

## How to Write an In-Class Essay

I. Warm-up: turn to someone next to you and tell each other what worries you the most about in-class essays

- A. Review
- B. Dispel the myth: no in-class essay is perfect. Teachers know this.

II. The Goal:

- A. What are the goals of an in-class essay? (Elicit, then put on board)
  - a. To show mastery of material that has been studied
  - b. To show mastery of language use and structure
  - c. To show mastery of analysis and discussion
  - d. Sometimes, a bit of each

III. Tips

- A. **Prepare!** In-class essays require that you do your preparation...*beforehand*. Make sure you attend class and complete the necessary reading and assignments. Make sure you know what your teacher is looking for in the in-class essay.
- B. **Practice.** Your essay will likely be on a) material you have studied, or b) a topic or author you have read and discussed.
  - a. Draw up a list of possible essay prompts you think your teacher might ask you to write on.
  - b. Draw up a list of possible short essay questions that you might be asked.
  - c. Practice writing thesis statements to various prompts.
- C. **When the essay begins, make your choices and stick with them.** Teachers sometimes give you a couple of choices to write on; if not, you will have to make a decision as to how you will approach your essay. Choose wisely, and accept your choice! Don't keep changing your mind on your topic.
- D. **Relax!** When you are handed your test, before you even look at it, take a few seconds to *take a deep breath* and *flex your hands*. Allow your breath to relieve tension and build strength. A relaxed body will calm your nerves. Tell yourself, "I can do this!"
- E. **Be Confident!** A confident and positive frame of mind sets the foundation for success. Not only tell yourself, "I can do this," but also tell yourself, "I will do this," and more importantly, "I am doing this; I am writing a strong essay!" Visualize yourself reflecting, planning, organizing, and writing a powerful essay.
- F. **Remember: Quality is as important as quantity.** Don't just write to fill paper: write to prove a point. Make sure you argue your point fully and completely. Leave no questions unanswered.
- G. **Time is critical.** Don't waste time copying down the question. Instead, read the question thoroughly, and then circle keywords that require a response. This will serve as an outline for your essay and help to keep you on track. A real danger of the in-class essay is rambling; writing on and on and saying nothing. If you stick to your keywords, and perhaps add a few in the margin that you need to consider, your essay is more likely to stay focused and on topic.

- H. **Budget your time.** If you have 1.5 hours to write, consider this time-management strategy:
- a. Allow yourself 5-10 minutes to plan the essay, either in your head or on the back page of your test.
  - b. Let yourself write for 1 hour.
  - c. Use the remaining time to reread, revise, and edit for grammar.
- I. **Pay attention to the details and structure of a proper essay.** Instructors will not expect the perfection that they expect in essays that are assigned out-of-class; however, making your essay look the best will help a lot. Make sure you:
- a. Have a title (choose it at the end)
  - b. Have a strong introduction with a powerful thesis that uses key words from the prompt.
  - c. Spell the names of the author, the characters, and your professor correctly.
  - d. Use proper citation techniques.
  - e. Indent paragraphs and give margins on both sides.
- J. **Make corrections simple, but clear.** Nothing irritates instructors more than trying to decide what you meant or did not mean. However, all teachers understand that in-class writing is imperfect, so don't panic if you make a mistake. Simply make a clear line through any text that you do not wish to be considered. Avoid scribbling, erasing, and dark splotches. If the error is so terrible that you need a lot of correction, clearly and cleanly mark out the text you do not want, and use arrows to point to where you wish the reading to resume.
- K. **Make time for editing.** This means that you must know ahead of time what your most common errors are. Is it verb tense, or sentence run-ons, or subject-verb agreement? Use a system to edit your work and be sure to go scan carefully for errors.

#### IV. Sample prompt

- A. Create a thesis for this prompt: Is the bay area a good place to raise children? Give 2-4 reasons why or why not.
- B. (Give Ss 1 minute to compose a thesis)
- C. Review theses, then as a group, plan an outline for the essay in less than 5 minutes.

#### V. Questions.