

Through Smoked Glass

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Click your heels three times...

There's no place like home

by Jean-Paul Nadeau

No one likes to take in-class essay exams. Students tend to worry more about essay exams than they do about objective tests: Will the topic(s) I have to write about be difficult? What if I can't think of what to write about? Will I have enough time to finish? Will I be the last one done? How "polished" a draft does the teacher expect?

Writing outside of class is different. You can work on the paper during your own personal peak-brain-power intervals, whether these occur at 7am or 11pm. You can write in your favorite spot - in an oh-so-quiet cubicle at the library, on the floor in front of a coffee table, at a computer or on a couch. You can usually "tweak" the setting: you can leave the Patriots game on for background noise, listen to the radio, eat a sandwich, take your shoes off, talk out loud, or do whatever you do to get in the "writing mood." Doing any of these things in class, however, would be a tad risky, to say the least.

You also have more time to write in such a setting. You can choose to stay up later to finish a paper or get up early to look things over. Essay exams, on the other hand, are usually limited to an hour or an hour and a half, and so require you to be an efficient writer.

In-class writing is different from take-home writing assignments, but the trick to doing well on an essay exam rests in treating the two similarly. In other words, treat an essay exam as much as possible like a take home assignment. While you won't be able to bring a coffee table to class, you *can* do certain things to encourage success.

Think about how you write at home: Do you jot



down notes first? Doodle your way to a thesis? Cluster your ideas together to get organized? Create a detailed outline? Write more than one draft? If you do these things at home, do them in class; just remember that you won't have as much time to perform each step. You will eventually discover ways to make these steps less time consuming. For example, once you have finished a draft, read it over, making corrections on it as needed. By doing so neatly, you will have in effect created a final draft, as long as the teacher hasn't asked for a finished-looking, polished final draft. Use your time wisely; instead of trying to leave early, make sure you're submitting the best writing you're capable of.

In this issue of *TSG*, you will find information about how to prepare for final exams and in-class essay exams. Students and professionals share their insights about these anxiety-inducing events so that you can be ready when the time comes.❖

Finals, finals, everywhere! And no relief in sight!

by Dr. Martha Ucci

Perhaps one of the greatest sources of anxiety for students lies in the ominous final exam period. The purpose of final exams is to synthesize material presented throughout the semester in a cogent, articulate manner. That may seem like a pretty large task for most students, especially since fourteen weeks of material is a lot to make sense of, much less master. Let me tell you that this task is essential for fully comprehending course material. In the process of preparing for final exams, students have the opportunity to gain a greater sense of the whole picture, rather than a series of smaller parts. In this regard, finals often provide a valuable learning experience for students.

Without dwelling on the educational benefits of

Send submissions to the Writing Center, Hall 6, 4th floor. *Through Smoked Glass* is published monthly through the Bryant College Writing Center and Learning Center.

exams, I would be remiss if I did not address some possible suggestions for preparation. First, consider developing a study group. Somehow working with other students can create a climate of confidence and shared knowledge. However, be sure to invite students who are willing to contribute to the group and not “sponge” off of the other members. Also, avoid a study group that simply gets together to complain about the class; that’s counter-productive. Consider meeting at the Learning Center with a tutor on-hand to answer questions as they arise.

Perhaps the best weapon against exam anxiety is over-preparation. Meeting with a study group, as well as preparing on your own, will build your confidence and reduce test anxiety. If you are still apprehensive, please make an appointment to meet with the Academic Skills Specialist to address your specific concerns regarding final exams. Good luck!❖

Seventh inning stretch

By Jacqueline Barry, Academic Skills Specialist

You are probably drawing a great sigh of relief now that mid-terms are over. You may even be thinking of this as a time-out or rest period before you have to start studying for final exams. Think again! Did you know test preparation begins weeks before the test date? Did you know that the best way to organize yourself for test day is to make not one, but three different types of simple study schedules? There are also many other tips to help you prepare for tests. I would be happy to share all of this information with you if you would like to meet with me at the Learning Center.



