

Dr. Jadwin

Guidelines for Taking Essay and Short-Answer Exams

General guidelines

- Use ink or dark pencil and write on one side of the page only. This makes your responses easier to read, and gives you space to insert new material if you revise.
- Double-space your responses if you think you might want to revise your work.
- While you will not be penalized for mechanical errors, your handwriting must be legible and your writing coherent in order to receive full credit.
- If you run out of time, write a brief outline of what you planned to say.
- Try to save a little time to review your responses before handing them in.

Short Answer/Identifications (usually worth about 1/3 of your total score)

You'll have a choice of items to select (3 out of 5, 5 out of 7, etc.) Each item is worth a certain percentage of your exam grade. Budget your time wisely; don't spend too long on any one item. If you "blank out," go on to another item or section of the exam. Some students like to write identifications *after* they have finished their essay.

Short Answer/Identification questions ask you to:

- define a key term or idea
- give an example of how the term or idea is used in a text we've read
- explain briefly why the term is significant

Well-written short answer/identification responses:

- get right to the point in clear, direct language
- supply complete, accurate definitions of terms/ideas
- use examples different from those used in class
- draw on a wide variety of texts (not just one work, for example)

Essay Questions (usually worth about 2/3 of your total score)

Essay questions ask you to:

- apply a key idea to at least two different texts, comparing and contrasting the way the two texts handle the idea.
- use examples from the texts to support your argument
- explain why the idea is significant
- use your own ideas - go beyond what has been said in class about the topic

Well-written essay responses:

- get right to the point in clear, direct language
- address the topic and fulfill its requirements, focusing on course texts
- have a clear thesis, stated in the first few paragraphs
- enlist textual examples different from those used in class
- are clearly organized and easy for the reader to follow
- explain why the argument is significant - how this issue relates to larger issues