Essays in Exams

VALUE MaP
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The Purpose of Exam Essays

In an exam essay, you summarise & analyse a topic in order to demonstrate your…

• Subject knowledge
• Ability to think critically about the subject
• Ability to express ideas quickly, clearly, and fluently within a given time limit
• Achievement of module Learning Outcomes
Preparing for Exam Essays

Good essays require good preparation....

• Make sure you can marshal key facts, theories, data, scholarly perspectives
• Make sure you can illustrate your answer with good examples/case studies
• Make sure you can offer a *critical perspective*

To do this....

• Prepare careful summaries of key topics/theories
• Link general reading to lecture notes & assignments
• Reorganise material into memorable form (e.g. lists)
Check the Rubrics

SO300/10 FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
LEVEL C EXAMINATION
SOCIOLOGY

Saturday, 12th June 2010: 9.30 - 12.30

There are FIFTEEN questions. Candidates should answer FOUR questions. Try to avoid duplication in your answers.

Free choice ex 15
c.45 mins. per question
Check the Rubrics

CB605/10 FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
LEVEL H EXAMINATION
KENT BUSINESS SCHOOL
EUROPEAN BUSINESS
Friday, 28 May 2010: 09:30 – 12:30

There are EIGHT questions. Five questions in Section A and three questions in Section B. Candidates must answer FOUR questions: any TWO questions from Section A and any TWO questions from Section B.

All questions carry 25 marks

Credit will be given throughout the paper for the use of examples from real-life business practice, even where these are not specifically asked for. Selection of questions prescribed + c.45 mins. per question
Reading the Exam Paper

When the exam starts....

• Re-read ALL the instructions carefully
• Read ALL the questions:
  - skim read first
  - re-read carefully
• Make an assessment of each question:
  - consider which ones initially feel difficult or easy
  - BUT be careful: impressions can be misleading
Choosing the Questions

• Stay calm and resist temptation to rush in
• Turn over the paper: more questions?
• Mark possible questions to return to later
• Check for ‘favourite topics’:
  - is topic there? Be careful – check wording!
• Can’t answer any….?
  - unlikely if you’ve revised properly
  - check you’re not missing something
  - go for topics where you can offer partial answer
• Not sure which questions to answer?
  - jot down some possible points (often helps decide)
Choosing the Questions

• Remember the marking scheme…
  - some questions may be worth more than others

• Having considered all questions, choose…
  - some prefer to make final decision; others prefer to start each question, then finalise next..
  - consider how much you can say generally about each topic before focusing on specific details
  - then look carefully at instruction verbs: discuss, explain, summarise, critically evaluate, etc…

• Work out rough time plan for each question
Answer the Question

• Try and keep the actual essay question *visible*, in front of you

• Frequently re-check essay question
  - is answer *still* on target?

• No matter how scholarly/eloquent/well-informed your answer is, *it will only gain marks if it answers the specific question!*

• Key an eye on the clock throughout exam
  - only so many marks for each essay, so...
  - do not spend too long on ‘good’ questions
Answer the Question

• Marshall your ammunition
  - key words, ideas, theories, concepts
  - practical examples and supporting evidence

• Think *in advance* about the evidence you will use!
Two Approaches: Jury Method

1. Outline key issues and define key terms
2. Present the evidence on both sides:
   - on the one hand…..
   - on the other hand…
   - cross-examine both sides
3. End with the verdict (therefore, in the light of this evidence, it seems that….)
   - check: have I answered the question!!
Two Approaches: Advocate Method

1. Give your verdict in the introduction
   - It has been suggested that …, but in fact…
2. Outline key issues and define key terms
3. Present your evidence
4. Demolish the opposition
   - x suggests that, but this is clearly wrong, because
5. Build up case to support your verdict
6. Conclusion: it is obvious that….
   - check: have I answered the question!!
Sketch Out Essay Plan