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For now, let me give you a few tips to get you thinking about test preparation and meeting success in your study endeavors. First, make sure you review and study when you are most alert. Trying to study when you’re half asleep is non-productive. Don’t waste your time. Another tip related to wasting time: don’t review material that you already know. Again, spending time reviewing information you know might make you feel smart, but will take time from learning what you don’t know. For more hints and help with preparing for tests and on test-taking strategies, stop by the Learning Center and ask to meet with the Academic Skills Specialist.❖

Forty-eight essays to a fitter, trimmer you

by Jessica Dodge, Writing Consultant

Even when I thought I would finally get away from it all, I didn’t. Not that I didn’t *want* to, I just couldn’t. I stayed up all night preparing and learning the forty-eight essays my professor gave us for our BUS 101 exam. Forty-eight essays! It wasn’t that individually they were long and involved, but when you have forty-eight to learn because you don’t know which *five* will be on your exam, your brain goes into overload. Fast. When I got to a point where I couldn’t bear to look at my notes any longer, I gave in to sleep. But I dreamt that I was studying for the same exam! In my dream, I could actually see my notes in front of me, but I couldn’t make any sense out of them! What I needed more than anything was a good night’s sleep. Instead, I spent the night having stressful dreams.

I woke up burnt out, and I hadn’t even taken the exam yet. So much information was circulating inside my head. All I wanted to do was hurry up and take the exam so that I could let go of the information before it escaped me. When the test was handed out, I immediately wrote down a number of ideas that I was having a hard time remembering. I didn’t care if they showed up on the exam or not. I just didn’t want them in my head any more. I then read each question on the exam, looking to see which ones I knew. There was a weight taken off my shoulders for each essay that I knew I could answer. My only problem now was being able to write fast enough to keep up with the thoughts that were pouring out of my brain. An hour and fifteen minutes had never gone by so fast.❖

On target

by Saiyeda Khatun, Writing Specialist



In order to hit any target, you need to fix your eye on it first; you need to aim. Likewise, if you want to do well in an essay examination, you need to understand the question(s) or “fix” on your target before writing your response. No matter how brilliant your answer, if it does not address the question, it is aimless, eventually causing you pain in the form of a lower grade.

Usually, every exam question gives you directions that specify the type of writing you are expected to do. So read the exam carefully for the following key terms which are usually used to

frame question(s):

Analyze. You have to break something into parts; find out the relationship among them, and show how they are connected to the whole. Example: If you analyze a character in a novel, you need to look at her/his speeches, actions and interactions with other characters, avoiding plot summary.

Argue. You have to take a position on a controversial topic and support your answer with reasons and evidence. Example: Should business majors be required to take a course in Liberal Arts?

Discuss. Explain the main points with your own commentary. You can compare and contrast the major points as well. Example: Discuss different methods of writing.

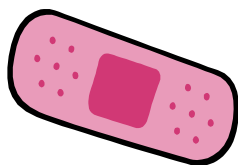
Explain. You have to present facts without taking sides. Example: Explain the causes of mental depression.

Evaluate: Provide your opinion on the value or worth of something after a close analysis. Example: Evaluate the registration process at your college.

What's next? Summon your class notes, your reading, and your critical thinking to do the rest!❖

Writing aches and pains

by Jessica Wocel



How many of us feel a sudden sense of dread when the teacher announces a writing assign-

ment to be due? What is it about writing that terrifies students so much? Writing in any form has always been one of the things that makes me cringe. It's not that I am the world's worst writer, which would give me good reason to dislike writing, but I just hate going through the whole process. It's hard to come up with ideas that I can actually coordinate into a paper. I try so hard to piece it together so it makes sense, continuously revising in order to produce a balanced and well-organized paper. In striving to achieve the best grade for myself, I've learned to get a firm grip on how to write a good paper.

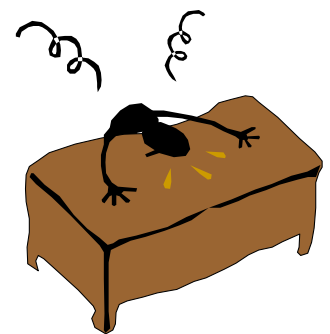
I have always been a good student and I tend to set high standards for myself as far as my academic performance goes. In high school, I was always in the advanced English classes even though I didn't think I had a creative bone in my body. As far as my thought process goes, however, I rarely tend to see things in an imaginative, creative light like so many of my peers.

