3 Classroom Writing

The writing that you do most regularly in the college classroom falls into two categories: writing notes and writing tests. These two types of writing aim toward very different purposes and require different strategies. When you write notes from lectures, discussions, and texts, you are recording information and ideas from an outside source, but you are writing primarily for yourself, to supplement your memory and to help you synthesize and understand the material. When you write answers for essay examinations, you are presenting information and ideas that represent your understanding of the material you have learned. You are not writing for yourself, but for a reader who represents scholars in a particular field and who will evaluate your answers by scholarly standards. In fact, understanding the requirements of your audience in an essay test sometimes helps to make an adequate answer into a superior one.

The sections that follow treat the various kinds of classroom writing, the reasons why such types of writing are an important part of learning, and strategies for making these types of writing an integral part of your learning process.

Writing notes from lectures, discussions, and texts

Like most forms of writing, note taking is a skill that evolves from experience. Individuals develop methods that they have found to be most effective, methods that are efficient and that contribute to learning. Often students' note-taking styles will change during college until they find the right balance between effort expended and results gained. Such a trial-and-error process may result in effective methods, but many courses may have to be taken before a satisfactory method emerges. The purpose of the following sections is to speed up this process by acquainting you with some legitimate goals for note taking, and to offer some techniques to try to improve your note taking in all courses.

Note taking from lectures

Many students go through college never using class time wisely or never organizing for the most efficient use of their study time. For example, taking down everything an instructor says in class may appear conscientious, but for many students this method is actually an impediment to learning. Writing for an entire class period, head down, hand moving, prevents some students from listening to what is being said. Also, pages of notes in which illustrations and anecdotes crowd out the points they were intended to support make reviewing those notes a tedious and sometimes not very useful exercise. How often have you had to ask yourself, after your notes have sat unexamined for a few weeks, "Now why did I write that down?"

On the other hand, sitting idly in class with the excuse that you are listening to and absorbing a lecture (and don't want to be distracted by writing) is also an ineffective way to learn for most students. Like the days of our lives, class lectures become fuzzy and indistinct with the passage of a surprisingly short period of time. Working memory is capable of retaining about seven "chunks" of information. Even though you may be thrilled by a lecture, you do not have the cognitive capacity—no one does—to retain it and all of the others that you hear in a week. You need to leave every class with something down on paper. Writing extends short-term memory. It allows you not only to keep a record of others' ideas, it allows you to study them later, to learn them exactly, to react to them and connect them with your own experience and information.

Besides helping your memory, taking notes can also help you pay attention to the lecture by keeping your mind actively involved with what the instructor is saying. Psychological studies have demonstrated that in the average college classroom, at any given moment one out of every three students is daydreaming, a high percentage of them about sex. While pleasantly diverting, such lapses contribute little to your understanding of the course material. You cannot learn something that you haven't even heard. Taking notes reinforces your concentration, physically as well as mentally.

But the main purpose of class notes is to give you a *summary* of what happened in class. This summary will be most useful to you later if it reflects and emphasizes the main points that the instructor made. Remember, the instructor has a purpose in presenting the material he selects for each class period. If you can figure out the purpose you will have established the major organizing principle around which to take your class notes. A good question to go into class with is "Why is today's lecture being given?" Figuring this out requires you to make judgments, to be sensitive to what goes on in class. Some students can do this during the lecture itself; others cannot concentrate on listening and evaluating at the same time. Naturally, the better you understand the intentions of an instructor, the more organized and concise you can make your notes. If you are not sure what a lecture is about, it is better to play it safe and take more notes than you usually would. Taking time after class to organize

your notes will then accomplish your main purpose, which is to understand the material at the level the instructor wishes.

There is no answer to the question "How many notes should I take in a class?" But the strategies given below can help you discover the most effective use that you can make of your class time. You will probably find that some of them work for you and some do not, but we urge you to experiment with each of them to find out, early in your college experience, how you take notes most successfully.

