

APSU Writing Center
In-Class Essay Exams

In-Class Essay Exams

- In-class essay exams are timed writing assessments completed during class in response to a specific prompt.
- These test your ability to think critically, organize ideas quickly, and write clearly under pressure.

How to Prepare Before the Exam

- Attend class regularly and take organized, detailed notes.
- Review your notes and look for patterns, themes, and connections.
- Identify the type of essay you may be asked to write (compare/contrast, argumentative, analytical, etc.).
- Practice by brainstorming possible prompts based on course topics.
- Review previous feedback to understand your instructor's expectations.
- Make sure to take some time to rest to avoid burnout.

What to Do During the Exam

- Take a breath and remind yourself that preparation matters more than speed.
- Read the prompt carefully and underline or note key terms.
- Narrow your focus and develop a clear thesis before writing.
- Briefly plan your essay so ideas flow logically.
- Use topic sentences and transitions to guide the reader.
- Save time at the end to review and revise.

Time Management Examples

75-minute exam

- 15 minutes: planning and outlining
- 50 minutes: writing
- 10 minutes: reviewing and editing

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45-minute exam

- 10 minutes: Reading and Evaluating the prompt
- 5 minutes: Introduction
- 15 minutes: Body Paragraph 1
- 15 minutes: Body Paragraph 2
- 5 minutes: Conclusion

Common Exam Keywords (What Professors Mean)

- **Analyze:** Break a topic into parts and explain how they work together.
- **Compare:** Discuss similarities and differences and explain their significance.
- **Define:** Explain what something is, what it is not, and how it differs from related ideas.
- **Discuss / Examine:** Explore relationships, evaluate ideas, or interpret meaning.
- **Evaluate / Assess:** Make a judgment supported by evidence, often considering multiple viewpoints.
- **Explain:** Describe how and why something works or happens.
- **Illustrate:** Use specific examples to clarify or support an idea.
- **Interpret:** Explain the meaning of a text, event, or idea.
- **Outline / Trace / Review:** Organize and describe key stages or elements.
- **Prove:** Present a clear claim and support it with logical reasoning and evidence.



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Planning: Read the prompt, identify key terms, and draft a clear thesis with 2–3 supporting points.

Introduction: Provide brief context and state a focused thesis that directly answers the prompt.

Paragraph 1: Present your strongest point, support it with evidence, and explain how it proves the thesis.

Paragraph 2): Present a second main point with evidence and analysis that continues to support the thesis.

Body Paragraph 3: Develop a third supporting point if time allows.

Conclusion: Restate the thesis in a new way and briefly explain why your argument is significant.



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References

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George Mason University Writing Center. (n.d.). *Taking In-Class Essay Exams*. George Mason University. <https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/writing-resources/different-genres/taking-in-class-essay-exams>

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