Often success or failure in a college course depends on a student’s ability to write well during a timed essay exam.

Highlights of an Essay Question Response

- Professors expect students to answer an essay question in an organized method using complete sentences, concrete details, and paragraphing.
- An in-class essay exam should look like a formal essay written in composition courses and use all parts of the essay.
- There is not time to write a formal introduction, but in a sentence or two write the main idea and a summary of the points that the essay response addresses.
- In the body paragraphs, be sure to support statements with examples and explanations of those examples.
- In a sentence or two, summarize the information presented in the essay response.

How to Use a Blue Book for an Essay Exam

A composition test booklet can be purchased at the Campus Book Store and makes a perfect template for an essay exam that must be completed in class. If students are nervous about taking essay exams, using a blue book formula will provide a tool that can be practiced at home.

1. **READ** the directions carefully and **CIRCLE** the direction words. In this way you will be sure to answer all parts of the essay question according to the professor’s directions. “Define” or “list” is a much different response than one required by the words “explain” or “compare.”

2. Make a **JOT CHART** using the inside of the blue book cover, jot down all the ideas you want to include in your response, making sure to list one idea per line. (Don’t worry about the order or judge the ideas as good or bad, just jot down a possible response for each part of the question.

3. **OUTLINE** the material you want to use by going through your jot chart and numbering the items in the order you plan to write about them, crossing through items or examples that you don’t want to use in your answer.

4. **WRITE** on one side of the page only, using double-spaced writing. (Double-spacing the writing allows you to add words, cross out words and make corrections, etc. in the space above your writing.) Write clearly and legibly. Use the numbered jot list as an outline for your writing. Keep the left side pages blank to insert additional information into your essay when you revise and recheck your response (indicating the insertion point in the essay with a *). Writing on one side of the paper and double-spacing the answer also leaves plenty of room for the
professor to make comments and corrections when grading, and a professor’s feedback is essential to improving the items you missed on an essay exam.

5. **REREAD AND REVISE** when you are finished. Reread your response and make corrections. Check to be sure that you sufficiently addressed every direction word you circled and responded to all parts of the question. If you’ve forgotten a sentence or two, if you want to add an example, or if you need to expand a portion of the writing, make an arrow to show the point of insertion within your text, draw the arrow out to the left margin, and add the information on the *opposite* page, which you have left blank for this purpose.

6. **PROOFREAD** your answer for technical and mechanical errors and correct these.