The best way to prepare yourself to "understand" a lecture is to anticipate it. Always consult the course syllabus, which often will list the topics for each lecture, and read the assigned reading for that class period. The text assignment usually provides clues as to what the general topic for a class period will be. In class, then, you will have certain advantages. You will already know key words, concepts, people, or ideas. You will have a context into which you can place the material from the lecture.

Once in class, the best guide to what to record is your professor. Generally, most college lectures are not delivered in simple narrative fashion ("first this happened . . . then this occurred . . .). Most professors construct their lectures around pivotal points and, overtly or subtly, will share these main organizing ideas with you. So, look for cues in class and build your notes around the most obvious points made. Here are some cues to look for:

- What is said during the first few minutes: Often at the beginning of a lecture the instructor will give an introduction that will include the main points to be covered that day, or will provide an overview of the topic. It pays to be especially alert during these early minutes. It pays to be there at the beginning. Lateness is more than a breach of etiquette.

- Overt directions: Typical of remarks put into a lecture as cues are: "The major point is . . ."; "This is central to our understanding of . . ."; "It is important to note that. . . ." Any comment introduced by this sort of direction should be written down.

- Anything written on the chalkboard: Instructors' use of the chalkboard ranges from complete outlines of the day's lecture to words written hastily. But whenever an instructor takes the time to record a word or an idea, it should be assumed to be important.

- Points repeated during the lecture: This is an especially valuable way of spotting the organizing principles of a lecture in which there are no overt cues, for often an instructor will return to important material to reinforce it from different directions. Look for the signals "As I said before . . ."; "This, you will remember, is . . ."; and "We saw this in another context. . . ."

Your instructors may give none of these cues; they may give them all; they may give others. Individual lecture styles vary so much that you should consciously look for the ways your instructors emphasize the major

points or the organizing principles of their lectures. If you cannot learn to pick them out while you are listening and taking notes, you should try to do so as soon after the end of class as possible, while the lecture is still fresh in your mind. A few summary sentences pulled out and written in the margin may well help you organize the lecture later during your study of the notes.

Lecture styles are not the only variables you have to contend with as you move from class to class. Another factor that will affect your note taking is the course material itself. Different subjects are taught differently. Just as you will have to take different kinds of notes for different instructors, so will you have to record differently for different subjects. For example, in the humanities and in many of the social sciences, concepts are often more important than information in organizing lectures. As one writer said of history, "Facts are merely hooks on which to hang concepts." In such courses, the organizing ideas for lectures will generally be observations that emphasize a principle or general condition. Examples of such organizing principles are: "Most European monarchs in the late seventeenth century wanted to emulate Louis XIV of France," or "Impressionism was the most dynamic movement in art in the last decades of the nineteenth century," or "At its core, Marxism is not an economic, but a philosophical system." In such situations, examples and data will usually be given, but almost always as illustrations and evidence. The important parts to record are the organizing principles. You should take notes on the supporting material only as you need it to fix the organizing idea in your mind. A good rule of thumb is to write down the evidence that the instructor indicates is the strongest proof or the most vivid illustration.

Conversely, in certain courses, especially in the physical sciences, the factual material itself is the essence of a lecture and, therefore, needs to be recorded completely. If an instructor in anatomy gives a lecture on the parts of the human gastrointestinal tract or a chemist talks on the components of DNA, the facts, all of them, are crucial.

The above examples from the humanities and the sciences are, however, only guidelines showing tendencies or general characteristics of disciplines. In most subjects and within single courses, the lectures will vary, with some centering on theory and others on data that you need to have. Your job is to be sensitive to what kind of lecture is being given in each individual class period. Experience alone will make you confident in your courses, but, as usual, looking for cues will help. Do the facts being given in a lecture illustrate a point, or are they themselves the focal point? If, for example, an instructor says, "There are many examples of monarchs who tried to emulate Louis XIV," you may need to record material about one or two kings to fix the point. But if an instructor says, "DNA is composed of the following materials," you should be ready to write them all down.

