

Six strategies for exam essays

1. Take time to choose the right questions

- Read the whole paper carefully -tick questions you can attempt
- Check you are clear re: the key words and content you need to know. Make a final choice.
- Check amount of marks per question. Divide the time between questions in proportion to marks – note starting times for each.

2. Make quick plan of structure and content

- Essential! -and jotting down points helps to calm nerves.
- Make a quick plan or diagram – work out essential **content** to put in, and double-check the **angle** you need to address (Discuss? Explain? Compare?) Number your points in the order you will cover them.

3. Get to the point

- The more relevant points you cover, the better your essay.
- Don't get 'long-winded' – if you start to ramble, stop yourself and go back to the plan.
- Shorter sentences can help you stick to the point and say more.
- For each point, check: am I still answering the question?

4. Stick to a time plan

- As you write, keep to a time plan. Leave a gap if you can't remember a name or fact – go back later.
- Don't risk missing out a question –attempt the right number.

5. Keep structure clear – 'signpost'

- Make your structure clear: intro, main body, conclusion.
- Use linking words and phrases to 'signpost' the structure and help it flow - let the reader know when you move on to a new point or section, so they can follow the steps of your argument.

6. Intro and Conclusion

- Keep these short but clear.
- Introduction: say how you will address the question. Outline the order of your main points as a guide to your essay – stick to it.
- Conclusion: Sum up main points briefly – and refer back to the question, to show how you have answered it.
- Number questions/pages clearly. Obvious, but easy to forget...

Contact the **Effective Learning Service** for a more detailed leaflet, and for extra advice and support: elsl@qmu.ac.uk, or drop in to room 1153