



## Literacy at Hartford Public High School

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### Responding to an Essay Exam from <http://www.studygs.net/tsstak4.htm>

Responding to an essay question on an exam can be done easily if you have a plan of attack. The following suggested steps will help you write a response that is well organized.

#### Read through the questions once and note if you have any choice in answering questions.

- Pay attention to how the question is phrased, or to the "directives", or words such as "compare," "contrast," "criticize," etc.
- Answers will come to mind immediately for some questions

**Write down their key words**, listings, etc, as they are fresh in mind. Otherwise these ideas may be blocked (or be unavailable) when the time comes to write the later questions. This will reduce "clutching" or panic (anxiety, actually fear which disrupts thoughts).

#### Before attempting to answer a question, put it in your own words.

- Now compare your version with the original. Do they mean the same thing? If they don't, you've misread the question. You'll be surprised how often they don't agree.

#### Think before you write.

##### Make a brief outline for each question

##### Number the items in the order you will discuss them

- **Get right to the point**  
State your main point in the first sentence  
Use your first paragraph to provide an overview of your essay.  
Use the rest of your essay to discuss these points in more detail.  
Back up your points with specific information, examples, or quotations from your readings and notes
- Teachers are influenced by compactness, completeness and clarity of an organized answer
- Writing in the hope that the right answer will somehow turn up is time-consuming and usually futile
- To know a little and to present that little well is, by and large, superior to knowing much and presenting it poorly--when judged by the grade received.

#### Writing & answering:

**Begin with a strong first sentence** that states the main idea of your essay.

Continue this first paragraph by presenting key points

#### Develop your argument.

- **Begin each paragraph** with a key point from the introduction
- **Develop each point** in a complete paragraph
- **Use transitions**, or enumerate, to connect your points
- **Hold to your time** allocation and organization
- **Qualify answers when in doubt.**

It is better to say "toward the end of the 19th century" than to say "in 1894" when you can't remember, whether it's 1884 or 1894. In many cases, the approximate time is all that is wanted; unfortunately 1894, though approximate, may be incorrect, and will usually be marked accordingly.

#### Summarize in your last paragraph.

Restate your central idea and indicate why it is important.

#### Leave time to review your work for punctuation, spelling, capitalization, quotation marks, omitted ideas, wrong information, etc.

The following list includes the various types of essay questions that students may be asked to respond to. They range from the simplest to the most complex, in terms of what is expected of students.

1. **Knowledge:** recall, define, arrange, list, label, identify, match, reproduce
2. **Comprehension:** describe, explain, recognize, restate, review, translate, classify; give examples; (re)state in own words
3. **Application:** apply, illustrate, interpret, operate, solve, predict, utilize
4. **Analysis:** analyze, compare, contrast, distinguish, examine, experiment, diagram; outline
5. **Synthesis:** design, develop, formulate, propose, construct, create, reorganize, integrate, model, incorporate, plan
6. **Evaluation:** evaluate, argue, assess, compare, contrast, conclude, defend, judge, support, interpret, justify