However you finally decide to take class notes, whether outlines, fragments, lists, complete sentences, or full, or developed paragraphs, try

not to write on the entire page of your notebook. Even though it may take more paper, leave wide margins and gaps between your sections of notes. In short, leave spaces. Remember, your notes are working papers, not inviolate prose that is to be graded. Sacrifice neatness for utility. Dense notes, packed in from top to bottom and margin to margin are neither easy to read nor to use. Leave space to fill in new information as you get it, examples from your text or more complete data. Keep space available for your comments as you study the notes and are forming your ideas and making connections with other knowledge. You may, upon reflection, disagree with a point in your notes. You will want space to pen in a question to ask in class regarding the problem. Cherish the value of words, but recognize the value of white space.

Notes from class discussions

The purpose of class discussions is to encourage you to be an active participant, not a passive recorder. Much of the emphasis in a discussion is on getting students involved in thinking, reacting, and responding. These are important intellectual activities in the learning process, for through them you are supposed to discover and express your opinions. Writing is an invaluable tool for accomplishing these tasks.

Unfortunately, too many times, when class discussion begins, pens and pencils go down. Admittedly, it is considerably more difficult to take notes from discussions than from lectures, for, unlike lectures, discussions tend to be disorganized and difficult to follow. Also, students usually don't know how much of what other students are saying is important. And if you are an active participant, it is not easy to take notes and formulate what you want to say. But note taking in discussions is not only manageable, it is important. Note taking helps to keep you active and alert; it allows you to impose some organization on the discussion; and it can prepare you to speak.

As with lectures, there is no sure guide to note taking in discussions, but the best preparation, as before, is in anticipating the discussion. Think about the assigned readings. Ask yourself, "Why is this discussion scheduled? Do I have any views on the topic?" When you give some attention to the topic before class, you will be better able to follow and to join in the conversation in class.

Use your notes to record important points made. You may not know what will be important at first, so you may record more at the beginning than you will as the discussion progresses. For your later reference, write down points reinforced by the instructor, for his interjections will usually be intended to guide the discussion toward his goals. Note all points that are generally agreed upon or mentioned repeatedly.

While you probably will take down some points for later reference, you should concentrate your attention on writing for purposes of thinking and responding. What is your opinion of what others are saying? Keep a running record of your ideas. If you respond on paper first, even if it is just a few words or a phrase, you may discover that when you speak, your

contribution will be organized and directly related to the topic. What happens in this sequence—responding, writing, speaking—is that you will have organized your thoughts better by the act of writing them down. We have mentioned before that writing is thinking on paper. In the case of class discussions you can use writing almost as an instant monitor. "What is it I want to say? Is it worth saying?"

If you are not particularly active in class discussions, this type of writing may help you to contribute. Brief, written notes may give you more courage to speak up. A few reference words, and, of course, your quick reflection on your ideas as you write them, may help to defuse some of your fears that you will say something stupid, that you will forget some of the points if there are several, or that you will embarrass yourself in some other way. Even if you choose not to respond to the discussion, these notes on your ideas and reactions are valuable. They will help to insure that you follow the discussion, that you think about what is being said, and that you try to form opinions.

Discussion notes will probably be messy. Don't worry about it or try to take neat, ordered notes. Discussions are messy. At every stage you will have to indicate who said what. This is especially important for two participants, your instructor and you. Be sure to write in "my opinion" or put your ideas in brackets. Don't be hesitant to draw arrows to the recorded comment to which you are responding. Any technique that makes the notes useful for you, in class and later when studying, is a valuable technique.

Studying from class notes

Too often students do little with their class notes beyond reviewing them before an examination. Such a practice deprives them of a chance to learn their material. It has been estimated that students forget about three-quarters of what they learn in college. This forgetting is due to many reasons, but among them is the widespread tendency to study for specific examinations rather than for understanding. Even if this transient goal is met and students have stored enough material in memory to pass a test, they probably will not do as well as they could. Last-minute memorizing does not always result in a grasp of information sufficient to allow one to use information effectively in an essay examination.

