

PREPARING FOR IN-CLASS WRITING

Use the study strategies below to help prepare for your in-class writing exam, whether it take the form of one essay or several short-answer questions. You might also attend the “Test-Taking Strategies” and “Note-Taking Strategies” workshops in the CLRC Learning Skills series, offered each semester, or view recorded video versions of these workshops in the CLRC, to learn to better prepare for testing.



BEFORE THE EXAM

- 1. READ and understand the prompt or task.** Review the directions that your instructor has provided about the in-class writing. If you have a specific prompt or choice of prompts, review each of these. Think about how you might answer the prompt or question.

Questions to Consider:

- Q** What information do you still need to know to be able to answer all the possible prompts successfully?

- Q** Where can you find that information? In lecture notes? In your textbook?

- 2. GATHER and REVIEW course materials.** Collect course materials such as textbooks, readings, handouts, syllabi, lecture notes, quizzes, and other graded assignments.

Hint: The syllabus often includes information that summarizes the main concepts covered in a course, as well as the course goals. Review the content of the syllabus to indentify the main concepts and goals of the course.

- 3. PRACTICE.** If you have the prompt ahead of time, practice answering it before the exam.

- List what you know: make lists of the important people, works, themes, and movements covered in the course material.
- Free write about what interested you in the class. How can you use this to answer the prompt?
- Write an outline to help you remember the main points you want to make when responding in class.*
- If your instructor did not provide the writing prompt or test questions beforehand, read the questions asked in previous assignments, or at the end of a chapters in textbooks. These question often provide clues about the types of questions that might appear on an exam.

* It is not advisable to write an entire essay ahead of time and try to memorize it. Trying to memorize a paper often adds extra, unnecessary stress to preparing for in-class writing.



DURING THE EXAM

1. **READ the prompt carefully.** Make sure you understand all the parts of the question.

- Underline the **verbs**. This is what you are being asked to do: *describe, analyze, etc.*
- Circle the **nouns**. This is what form your writing is to take: *essay, paragraph, etc.*

2. **PLAN your writing.**

- Brainstorm or free write, writing down what you know about what the prompt is asking. Organize your thoughts into main ideas.
- Make an outline that includes the main ideas you generated while brainstorming.
- Write a controlling idea or thesis based on the ideas you plan to write about. Some students prefer to do this first, to guide their brainstorming.
- Plan your time. Whether you have 30 minutes or 90 minutes, break up the time into parts, 5-10 minutes at a time, and identify writing tasks to be completed by a certain time: *outline completed, thesis written, first draft completed, etc.*

3. **WRITE.** Begin writing. Be thorough and thoughtful, but don't worry too much about grammar and spelling. Leave time to revise and you can focus on sentence-level errors later.

4. **REREAD your essay and REVISE.** Instructors do not expect an essay written in class to be error free, but it is still a good idea to reread carefully and correct any errors you find.

- Reread the prompt and your thesis. Be sure your thesis clearly answers the prompt.
- Reread your topic sentences and make sure they both summarize the content of the paragraph and refer back to the thesis.
- Read the whole essay once through, slowly and carefully. Correct errors neatly as you find them. It is better to cross out and correct than to turn in a "tidy" paper.
- Know your own common errors. If you have practiced self-editing other writing, you will be better prepared to find your own errors during an in-class exam. See the WCenter Self-Editing Strategies handout for a list of the most common errors and how you can identify and correct them.



AFTER THE EXAM: RELAX, REVIEW, REFLECT

Questions to Consider:

- Q** What strategies did you find helpful? In what ways did you feel prepared?

- Q** How might you prepare differently next time?