

Writing Guide: **Taking an Essay Exam**

Here are four basic steps to taking an essay exam and succeeding:

1. Read the question carefully.
2. Rephrase the question as a sentence that states the main idea of your answer. This would be a kind of thesis statement or topic sentence.
3. Make a quick outline of the points you want to cover.
4. Write your essay.

Here is an example of an **analytical essay-exam question** and a plan to answer it:

Exam question:

Write an essay in which you analyze three major causes of the American Civil War.

Student thesis statement:

Three major causes of the American Civil War are _____, _____, and_____.

Quick outline:

Paragraph 1: Very brief intro that ends with thesis

Paragraph 2: First cause of American Civil War

Paragraph 3 Second cause of American Civil War

Paragraph 4: Third cause of American Civil War

Paragraph 5: Very brief conclusion

Here is an example of a **comparison-contrast essay-exam question** and a plan to answer it:

Exam question:

Write an essay that compares and contrasts Creationism and Darwinism.

Student thesis statement:

Although Creationism and Darwinism share a few basic similarities, the differences between the two theories are far more profound.

Quick outline:

Paragraph 1: Very brief intro that ends with thesis

Paragraph 2: Similarities between Creationism and Darwinism

(This may take more than one paragraph.)

Paragraph 3: Differences between Creationism and Darwinism

(This may take more than one paragraph.)

Paragraph 4: Very brief conclusion