Written Tests
Learn how to prep for your short answer & essay exams

Long-term preparation

- Read the course syllabus
- Make note of any themes or connections you notice
- Check with your instructor to see if he/she agrees with the connections you have made
- Learn from instructors and other resources about the form and content of upcoming tests, including grading criteria

Short-term preparation

- Review your notes and reading assignments 1-2 weeks before the test
- Make a list of main ideas or themes that your instructor covered in class
- Note the relationships between these ideas. (They may be clues to possible essay questions!) 
- For each idea or concept, create a summary sheet of relevant data
- Review the topics actively by integrating notes, text, and supplementary information (i.e., diagrams)
- Show your review sheets to your instructor to make sure you are on the right track
- Generate a list of possible questions using your relationship charts and summary sheets
- Outline answers to as many of these questions as time permits
- Create a chart similar to the one found below before tackling compare and contrast questions that are typically found on essay tests

Example:
Compare and contrast President Bush’s proposed private accounts for Social Security and the current system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Private accounts</th>
<th>Current System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Individual assumes risk</td>
<td>Society assumes risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>Democrats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Potentially gaining higher investment yields</td>
<td>Risks of the marketplace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Before you write**

- **Budget your time**
  - Spend more time on questions that are worth more points
  - Allow time for reviewing & proofreading at the end
- **Read carefully**
  - Read all essay questions before you start to write
  - Pay attention to key words such as compare, explain, justify, and define
- **Start off easy**
  - This might seem obvious, but it can help you manage your time
  - Ask your instructor for clarification if you don’t understand a question
- **Make an outline**
  - Quickly list the ideas and facts you want to include
  - Number the points in the order you want to present them
  - Be sure to distinguish main topics from supporting examples

**While you write**

- **Write on every other line**
  - This will leave space for any additions you may want to make to your answer
- **State a definite, clear thesis**
  - Include it within the first few sentences of your answer
- **Follow your outline**
  - Be specific with examples and details
- **When time is up for a given question, move on to the next one**
  - Partially answering all questions is better than fully answering some and not answering others at all
- **If you’re running out of time, write an outline for the rest of the answer**
  - The grader might be able to give you partial credit for it
- **Brainstorm if you don’t know much about a question**
  - Relax and try to recall your reading, lectures, and discussions; this may trigger memories relevant to the question
- **If your mind goes blank, don’t panic**
  - Think about something pleasant, unrelated to the test
  - Take some deep breaths
  - If you’re still blank, move on to a different question

**After you write**

- **Read through your answers**
- **Proofread**
  - Make any necessary additions
  - Check for errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation