

Take-Home Essay Exams

Take-Home Essay Exams are an odd half-step in-between in-class essay exams and papers. In comparison to in-class exams, expectations about content are higher because you can use your notes and course texts. Expectations are also higher regarding structure and argument because you have more than 50 minutes to prepare a solid, workable outline and argument. But expectations are slightly lower than are expected with papers because there are often greater time constraints. But it's a good idea to treat take-home essay exams more like papers than in-class essay exams: they require the same kind of preparation that in-class essay exams do combined with the polished aspects of papers. For additional tips on preparing for In-Class Essay Exams, see our handout on that subject, located at <http://depts.washington.edu/pswrite/Handouts/InClassEssayExams.pdf>.

PREPARATION

1. **Review course materials.** Look over lecture notes and readings before you start to write. Give yourself time to summarize the course themes and the authors' main arguments.
2. **Take the time to think big.** What does this class help us think about in a larger sense? Why does the professor think this area of study is important enough to devote his or her life to it? How does what we are doing in this course help us understand the world better?
3. **Draw connections between textual arguments and course themes.** What are the arguments concerning a particular topic and how do they relate to class themes? How are authors'

arguments similar or different? Does one of the theories presented do a great job of explaining one situation but a poor job of explaining another, and can the author explain the variation of explanatory power? Can you group the authors according to their stances? Is it easier to group by country or event or by theory?

DECONSTRUCTING THE QUESTION

1. Read questions and instructions carefully.

- *A primary question* is a question that asks you to make an argument using course materials.

- *A secondary questions* often provide you a guideline to what ideas or concepts you'll describe for use in your argument. Identify each individual question and address each one in your outline and answer.

2. Create an Outline (really): MOST important part

a. Write your thesis (and what is a thesis?!)

“major events such as...**lead to** sharp breaks from previous system because 1...2...3.”

Or “major events such as...**do not lead** to major departures because 1...2...3...”

- b. Create main points (such as... and 1, 2, 3) that correspond to what the question is asking for.
- c. Brainstorm supporting evidence
- d. Make an argument: PICK A SIDE.