Learning must take place over a period of time. Give yourself enough time to absorb and understand your class notes. Strategies for the effective studying of notes always involve an investment of time over a period of days or weeks. You should become more than familiar with the material in your notes; you should be on intimate terms with it. The first necessary step is to put your notes in a form that corresponds to your studying needs. If rewriting or typing them helps you to learn them, then the time copying will be well spent. However, most students have neither the time nor the need to recopy notes. Many have found it more valuable to reorganize their notes in some way, since the act of reordering raw, unedited notes, unlike copying, requires active intellectual involvement. Following are

some strategies, arranged sequentially, to assist you in learning your course content.

Reducing and restructuring your notes. The major problem in studying for an examination in a course is that you are confronted with large masses of material, the accumulation of weeks or months of note taking. How is it possible to learn dozens or hundreds of pieces of information? As you probably already know from experience, memorizing is not only unproductive but counterproductive, because it detracts from real study. The best answer, offered by psychologists and confirmed by experience, is organization and structure. It is important to fit information into larger contexts, to relate it to other information, and to see it in some kind of a structure. This process of structuring your lecture notes, you will remember, began in the classroom with your identification of organizing principles. As you study, write your comments on the relationships within your material and between this new material and what you already know. The structure to which you attach information may come from the course, from other courses, from ideas that you have known for a long time. One characteristic of intellectual maturity is a need to impose order on seemingly unrelated objects or to give meaning to information. Establish an intellectual principle of order in your notes. Developing the ability to create order from chaos is one of the purposes of a college education, and during your early undergraduate years chaos may still seem to be winning.

How do you begin? The best strategy is to find some way to reduce your material. The only requirement of the method is that it allow you to reduce systematically, each reduction providing key concepts, ideas, or words that trigger associations in your mind. Some students prefer to outline their class notes. Others prefer to pick out one or two points from each class session under which to organize the lesser points. Many students have reported to us that their best study strategy consists of extensive reduction of notes, finally to lists of just a few words. Built into those words are numbers of associations with other concepts, ideas, or categories. And each of these represents whole groupings of other facts. This kind of reducing is an ongoing process throughout study so that at examination time you are so familiar with your course material that a few references—key words or categories—allow you to recall by association large blocks of material.

Reinforcing your knowledge of your notes. Reducing your notes requires that you go over them periodically to learn them by reinforcement as well as by association. Familiarity breeds understanding, and it is only with this kind of understanding that you will be able to think about your course material in constructive, associative ways. One of the problems with studying notes is that it is usually a lonely, tedious job, sitting in your room rereading. These circumstances contribute to that common academic malaise, mind wandering, the feeling that you would rather be doing something with friends. We suggest very strongly that whenever possible you study with the friends who are in your courses.

What you need to do is to get together with others and, quite literally, compare notes. Even the best note takers will miss material. Not only does collective studying help you fill in the gaps in your own knowledge or understanding, the process itself is inherently beneficial. Collaborative learning within a community of scholars is a respected academic tradition. It works. Different people not only bring different perspectives to a learning project; their presence can also make studying more enjoyable. To make such sessions productive, however, you must follow some basic ground rules. You must all agree that the purpose of getting together is to study. Set a time limit after which you can socialize. To read notes to each other and discuss course material for two hours is more useful than spending an entire evening talking about life and occasionally saying, "Hey, we had better get back to work." The second rule is to take notes or add to your own. Do not leave such sessions without something written down.

Reflecting on your notes. One of the primary advantages of studying your notes over a period of time is that increasing amounts of material begin to lodge themselves in your brain. The more you know your material, the more material you carry around in your head. Whether or not you are aware of it, you will probably think about this material. Consciously or unconsciously you will mull over these facts and ideas. An incubation period is as important to learning as it is to writing. Do you ever remember a time when you were trying to think of someone's name and you couldn't, but that night in bed, when you were thinking about cleaning your room in the morning, the name popped into your mind? Looking at your notes for the first time the day before an examination robs you of a chance to get valuable insights.

