Think big picture

Essay exams usually require you to focus on major concepts or themes within the course material. Reviewing your class notes, readings, and assignments extensively and make note of any themes.

Anticipate questions

Most profs won’t give you essay exam questions in advance, so plan to spend some time generating possible questions based on the course materials. Don’t just focus on studying these questions, but have them in the back of your mind as you review your course materi-

Form a study group

Working with others to review course material and to discuss course themes are both effective strategies to ensure that you are prepared for your essay exam. If you aren’t clear on something or missed a class, then hopefully your classmates can fill you in on

Organize your course materials in themes

Consider each lecture in the course as a theme and group together additional readings, research you’ve done, and your notes to reflect each theme. Studying course material in groups will help you prepare best for an essay exam.

Read the question carefully

Understand what it means to “compare”, “analyze”, “discuss”, or “explain” before the exam. These prompts might be simple, but they really are the most important part of writing a good essay exam. So, underline them; and when you’re responding to the essay prompt, be sure that you are doing exactly what the question asks for.
**Brainstorm before you start writing**

If you’re given an option to pick which essay prompt to respond to, consider all of them. Quickly jot down your ideas, key points, and other information that you can recall that would fit into your essay. Then, choose to respond to the question that you know most about.

**Plan in out**

Before you start writing, take a few minutes to write out an outline for your essay. Think through your thesis statement as well as the main point that you want to include. For an ex-

**Use your time wisely**

Even in an exam, you need to leave yourself time to review your essay before you submit it. A good rule of thumb is to break up the time you have for an essay exam question by using 5% for brainstorming, 10% for an outline and thesis, 10% for intro and conclusion,

**Keep it simple**

Choose a simple structure for your essay; use 1 paragraph with supporting information for each main points that you have. You should also try to integrate the question into your thesis statement or intro paragraph – this will help make it obvious what you are writing to prove.

**Don’t forget an intro and conclusion**

Even though the majority of your time will be spent on the main paragraphs of your exam essay, you still need to spend a little time introducing and concluding your writing. Aim to have at least 2 or 3 sentences in each your intro and conclusion paragraphs.