

1. Prepare properly.

One marathon all-night "cramming" session is the wrong way to prepare for an exam. Cramming does not work! You should develop a study method that spreads out your preparation over several sessions. See "How to study for an essay-type exam."

2. Follow all directions.

Most students tend to move right to the first question and start writing. Don't do this! **First read all directions** that are given--and then follow them. For example, sometimes you are asked to answer only selected questions; to write your answers in ink; etc.

3. Read each question carefully and be sure you know what it is asking.

Look for words that *focus* the question. For example, take the question: "Discuss *two* ways in which the Bible *challenged* society's views on women." Note the italicized words. (On the actual test question, they will usually not be italicized.) This question does *not* say: "Discuss any two things that the Bible says about women." Nor does it say: "Discuss one way in which the Bible challenged society's views on women." It is very important that you answer the question *precisely as asked*. If you are not sure what a question means, ask your instructor for clarification.

4. Structure your answer to correspond to the question.

Your answer should be structured in the same way as the question. For example, if the question asks you to compare and contrast "a" and "b", you should explicitly point out similarities and differences, not just list what you know about "a" and "b" and let the teacher guess what is similar and what is different. If the question contains several sub-questions, it is usually best to answer them in the order listed.

5. Answer each question as completely and specifically as possible.

Do not speak in vague generalities. For example, if you use a term, define it; if you mention a person, state what that person did or why that person is important. Don't assume that your instructor will know what you are talking about. That's what he or she is trying to determine. A good rule of thumb is to write your answer as if you were trying to explain the material to someone who is not in the course. Refer frequently to specific points from your readings and class notes. Your professors want substantive answers, not free-wheeling personal reflections.

6. Pace yourself.

Leave more time for the bigger portions of the exam, particularly the essay question(s). Don't waste most of the exam period on a True-False or short-answer section. If you are "stuck" on a short question, it's better to move on to the essay (which usually is worth more points) and come back to it later.

7. Outline an essay before you write it.

Take a few minutes to outline what you want to say. Don't just start writing and throw in everything but the kitchen sink. When outlining, refer to #3 above. Ask yourself: what *specifically* am I being asked to discuss in this essay? Discuss only this, not everything you learned since the last exam or the first day of class. It is not sheer quantity of information that your instructor wants; it is the ability to select and interpret the material that is relevant to a specific question.