Taking notes from readings

Taking notes from books and articles poses fewer difficulties than taking class notes. Unlike lectures, which exist as a permanent record only in your notes, the printed page may be consulted again and again. This characteristic is both a strength and a weakness. Material in a book or article lends itself to careful analysis and, consequently, can be learned with accuracy. On the other hand, the existence of the material in a book can give you a false feeling of security. It is always there. You can learn it at your leisure. One of the most pervasive difficulties in studying is the postponement of learning textbook material, primarily because a text does not possess the immediacy of a lecture. For example, many students underline or highlight passages in their textbooks. This strategy, in itself, is not a bad way to read the first time through. However, you should recognize underlining for what it is, a way to organize to study. In effect, what you are saying to yourself is, "This is important. I must come back later to learn it." And too often "later" means the day before an examination, too late to digest the material or to learn parts of it that are troublesome. It is also quite possible to underline large portions of a page and to get to the bottom with no idea of what you have read.

The primary way to insure your active involvement in reading is to take notes. Note taking requires you to think about the material you are reading, because to keep a few notes you have to make choices about what is important and what is not. The written exercise forces you to be selective. People who only underline tend to underline too much material; they don't need to force themselves to make choices, and, therefore, they rarely do. Figure 3.1 is a paragraph that a student has underlined indiscriminately.

The example below of a Grand Central Station of underlinings will be useless to the student when he studies. If the student were to read carefully, his notes might look like figure 3.2.

This brief set of notes might be enough to jog this student's memory about the important details because he has followed the lead of the author and concentrated on what the author thought was important. It is all right not to underline or record the parts about James's background, his disappointment, and what historians formerly thought. These observations need not be ignored, but they need not be given the same attention as the organizing ideas of a paragraph.

What then could one usefully write in the book while reading the above paragraph? In the books that you own, marginal notations are a valuable form of note taking. (Of course, you would never mark up a library book!) But you can make the books that you have purchased your

Too much underlining

The prestige of the English monarchy declined greatly under James I, 1603–1625. As a Scotsman who had lived his adult life in poverty, he came to the English throne expecting to control vast fortunes. He was greatly disappointed. The parsimony of parliament and the suspicion of royal authority that he discovered, forced him to resort to ill-advised schemes to raise money, including the sale of offices, peerages, and monopolies. These policies divided the nation. Formerly, historians argued that he divided his nation along the lines of religion—the puritans against the king's Church. But the major division was always the court vs. the country. The focal point of opposition was the House of Commons, the instrument of the landed gentry. This class, which included puritans and Anglicans, organized against what seemed to them to be royal encroachments against their liberties. They didn't approve of his church, but their efforts were directed against his pocketbook. They blocked his new taxes, dissolved his monopolies, and, finally, impeached his ministers. An angry and militant parliament was James' bequest to his son.

FIGURE 3.1

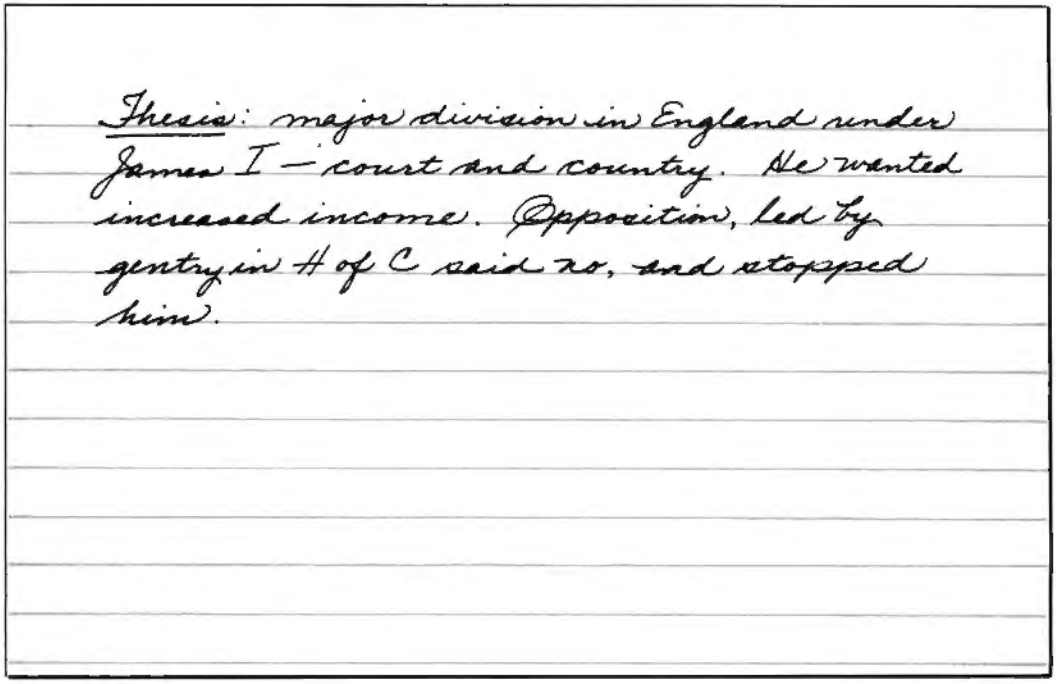

FIGURE 3.2

own indeed by using the margins to organize, summarize, and respond, as shown in figure 3.3.

Notice how little is underlined and how each underlined segment is annotated. When this student comes back to review this passage, reviewing is all he will have to do. He will not have to read fifteen or twenty underlined lines. Notice also that he has made notes to himself to find out words or ideas with which he is unfamiliar. He can make a point of looking these up. They are not lost in an indiscriminately drawn maze of lines. In short, this student understands the paragraph that he has read, and that, after all, is the purpose of studying.

Writing essay examinations

The purpose of any essay examination is to determine if you know the course material well enough to use it in a controlled situation. The instructor will ask you to do something with the knowledge you have been exposed to, so the first requirement for taking an essay examination is to understand your instructor's directions. Knowing what type of question you are answering will help you to determine the nature and focus of your responses and to set limits. Following are the general categories into which essay questions fall. They are not mutually exclusive, and some essay

questions may ask for more than one type of response, but these categories are illustrative of the types of questions you should look for when taking an examination.

The information question

This question type is the most common form of essay question. It asks for nothing more than information and is the most direct way for an instructor to find out how much you know about a subject. Table 3.1 lists key words that will help you to identify an information question.

Compare, contrast, or choose between two things

This type of question, discussed in detail in chapter 8, seeks to find out how much you know about two or more topics. Remember that you must connect the two topics, not just discuss them separately. Table 3.2 lists key words to look for.

Questions that ask you to argue a point of view or to develop an interpretation

These types of questions often have no right answers, and while some answers can be wrong, most answers fall into the reasonable or unreasonable category. Remember the definition of an argument presented in chapter 2. Table 3.3 shows the key words in questions of argument and interpretation.

James began on the wrong foot

what were these?

look up this word

The prestige of the English monarchy declined greatly under James I, 1603–1625. As a Scotsman who had lived his adult life in poverty, he came to the English throne expecting to control vast fortunes. He was greatly disappointed. The parsimony of parliament and the suspicion of royal authority that he discovered, forced him to resort to ill-advised schemes to raise money, including the sale of offices, peerages, and monopolies. These policies divided the nation. Formerly, historians argued that he divided his nation along the lines of religion—the puritans against the king's Church. But the major division was always the court vs. the country. The focal point of opposition was the House of Commons, the instrument of the landed gentry. This class, which included puritans and Anglicans, organized against what seemed to them to be royal encroachments against their liberties. They didn't approve of his church, but their efforts were directed against his pocketbook. They blocked his new taxes, dissolved his monopolies, and, finally, impeached his ministers. An angry and militant parliament was James' bequest to his son.

