

Essay Exams

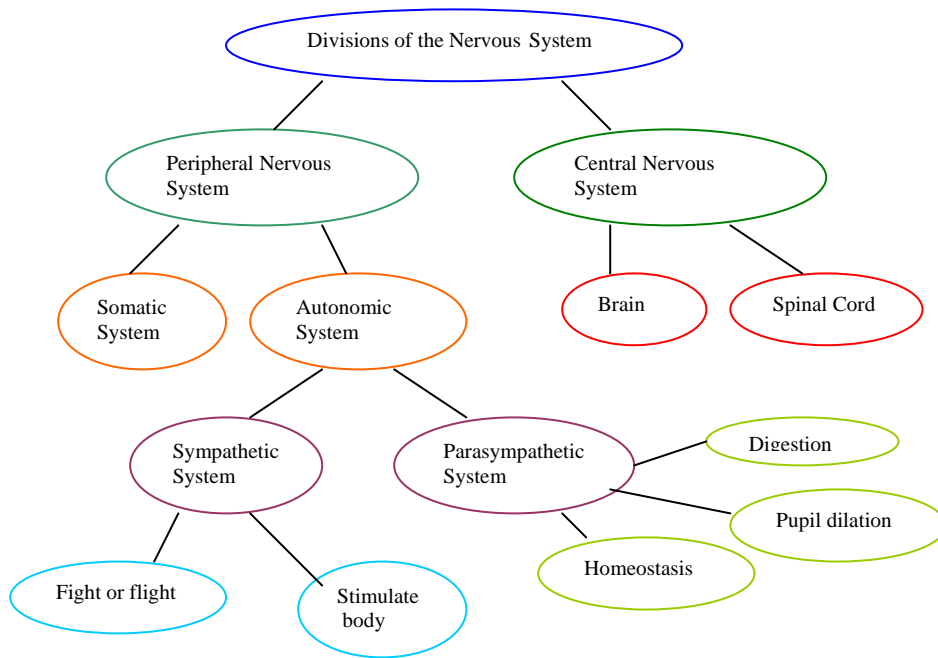


How to Study:

When you study for essay exams keep in mind that it is not enough to just include a list of the details and assume that is what the professor wants. *The information must be presented in a logical, organized way that demonstrates your understanding of the subject.* So when you study and memorize details, make associations and connections between terms. Knowing how to apply information and being able to give supporting examples is the key to demonstrating understanding. This requires memorization and application.

1. *Know what material the test will cover.* Refer to your exam checklist or ask the professor for specifics.
2. *Predicting test questions* and answering them allows you to formulate organized thoughts that will help answer a variety of possible questions. Here are some hints in predicting good essay questions for practice:
 - Refer to the **course description** listed in your syllabus. Ask yourself, “what does the professor want me to learn from this course?” Look at the test from the professor’s perspective and with their expectations. Look for relationships the professor could make between ideas in the description (i.e. compare, cause, trace, defend, support, or explain.)
 - Using your **textbook**: 1) *study questions* at the end of a chapter; 2) *turn headings into questions*, asking what, when, where, why, and how. This organizes your studying around key ideas. 3) The table of contents provides a visual presentation of how topics connect with each other and will often prompt ideas for possible test questions.
 - Using your **notes**: 1) *create your own table of contents* from the lecture material. Begin by placing your notes in chronological order, and then compare your notes with others so you can fill in gaps and clarify vague points. 2) re-read each day’s lecture notes to decide what *major questions the professor answered that day*. Write those questions in the margins.
3. Create associations between topics and words. Memorize details and examples in manageable clumps. Create relationships between clumps that will form the overall “big picture” or topic. Below are two tangible ways of creating relationships:

Concept Mapping



Concept Matrix

General	Specific	Example
Social	homeless gangs drugs police brutality healthcare urban renewal	all large cities LA LA, NYC, Florida poor people dying city centers
economics	high unemployment recession industries housing crisis	East/Massachusetts all over East/Michigan foreclosures in FL
educational	drop out rate literacy rate	esp. in minorities
environmental	endangered species natural resources	spotted owl oil reserves timber



Taking the Test:

1. *Remain Calm.* You have studied and memorized a lot of information, organizing it so you can perform well on the test is important. If you are afraid you will forget certain terms, write them in the margin or on the back of the test before reading the question(s). However, do not spend too much time doing this.
2. Before answering any question, *read through all the questions.* If you have a choice between questions, *select the easiest* of the ones for which you are best prepared. Answer them first.
3. *Read the questions slowly and thoroughly several times.* Underline or circle key words in the directions. Number the different parts of the question and continually refer to the question to make sure you are answering all parts of it. As you answer the different parts, in your essay, check (✓) them off. Look for these three aspects in the question:
 - a. The topic you are to write about
 - b. Limiting words that direct your answer
 - c. Key words that tell you how to organize and present your answer

You should be able to generate a thesis statement by using some of the same wording of the question.

4. After carefully analyzing the question(s), *begin organizing your thoughts.* Using a concept map or a concept matrix will help generate specifics and examples for general ideas you have for answering the question. Feel free to draw a concept map or matrix in the margins of or the back of the test. Jot down everything you can think of that might help answer the question. Make sure what you are writing down applies to the question being asked.
5. *Plan your time for efficient test taking.* Answer questions in this order after choosing the questions you are most prepared to answer.
 - a. The easiest
 - b. Questions with the most point value
 - c. Everything else

If the easiest questions do not have much of a point value, do not spend a lot of time on them. Directly answer them and then move on to the questions with more point value. Budgeting your time is the key.

