

# Test Strategies: Essay Questions

Academic Success Center  
Iowa State University



## Steps to Answering an Essay Question

1. Understand the question clearly
2. Know necessary facts & supporting materials
3. Apply reasoning to these materials

## Preparing Before You Answer an Essay Question

1. Make notes on back of test to free your mind
2. Read directions carefully
  - ◆ Do you have a choice (ex: respond to 3 out of 5 questions)
3. Read everything
  - ◆ Read all the questions: choose questions you're best prepared for
  - ◆ Circle key words as you read
4. Jot clues alongside each question to help you organize thoughts before writing
5. Plan your time
  - ◆ Don't use extra time for difficult questions
6. Start with the easiest question—this builds confidence!

## How to Answer an Essay Question

1. Understand question with precision—what idea are they getting at?
2. Be explicit and complete
  - ◆ Define terms as you write
  - ◆ Don't allow inferring or concluding
3. Eliminate impressions or feelings
  - ◆ Avoid phony & fancy writing...be real
4. Be concise
  - ◆ Direct and straightforward is most impressive, avoid being wordy
5. Spell correctly
  - ◆ Avoid misspelled words & grammatical errors (edit your work)
6. One idea per paragraph
  - ◆ Be organized
  - ◆ Write deductive paragraphs: State idea clearly then support with facts
7. Understand "pet ideas"
  - ◆ Instructors use only a few basic approaches
  - ◆ What are the main themes?