thesis

their reason →

their method →

TABLE 3.1
Key words in questions of information

Words	*What they ask*	*Example*
Define	Give the exact meaning of the topic. How is it different from everything else of its type?	Define Marx's concept of alienated labor.
Describe, Discuss	Tell what happened or what the topic is. Concentrate only on primary or most important features.	Describe the conditions on the ships that brought slaves to America and discuss one rebellion that took place on a slave ship.
Explain why	Tell the main reasons why the topic happened or happens.	Explain why the ocean tides are not at the same time every night and why they are not always the same height.
Illustrate	Give one or more examples of the topic, relating each to the topic.	Primitive tribes usually have rigid family systems. Illustrate this point, using one of the tribes studied this semester.
Relate	Show how the topic has an effect on something else; the connection(s) between two things.	Relate the evolution of the horse to the changes in its environment.
Summarize	To give all the main points of a topic; to reduce it without changing it.	Summarize Galileo's main discoveries.
Trace	Give a series of important steps in the development of a historical event or a process or any sequence of happenings.	Trace the events that led up to the Civil War.

Source: Adapted from Harvey S. Wiener and Charles Bazerman, The English Handbook: Reading and Writing *(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), pp. 311–15. Copyright © 1977 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Used by permission.*

TABLE 3.2
Key words in questions of comparison/contrast

Words	*What they ask*	*Example*
Compare	Show how two things are both alike and different.	Give two examples of biological polymers and compare them.
Contrast	Show only the differences between two things.	Contrast the sculpture of Renaissance Italy with that of Baroque France.

Questions of application and speculation

These are among the most difficult essay questions, for they ask you to apply what you know to solve a problem. In addition to knowing the subject matter, you must be able to "use" it in a creative but logical way, analyzing the problem and thinking through the solution. You must not only reason out a solution, but show why your solution is reasonable. The key words for this type of question are often not as evident as in other questions, so you may have to read a question several times before you recognize it. Table 3.4 gives some words to look for.

Although all of these question types ask for different kinds of responses, they share common traits. Instructors know the characteristics of good answers, and these include a clear statement of purpose (your thesis or response), the reasons why you responded as you did, and support for your answer. Theses without supporting evidence are unacceptable; facts unrelated to each other or to the thesis are useless facts. You need to direct your answer toward the exact question asked and to respond to it concisely, but sufficiently, in the time allowed. If you are wondering how to do all of this, you share a concern with almost every undergraduate student.

Answering an essay examination question

Following are some guidelines for taking essay examinations. Some of them may seem obvious, but under the pressure of time the simplest tasks can be forgotten or, worse, ignored in an attempt to cut corners.

Read the question—all of it. One difficulty with looking for key words to give you your direction is that you may skip too quickly over the rest of the question. Many essay answers are unsuccessful because they miss the point of the question. Make sure you understand not only what type of question it is, but what the specifics are, and what all of your obligations are. Many essay questions have two or more parts, and it is a common mistake for students to answer the first very capably, the second in less acceptable fashion, and to ignore the third. Before you begin to write, make sure that you are aware of all of your responsibilities.

Make notes on what you know about the subject. Although it takes a few minutes to jot down a few words and phrases, taking the time to do so can result in a better answer than if you immediately begin writing.

TABLE 3.3
Key words in questions of argument and interpretation

Words	*What they ask*	*Example*
Agree or Disagree	Give your opinion about a topic. You must express either a positive or a negative opinion. Support your opinion from appropriate sources.	The first six months of a child's life are the most important period in its emotional development. Agree or disagree.
Analyze	Break down the topic into its parts and explain how the parts relate to each other and to the whole topic.	Analyze the structure of Beethoven's Fourth Symphony.
Critique, Criticize	Break the topic into its parts (analyze); explain the meaning (interpret); and give your opinion (evaluate).	Critique Peter Singer's argument that all animals are equal.
Evaluate	Give your opinion about a topic. You may make both positive and negative points, but you must come to some conclusion about the relative weight of good and bad points.	Evaluate the importance of protein molecules in a cell.
Interpret	Explain the meaning of the topic. Give facts to support your point of view.	Interpret the meaning of the election statistics given on page 12 of your textbook.
Justify, Prove	Give reasons to show why the topic or assertion is true. Use examples.	Justify, from a Southerner's point of view, the need for slaves in the ante bellum South.