6. Writing your Essay

- *Follow your matrix, map, or outline* to have a logical arrangement of subject, specifics, and examples for answering the questions.
- Your **introduction** should state in general terms the answer to the question. Restate the question in a way that answers the question in a general way and gives you a thesis. The **body** of the essay should elaborate on the generalities with details and examples. *Express ideas simply and directly.* **Be sure to answer all parts of the question.** Try to include **transitions** from one paragraph to the next, linking ideas and opinions. Do not state things you cannot support with examples or specifics. Do not waste your time with a bunch of fluff. Do not expect the professor to infer or conclude you know what you are talking about

unless you have put it in writing; *strive for complete answers*. Then in the **conclusion** highlight important aspects of your essay that answer the question.

- *Have a topic sentence for each paragraph.* Not all essay tests require an introduction, body, and conclusion, but every paragraph needs a topic sentence. Again, the topic sentence should be started with supporting evidence following. Include sufficient explanation for all answers.
 - *If you run out of time,* try to jot down the major ideas that you would discuss fully if you had time. You will probably get some points for this, even though you did not have time to expand on the ideas.
 - *Proofread your answers.* If you have budgeted your time effectively, you should have some time to read your answer after finishing. When proofreading look for: 1) omitted words, 2) miswritten words, 3) unclear phrasing & punctuation, 4) misspellings and grammatical errors.
7. Other helpful hints:
- *Be neat.* If you can print as fast as you can write in cursive, then print; especially if you have poor handwriting. Also avoid excessive scratching out. Simply mark out the unwanted words and start again.
 - *Use ink.* Shows up better and easier to read.
 - *Write on only one side of each sheet.* You will be able to add in information if needed by using arrows or use the space to make notes to yourself on things to add into the essay.
 - *Leave a generous margin,* especially on the left side, for the professor to make comments.
 - *Leave a space between answers.* You can add information that might occur to you later. Use a transitional phrase like “An additional idea that pertains to this question is...”



Key Words in Essay Questions

<u>KEY WORD</u>	<u>EXPLANATION</u>
Analyze	Break into separate parts and discuss, examine, or interpret each part.
Apply a principle	Show how a principle works, through an example
Comment	Discuss briefly
Compare	Emphasize similarities, but also present differences
Contrast	Give differences only
Criticize	Give your judgment of good points and limitations, with evidence
Define	Give meanings, but no details
Demonstrate	Show or prove an opinion, evaluation, or judgment
Describe	State the particulars in detail
Diagram	Show a drawing with labels
Differentiate	Show how two things are different
Discuss	Give reasons pro and con, with details
Distinguish	Show main differences between two things
Enumerate	List the points
Evaluate	Discuss advantages and disadvantages, with your opinion
Explain	Give reasons for happenings or situations
Give cause and effect	Describe the steps that lead to an event or situation
Give an example	Give a concrete example from your book, notes or experience
Identify	List and describe
Illustrate	Give an example
Interpret	State the meaning in simpler terms, using your judgment
Justify	Prove or give reasons
Outline	Describe main ideas, characters, or events. (Does not necessarily mean write Roman numeral/letter outline)
Prove	Support with facts, especially facts presented in class or in the text
Purpose	How something fulfills an overall design
Relate	Show how things interconnect
Relationship	Connection between events, the linkage
Review	Show main points or events in summary form
Show	List your evidence in order of time, importance, logic
State	Come up with a solution based on given facts or your knowledge
Summarize	Organize and bring together the main points only
Trace	Give main points from beginning to end of an event

Using Transitions in Essays

<u>TRANSITIONAL WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS</u>	<u>INTENTION OR RELATIONSHIP</u>
For example, in other words, that is	Amplification
Accordingly, because, consequently, for this reason, hence, since, thus, therefore, if...then.....	Cause and effect
Accepting the date, granted that, of course.....	Concession
In another sense, but, conversely, despite, however, nevertheless, on the contrary, on the other hand still, though, yet.....	Contrast or change
Similarly, moreover, also, too, in addition, likewise next in importance.....	No change
Add to this, besides, in addition to this, even more, to repeat, above all, indeed, more important.....	Emphasis
At the same time, likewise, similarly.....	Equal value
Also, besides, furthermore, in addition, moreover, too	Increasing quantity
First, finally, last, next, second, then.....	Order
For these reasons, in brief, in conclusion, to sum up.....	Summary
Then, since then, after this, thereafter, at last, at length, from now on, afterwards, before, formerly, later, meanwhile, now, presently, previously, subsequently, ultimately.....	Time

Bibliography

- Ellis, D.B. (1985) *Becoming A Master Student*. 5th ed. Rapid City, South Dakota, College Survival, Inc.
 Lesyk, S.B. (1991) *The Blue Book: Achieving Success on Essay Exams*. Dubuque, Iowa Kendall/Hunt.
 Pauk, W. (1989) *How to Study in College*. 4th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin
 Shepherd, J.F. (1990) *College Study Skills*. 4th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin