CONQUERING ESSAY TESTS

You can successfully complete essay tests if you know how to "attack" them.

1. Read all directions and each essay question carefully before you begin to write. Reread anything that is not clear to you. Doing so will give you the time to think and prevent overlapping answers.

2. Star, circle or underline important ideas, terms, and instructions.

3. Know the meaning of directional words. (See explanations on back.)

4. Budget your time; spend the most time on the question that counts the most.

5. Begin with the easiest question. Ideas to answer the more difficult questions may occur to you as you write.

6. As ideas to answer other questions come to you, immediately jot them down on scratch paper. Jot down key words or phrases to stimulate and anchor your thought process.

8. Organize your ideas by quickly and briefly sketching an outline or list before you begin to write. The time spent planning your answers will pay big dividends in the end by helping you move quickly from one point to another.

9. Write quickly and efficiently with determination and purpose. Don't forget to use proper essay structure where appropriate: introduction, which includes a thesis; body; and conclusion.

10. Write your thoughts clearly and to the point, using formal English (no slang or contractions). Keep the writing simple, but use a variety of words and sentence structures to keep the reader's attention. Remember: It is more important to write clearly than to try to appear brilliant. Write legibly.

11. If you don't know an answer to a question, try to reason it out. Don't leave it blank unless you have absolutely no idea of an answer and don't waste time giving an incorrect or absurd answer. Save this question for last. Go to other questions; the answer to the difficult one may come to you while working on others. Remember, you may earn partial credit for a related answer to the question.

12. If information you've given for a question relates to another question, point out the relationship.

13. Leave time to read over your answers. Make sure your answers answer the question(s) appropriately, making sure that you followed the exact directions (directional words). Check and edit your essay for meaning, correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure.

DIRECTIONAL WORDS IN ESSAY QUESTIONS
ANALYZE - take the subject apart and highlight the interrelationships of the parts; examine similarities, differences, cause and effect, pros and cons. Don't forget to support your statements with evidence from facts, quotes, etc.

COMPARE - draw out similarities and contrasts. This term usually emphasizes similarities but differences can be shown.

CONTRAST - by stressing and explaining differences and highlighting unrelated qualities.

CRITIQUE - analyze an idea in detail and present your judgment and reasoning supported by facts, statements or quotes about the subject.

DEFINE - explain the meaning in concise (short), clear terms, including any limitations of the definitions. Keep in mind the class or group to which the subject belongs and what makes it different or the same from others in the same group.

DESCRIBE - give an overview and details by telling, characterizing, sketching or relating in a narrative form.

DISCUSS - examine a subject by giving information, reasons, details, examples about all sides of a subject including similarities, differences, cause and effect, pros and cons. Don't forget to support your statements with evidence.

EVALUATE - present a careful appraisal or assessment of the subject, looking at both sides of an issue, including advantages and disadvantages; limitations and strengths; and cause and effect where possible.

EXPLAIN - clarify and interpret the subject. Answer the questions what, why, and how, and, where appropriate, where and when. Explain any differences of opinion or experimental results.

ILLUSTRATE - give examples of how an idea works in different circumstances or examples of why an idea works.

JUSTIFY - explain why, giving reasons.

LIST - itemize concepts in brief form, explaining them, if necessary.

OUTLINE - sketch and/or explain the main points, showing the structure and meaning of the subject matter.

PROVE - present documented facts and evidence that support a point of view.

RELATE - draw connections between dissimilar ideas, using evidence.

STATE - use precise terms to describe rules, laws, options.

SUMMARIZE - give a concise (short) overview that explains the subject.

TRACE - give historical progression or development of a subject.