These notes will help you to make decisions about the question. In a "compare" or "contrast" question, do you know which approach you want to take? Should you criticize or support a thesis in a question? What *do* you think of Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*? You need to know before you begin. A common problem with timed essays is lack of focus, caused often because students discover what they want to say as they write and, consequently, change directions in midcourse. A few minutes at the

TABLE 3.4
Key words in questions of application and speculation

Words	*What they ask*	*Example*
Could . . . ?	Determine if the topic is capable of what is being asked. Your response should include a yes or no answer.	Could Hitler have won World War II if he had defeated Great Britain in 1940?
How would . . . ?	Determine the probable reaction to the topic in the circumstances provided.	How would President Truman have reacted upon discovering the Watergate break-in?
What would happen . . . ?	Based on what you have already learned, determine the probable outcome of a new set of circumstances.	Concentrated solutions of urea (8 M) act as denaturing agents for proteins by disrupting noncovalent bonds. What would happen to the configuration of a protein dissolved in 8 M urea?

beginning spent making your decisions, organizing your notes into coherent groups, and putting these groups into a logical order will save you valuable writing time, for you will be writing purposefully.

Write the answer. Be direct. The instructor is not hunting for elegant phrases or meticulously chosen words in a timed essay. He wants to know the state of your knowledge or your powers of analysis or your ability to synthesize data. As a rule—which you are allowed sometimes to break—try to begin with a clearly stated topic sentence in which you set down the scope and direction of your answer. Follow it with your reasons and supporting materials. Handle each part of the question separately and indicate at all times what you are doing.

"How long should the answer be?" Your instructor will give you guidelines. Stay within them. It is just as easy, and just as tempting, to write too much as too little. Theses not supported by facts, evidence, detail, or argument are not going to be received very well. On the other hand, do not put in everything you know about a topic with the expectation that your instructor will pick out whatever he wants. Selection is your job, not his. Concrete, supporting detail is very important, but only if relevant. Remember that your answer is not supposed to be a multiple-choice exam for your instructor.

The requirements of a timed examination almost always prevent the writing of a second draft, and your instructor understands that your essay

will not be as good as it could be if you had more time. Nevertheless, your essay must be adequately written without glaring errors that will distract and annoy the reader. Spell words as well as you can (and especially do not misspell any of the words you had to learn for the exam), punctuate carefully, and use proper grammar. Make your handwriting legible. It is in your own interest to present your essay, the product of thorough study and careful thought, in a form worthy of its content. The studying that you have done in preparation for the examination will help to make some elements of the writing process routine. If you understand the concepts well before you come to the exam, you won't have to worry about generating ideas. The format of the essay is also pretty much determined by the exam questions. So plan to leave a few minutes at the end of the exam to proofread your answers.

So far in this book we have dealt with ways to use writing to think, to organize ideas, to record, and to write in classroom contexts. The rest of the book discusses the preparation for and writing of papers outside of class. Although these out-of-class assignments are designed to develop additional skills, keep in mind the strategies you have encountered so far. They can be helpful in a wide variety of writing tasks.

QUESTIONS

1 What is the value of reducing your class notes to lists or outlines?

2 What are your major responsibilities when writing a timed, in-class essay examination?

3 What are the main problems with underlining or highlighting material in your textbook?

4 What are the major differences between questions that ask you to argue a point of view and questions that ask you to speculate?

EXERCISES

1 Immediately after you leave a lecture, meet with several of your classmates to "compare notes." Each of you should take several minutes to write down what you believe to have been the main points of the lecture. Discuss your impressions and try to resolve your differences.

2 Monitor your own study techniques. How do you study or use class notes? What strategies for studying do you think you could profitably try?

3 Practice reducing each paragraph in one of your reading assignments to one or two sentences.

4 Summarize in your own words the textbook entry in figure 3.1. In what ways is your summary different from the underlining in the text? Which do you believe will be more useful? Why?