• Remember general essay structure:
  – Beginning, middle, end
  – Roughly allocate material to each section
• Keep outline plan brief – main points only
  – Short bullet points to jog memory
• Jot down other mnemonics you might forget
• Write down ideas as they occur, then order them
• Start writing essay as soon as you can
  - don’t worry about incomplete or untidy plans
  - cross out plan to indicate ‘rough work’
Planning with paragraph structure

• Academic paragraphs have an obvious, 5 point structure:
  – **T**opic sentence (the central idea)
  – **S**upporting sentences (unfold/develop this idea)
  – **E**vidence (for the above)
  – **E**valuation of evidence (everything must be explained/defended!)
  – **L**ink (implicit or explicit connection to next paragraph)
Planning with paragraph structure

- You can convert this to a useful mnemonic – S T E E L
- Much of the model comes out in the writing, e.g. links between paragraphs
- Arguably, two elements can be predicted in advance: the topic sentence and the evidence used
- Draft topic sentences and evidence points in advance for a skeleton plan?
Example

• Why is *In Our Time* a modernist text?
• [Introduction – sets up essay etc.]
• Paragraph 1
  – T “*In Our Time*” differs from previous collections of short stories, as it displays a characteristic feature of literary modernism: extensive innovation.
  – E “Make it new” (Pound)
  – E “The artist is always beginning” (Pound)
Example

• Paragraph 2
  – T “Hemingway melds together poetry and prose, drawing on the concepts of the Imagist movement and deliberately blurring the boundaries and forms of writing.”
  – E Pound “Direct treatment of the thing…”/”Compose in the sequence of the musical phrase…”
Structure of Exam Essay

• Introduction
  – Link to module
  – Set the scene,
  – Interpret the question, ‘delimit terrain’

• Body
  – Present evidence, theories, argument
  – Analyse and interrogate evidence
  – Logical build up
  – 4-5 paragraphs

• Conclusion
  – Summary: tie together strand of argument
  – Generalisation/ evaluation/ judgement …
Writing the Essay

• Focus on key points/theories/arguments
• Avoid waffle – give as much factual detail or critical assessment as you can
• Don’t try to impress with sheer weight of information – higher marks always given for critical analysis
• Avoid being side-tracked by less important material, however interesting it may seem
• Write as neatly as you can at speed
  - make sure examiner can read answer!
• Avoid flowery, long-winded sentence style
Developing the Essay

• State thesis and give general overview
  - no need (or time) for polished introduction
  - address the question immediately

• Develop key points systematically
  - Present evidence in series of clear paragraphs
  - State each paragraph-topic point clearly
  - Give sign points and link ideas
  - Support generalisations with examples/evidence
  - Avoid repetition, wordiness, subjective opinion

• Give reasoned conclusion
  - show how essay answers the question
Successful Essay Structure

• Generally, clear paragraphs…

1. Clear opening statement – right to the point
   - answers question directly & previews arguments

2. Point 1 of argument
   - evidence, analysis, and examples

3. Point 2 of argument
   - evidence, analysis, and examples

4. Point 3 of argument [etc.]
   - evidence, analysis, and examples

5. Conclusion (‘In brief, this shows that [answer]”)
Unsuccessful Essay Structure

1. Introduction misses question target
2. No thesis statement or sense of direction
3. No division into clear paragraphs
4. Vague or irrelevant information
5. Cliché or sweeping generalisations
6. Padding out with repetition
7. Dogmatic or unsubstantiated assertion
8. Unexamined assumptions (who says & why)
9. Empty or irrelevant Conclusion
Know Yourself (through practice)

- Should I plan everything first?
- Should I write my best answer first
- Should I take breaks?
- Should I revise each answer when completed, or revise all at the end of the exam

Answer: What works for you?

What if....

- My mind goes blank? (stay calm, keep going)
- I finish early? Use time to add, correct, revise
Good luck....

• For all your studies, and for the 2016 Examinations!
• Any questions: Shaun Theobald
  – srt@kent.ac.uk
• Further support:
  – www.kent.ac.uk/ulet/learning