I have strong points in my writing (as well as weak points) - one of them being that I have good grammar skills and a fair understanding of the rules of writing. I did not always have these skills. I achieved these skills through nothing other than practice. In college, I've encountered several problems in my writing. Just when I thought I had mastered it, a teacher found something else wrong. Lack of a thesis statement, improper use of the comma, run-on sentences, conflicting ideas -- I've had it all. However, each time I write a paper, I get better at it. I'm not going to say that once I make a mistake that I'll never do it again because writing

Some tips for taking in-class essay exams

by Aubry Bettencourt and Jessica Dodge, Writing Consultants

1. If given the question ahead of time, prepare a "trial" essay in advance. While you won't be able to bring this essay to the exam, you will have had the benefit of going through the thought process at least once.
2. If you are given a list of questions to choose from, read through them all before you decide which you want to answer. Time restrictions often tempt students to choose the first or second question; you may find that you'd have a much easier time answering the last one listed.
3. If you must write more than one essay, begin with the one you feel most comfortable with. The others will be easier to do once you have some writing behind you.
4. Take time to gather your thoughts. This may take the form of a quick brainstorming, clustering, or outline. Yes, this does take up valuable time, but this step will save you time once you begin to write.
5. Try to get the most important ideas down first. You can always add information if there is time left.
6. Leave enough time to re-read your essay(s) to check for mistakes. You are expected to use the time allotted to produce a well-written essay; avoid skipping out early.
7. Relax! Prepare adequately for the exam so that you can avoid anxiety once the test has been distributed.



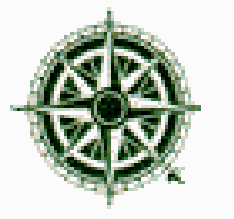
doesn't work that way. However, now I am able to notice these mistakes and correct them during the revision process, something I was never able to do before.

Through my work in the Writing Center I hope to help students understand that there is always something to improve in their writing. I try to teach them that comments on a paper are not always bad, that students can learn something from them. Writing, horrible as it may seem to some students, is not a hopeless endeavor, and it is possible to be comfortable with writing without being a master at it.❖

In response

by the TSG Staff

This monthly column is devoted to responding to questions and/or concerns about academic issues sent to TSG by Bryant students. These submissions are published anonymously. Student's concerns are designated with a "C," the corresponding response(s) with an "R."



C A problem that I have come across with studying is **time management**. Often I'm not sure which class to start with and how long I should spend on it. I find it difficult to read 60 pages and write a paper all in one night. I am not a procrastinator; I just feel like I'm being pulled in 5 different directions. Once I begin studying, I usually don't have any problems, with the exception of time.

R Time management is a problem that most students have. College, as compared to high school, is much more demanding, with a lot more reading assignments and essays. The best thing you can do is to **prioritize**. Out of your five or six classes, decide which assignments are due first. If you are given a selection of 150 pages to read by the end of the week, divide those pages over the number of days you have to finish the reading. Also, **use your weekends wisely!** The weekend gives you an opportunity to catch up on what you didn't get to finish during the past week. When Mondays' assignments are given, try to do as much as you can that night before Tuesday's assignments are given. This way you can stay on top of things. This rigid schedule just takes time to get used to. Eventually, you will develop a routine based on your schedule, and homework will become less stressful. Until then, hang in there, and remember that there is a light at the end of the tunnel!

Melissa Strenko, Writing Consultant

R I must say that I'm impressed with Melissa's advice in response to your time management concerns. Prioritizing assignments is certainly a key task in managing your time. **Creating a written schedule** of your priorities can also help you visualize and organize your priorities. Being consistent by following a rigid study schedule will help you develop good study habits and keep you on track. However, keep in mind that while you strive to keep a rigid study schedule, you need to work a realistic and productive study session.

In addition to prioritizing assignments, make sure you divide study time into reasonable smaller periods of time, versus unrealistic five to six hour non-stop study sessions. For even more suggestions, stop by to see me!

Jacqueline Barry, Academic Skills Specialist



Stress Management Survival Plan

by Lori Harrison, Resident Director

1. Recognize when you have too much stress: Learn to recognize your unique cues.
2. Talk out your troubles
3. Learn a systematic, drug-free method of relaxing.
4. Get regular physical exercise.
5. Eat nutritious foods.
6. Sleep: Each person has different needs. Getting seven hours of sleep per night on a routine basis will help moderate stress.
7. Learn to plan: Disorganization can breed stress.
8. Recognize and accept limits
9. Have fun! Occasionally you need to escape from the pressures of life and have fun. Find pastimes which are absorbing and enjoyable for you, no matter what your level of ability.

