

A HANDOUT TO CARRY TO AN ESSAY TEST

1. **Read** the question carefully, selecting the words that predict what the answer should be. The “clue” words are often verbs: **analyze, discuss, cite**, several instances, **compare, explain, trace**. However, find the important nouns as well: “What are the **main features** . . . ?” “What is the **significance** . . . ?” “Which of the two **positions** is . . . ?” (See the lab handout entitled “Important Words in Essay Questions.”)
2. **Jot** down specifics, facts from your reading and lectures, that you can think of to use in your answer. Note these rapidly, then sort them to be sure that all your notations fit; discard any items that are irrelevant.
3. **Organize** by numbering the items that you have noted. You may or may not have time to make a brief outline, but the numbering system helps you arrange an answer rapidly. Try to “think through” such as this: “first I could . . . , then I could show . . . , and finally” A logical, clear answer is both factual and organized.
4. **Consider** starting your answer by using the key words from the question in a controlling generalization or assertion. If this sentence is not your starter, you may often use it in some form as a conclusion.
5. **Write**, keeping controlling statement in mind as you incorporate your numbered items in your answer. Allow yourself plenty of space on the page. Save a little time to re-read and to change a word or sentence as you need to, even to add something important that you may have omitted on the first writing.
6. **Remember** that mechanics and spelling may not count, but a clear, clean answer always makes a better impression than one that is carelessly written.