EASY STEPS TO WRITING THE ESSAY EXAM

These are some ideas that may help you while you are taking an essay exam. Remember that thoroughly preparing and studying for an exam in advance makes writing essays much easier. All right, you've been handed the test. Now what?

1. Before you start:
   A. Set up a time schedule:
      If six questions are to be answered in sixty minutes, allow yourself only seven minutes for each question. When the time is up for one question, stop writing and begin the next one. Where will be 15 to 18 minutes remaining when the last question is completed. The incomplete answers can be completed during that time. Six incomplete answers will usually receive more credit than three complete ones.

   B. Read through all the questions once:
      Answers will come to mind immediately for some questions. Write down key words, listings, etc. right way when they are fresh in your mind. Otherwise, these ideas may be blocked or be unavailable when the time comes to write the later questions. This will reduce “clutching” or panic (anxiety, actually fear which disrupts thoughts).

2. As you answer each question:
   A. Put each question in your own words:
      Put each question into your own words. Now compare your version with the original. Do they mean the same thing? If they don’t, you’ve misread the question. You’ll be surprised how often they don’t agree.

   B. Outline the answer before writing:
      Whether the teacher realizes or not, he/she is greatly influenced by the compactness, completeness, and clarity of an organized answer. To begin writing in the hope that the right answer will somehow turn up is time consuming and usually futile. To know a little is, by and large, superior to knowing a lot and presenting it poorly, when judged by the grade received.

   C. Take time to write an introduction and summary:
      The introduction will consist of the main point to be made; the summary is simply a paraphrasing of the introduction. A neat bundle with a beginning and an ending is very satisfying to the reader.

   D. Qualify answers when in doubt:
      It is better to say “Toward the end of the 19th century” than to say “in 1894” when you can’t remember whether it’s 1884 or 1894. In many cases, the approximate time is all that is wanted; unfortunately 1894, though approximate, may be incorrect and will usually be marked accordingly. When possible, avoid very definite statements. A qualified statement connotes a philosophic attitude, the mark of an educated person.

   E. Write neatly and legibly

3. After you are finished:
   A. Take the time to reread the paper:
      When writing in haste, we tend to:
      a. Misspell words
      b. Omit words and parts of words
      c. Omit parts of questions
      d. Miswrite dates and figures