

How to approach an in-class, timed essay

Reading the prompt

1. Read the prompt carefully (often several times), circling key words.
2. Understand what it is asking. Try to rephrase the question.
3. Identify how many parts the question has.
4. Do not begin writing the essay immediately. Take a few moments to plan.

Planning the essay (knowing where you're going before you embark)

1. Develop a thesis and select an appropriate number of supporting points.
2. Prepare a simple outline.
3. List some details you will want to incorporate into the essay.

Writing the essay

1. Write an introduction and conclusion, much like a 5-paragraph essay.
2. One main point per paragraph, and transitions between paragraphs.
3. Each paragraph should have a topic sentence, which directly supports your thesis.
4. Provide concrete and specific details in each paragraph supporting the topic sentence.
5. While writing, sometimes revision is necessary. Use asterisks and margins.

When you are finished:

1. Read the essay over once, fixing misspellings or omitted words. Do not make wholesale revisions. Edit and revise slightly.
2. Forget about it. It's done. You can do nothing about it now.

Evaluate the following introductions to in-class, timed essays:

1. The Great Depression was an important time in our nation's history. Unemployment, urban decay and a sense of hopelessness filled almost every part of human life. Yet, even in the midst of great misery, people needed to entertain themselves. People tried many different ways to relieve their tensions, from religious revivals, to Jazz music, to membership in the Communist party. But a whole lot of average people who were suffering in their daily lives often sought escapist entertainment in the form of movies. One such movie was Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*. In *Modern Times*, "The Little Tramp" symbolizes the simple human values that are threatened by industrialism.
2. Throughout the ages, scholars have looked at the question of X. When confronted with works A and B, we are left to ask ourselves, do works A and B present the idea that X is true, or do they challenge it? Scholars have tried to answer this question for many years. There are many ways to attempt to answer it.

Some Final Tips:

Jot down ideas as they come to you, before you forget them
You might want to double-space your essay to provide space for insertions or revisions
Your grader will read your essay, not weigh it
Leave the white-out and the erasable ink at home