



Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logo

IN-CLASS ESSAYS

What is the purpose of an *In-class Essay*? Sometimes it can be difficult to test a student's knowledge with multiple-choice tests. With essays, teachers can view a student's interpretation of a subject and how well that student can project his or her ideas onto paper.

To understand the test, you must first understand the question! When you know what your professor is asking, it will save you precious time to write. Many students have trouble interpreting the question, which leaves room for mistakes. The more about the question you understand, the more refined your answer will be.

The following terms are often used on In-Class Essays:

- **Compare:** Define a few central ideas of similarity and difference; next explain in depth about each.
- **Contrast:** This is similar to Comparing (don't get mixed up!) except you are only showing and detailing the differences between two subjects.
- **Criticize:** We can all do this. This simply asks you to take a point and argue against it. Once you have stated your opinion, use reason to back it up.
- **Define:** Give specific characteristics by which a concept/thing/event can be recognized. Tell what it is and what it is not. Begin by placing it in a general class and then differentiate it from other members of the class by presenting boundaries, not details.
- **Describe:** In this case, avoid hasty generalization; detail the features as concisely as possible.
- **Discuss/Examine:** This is the vaguest of the essay terms, allowing more personal input into your answer. Decide how your going to lie out the

question; you may want to quote, refute, then offer a counter statement, prove and illustrate your point.

- **Evaluate/ Assess:** Similar to criticizing, evaluating allows you to express your opinion, though this allows you to set forth more than one view on the position. When you move from one point of view to another, be careful to signal your changes.
- **Explain:** Asks for you to define the relationships: casual, temporal, and systematic. It asks for you to present the “*how*” and the “*why*”. Give clear and intelligent reasons for, or the basic principles of something. This may demand for you to account the differences of opinions or contradictions between theory and data.
- **Illustrate:** This asks you to give details/examples to show relationships and interactions. Your two goals are to (a) find and present supporting details and (b) to show how they support your views.
- **Interpret:** Assess/translate what something means. Explain what the author means.
- **Prove/Validate:** Define the proposition that is to be proven, then give reasons for believing it. Be sure to present enough strong reasons in order to convince the reader.
- **Synthesize:** Summarize, or condense. First, describe the main points, and then omit the minor details. The question may ask you to summarize the work of more than one person to show what their texts have in common.

Be sure that you read over your Professor’s instructions more than once and that you understand the key terms. People are not born good students. It takes time, practice, and dedication, but in the end, everyone can do it.

TIME MANAGEMENT.

The Test Taking Environment:

Imagine you are limited to an hour of writing. What do you do when you get to class? Or is there anything you can do in preparation?

BEFORE THE TEST:

- Be sure to get a healthy dinner and a good night sleep before the big day. It is surprising the small amount of students that actually take this to heart. It really works!
- If all else fails the night before, supply your body with mind fuel (not junk food) in the morning.

DURING THE TEST:

- Positive outlook is VERY important. When you get to class, figure out how well you want to do, and visualize the A.
- Once the Professor hands out your assignment, have a time chart plotted out to help with your writing, below is an example of such a chart.'

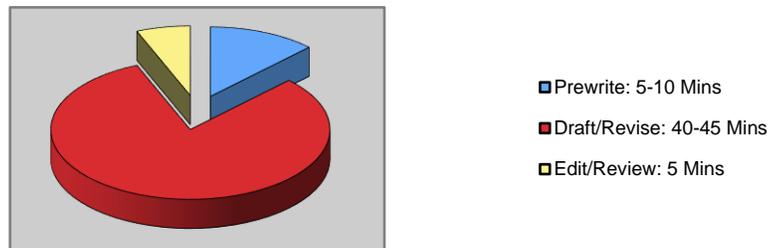


Figure 2 Pie Chart of Time Management for in class essays

The Writing Process:

Pre write- As shown in the graph, use about 5-10 minutes of your time to do some Prewriting. One of the most common mistakes is just jumping into writing without first developing a focus for your essay. Techniques include: clustering, listing, free writing, and brainstorming.

Drafting- Usually you start with a rough draft, a raw material that can be shaped and developed. Remember essay structure, Intro – Thesis – Body Paragraphs with Topic Sentences – and Conclusion; use about 40-45 minutes for this. To compensate, use the same language in your essay that your professor has used in the prompt. This will keep you on track and ensure that your instructor knows that you are on topic.

Edit/Review- Try not to scratch out or completely re-write a page in your last 5 minutes, just draw a line through what you want to take out, and continue.

Remember you have a set time and don't want to be stuck in the middle of re-writing a page when that time is up.

Here are some writing prompts you can sit down and work on. With these, try to limit yourself to only 20 minutes. Try one or two, or all of them for the most practice:

1. Write a short summary describing your experience of LAVC. Ask yourself certain questions to trigger ideas, for example: where is the campus located and what kind of environment is it in? What do you actively pursue as a Major? Or if you're undecided, what do you think you'd like to do and how can LAVC help achieve that? Compare and Contrast your experience at LAVC to other schools you've attended.
2. Write a story about your youth. Illustrate where you grew up, and describe what your favorite hobby was, or who was your best friend.
3. Recall a time when you went on vacation. Explain about where you went, the people and places you saw, and their reaction towards you. Would you ever take this trip again and why?
4. Discuss/Examine one of your favorite teachers/professors. When did you come in contact with this person? Why did you like him/her? Have you changed positively because of this person, and what were the things that made you change? Talk about the inspiration you've found through learning.

If you are given an article prior to the essay:

When you're reading over an article for the first time, try some of these tips to improve your essay:

1. Orient yourself with a quick review: Look at the title: What's the subject and context?
2. Who's who with the Author: does he hold any bias or comment at all on the subject?
3. Jot down the 6 W's: Who, What, Where, When, Why (and How!)

This handout is based on the following text:

George Mason University. "Decoding the Question" Writing in Public and International Affairs

11 February 2008 <<http://classweb.gmu.edu/piaguide/html/decodques.htm>>

Los Angeles Valley College. "The Writing Process", "Time Management and Study Skills". The

Writing Center. 11 February 2008 <<http://www.lavc.edu/WCweb/handouts.html>>

Please visit our website at www.lavc.edu/Wcweb/index/html for additional resources and services.

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