

PREPARING FOR AN IN-CLASS EXAM IN AN ENGLISH CLASS

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- first of all, there is **NO** magic formula
- it would be best to see the exam, in most cases, as an exercise in **analytical argumentation** that centers on comparison and contrast
- you cannot reread everything, so first review your notes
 - ask yourself what ideas keep coming up again and again, what has the professor emphasized, what has been the point of class discussion (in my classes there is a simple answer to the latter--I am training you to think and respond specifically and analytically)
 - after your review, pose questions you think might appear and go through some mock responses
 - ask yourself how you would respond to one of your own questions, what works would you select to make your case, what specific evidence would you cite to support your claims
- in a literature class, review **major ideas** and **themes**--once again ask, is there something that comes up in discussion frequently or that I see appearing in a number of works I am reviewing
- if the professor has been introducing various historical ideas--neo-classicism, romanticism, realism, existentialism, whatever--pay attention to those, review their tenets, consult your handbook to literature, and prepare yourself for a question that asks you to place a work(s) in that context

Writing the Exam:

- do not attempt to write a draft and then copy it into the blue book
 - instead take 10 minutes for a 1 hour exam and 15-20 minutes to do some rough prewriting--an outline and thesis statement. Take the next 35 minutes for a 1 hour exam and an hour and a half for a two hour exam and write your response in the blue book, skipping lines and numbering your pages. With any remaining time, review your response and add any material wherever it seems appropriate. Bring white out; it helps when you are making corrections.
- watch the clock; always know how much time remains and budget your time accordingly. To say that you did not have enough time is not legitimate; there are always students in every class who manage to do the assignment and achieve satisfactory results. If they can, you can.
- look closely at the wording of the topic, ask questions if you are uncertain about something, and then follow those instructions. Assume, unless otherwise instructed, that English professors want to see you argue a case, not just summarize material (as in some other disciplines)