

TAKING THE ENGLISH 50 FINAL EXAM

A timed essay is designed to assess a student's ability to effectively communicate ideas in a reasonably coherent paper that is thesis-driven, well-organized, well-supported. Instructors are looking for essays that demonstrate that the student has (a) understood the assigned reading, (b) responded to the prompt intelligently, and (c) incorporated information from outside reading effectively.

Timed essays test a student's ability to think, reason, organize, analyze, synthesize, respond, and communicate in writing. Though somewhat artificial (most of us won't be called upon in "real life" to perform in a similar manner), the test is a reasonable measure of what students should be able to do at this level of instruction, especially if they have done the necessary preparation.

The procedure for taking the English 50 Final Exam is as follows:

- One week before the scheduled test, you will receive a reading assignment. This reading will probably be a published essay, typically taken from recent newspaper or magazine and dealing with a topic that is somewhat controversial or provocative. Sometimes, pairs of readings, such as a pro/con discussion, will be assigned.
- You are encouraged to critically read, analyze, and understand the reading during the week. You may assume that the topic of your final exam will have something to do with the general topic of the reading, though you will not be told what exactly you will be writing on until the day of the final exam.
- You are permitted to *lightly* annotate this reading. However, do *not* write lengthy notes, and do not write a summary of the article on your reading. Be careful not to write anything on the reading that might be misconstrued as pre-writing, or that can be transferred to your essay later.
- On the day of the final, bring your annotated reading with you to class, along with a sufficient supply of *blank* college-ruled paper, blue or black-ink pens, a dictionary, a Thesaurus (electronic spell checkers are permitted), white-out (optional). Do not bring notes, outlines, print-outs from Internet searches, etc. You will be permitted to refer your annotated reading only during the test.

The information on the next pages will help you prepare for the English 50 Final.

BEFORE YOU ARRIVE—PREPARE AT HOME

1. Carefully and critically read assigned readings the way you have been taught. Be sure you understand the author's thesis and main points.
2. Try to guess what the prompt *might* be and begin brainstorming about how you *might* approach responding to the prompt. Keep in mind that you may have guessed wrong, so be prepared to adapt.
3. Research the general topic addressed in the essay/s. Get familiar with the topic beyond what the essays are covering. Though you won't be able to bring notes or write any of this information on the reading, you will have a broader idea of the general issue, which you can draw on later while writing your essay.

ON THE DAY OF THE FINAL—BUDGET YOUR TIME

PRE-WRITING (25%)

When you get your test, read the prompt carefully. Note key words. Be sure you understand what you are expected to do. Understanding the prompt will enable you to determine the organizational strategy you will use when writing your essay. Generally speaking, essay prompts could fall into the following categories:

Argue—Give the pro and con evidence of the topic and take a position.

Agree/Disagree—Discuss the positives and the negatives of the subject.

Discuss—Examine the issue from various points of view.

Illustrate—Emphasize specific examples.

Once you feel confident you understand the prompt, get out some scratch paper. Following the 25/50/25 approach (see last page), allow yourself 25% of your 2 hours (approximately 30 minutes) for prewriting:

1. On scratch paper, *jot down your thesis*. Base your thesis statement as a direct response to the prompt. Consider forecasting the key points you will be making in your essay in the thesis itself. This will help the reader follow your ideas, and will serve as a guide to you as you write.
2. On the same scratch paper, *sketch out a simple outline*. List the main topics and points you plan to discuss.

WRITING YOUR ESSAY (50%)

Now you have 50% of your remaining time (approximately 1 hour) to write. Remember to skip lines and write on one side of the page.

If you have sketched an outline, and if you have a clearly-stated thesis, you are ready to go. As you write, try not to worry too much about spelling and grammar—yet. Once you have a complete draft, you will need to go back and carefully proofread your essay.

As you write, remember the principles of good writing that we've been working on all semester: an engaging beginning, a clearly-worded thesis, topic sentences for each body paragraph that begin with smooth transitions, a variety of support for each body paragraph, an effective ending.

After each paragraph, pause and re-read what you've written so far to be sure you're making sense. If necessary, pencil in words or phrases that help clarify confusing or unclear ideas.

Keep an eye on the time. Try and finish writing your essay well before the allotted time.

PROOFREAD/EDIT (25%)

Ideally, you have approximately 30 minutes left to re-read the essay in its entirety. You will NOT have time to copy the essay again, but you should be able to make MINOR improvements to the draft. These improvements could include—

- Cleaning up your prose by inserting stronger verbs, replacing repetitious words (this is what your Thesaurus is for!) etc.
- Adjusting topic sentences, transitions, and conclusions to clarify relationships between and among paragraphs.
- Proofreading for grammar and punctuation errors
- Checking your spelling (draw a simple line through the error and clearly print the correction above the crossed out word)

BEFORE TURNING IN YOUR PAPER

Make sure you've followed all directions

- Professor's name on cover page
- Your name on **back of last page of your essay**
- Page numbers at the bottom of each page
- Assigned reading attached

Assemble your test correctly (cover sheet on top, your essay, annotated reading).

TAKING THE ENGLISH 50 FINAL

KEYS TO SUCCESS:

AT HOME: KNOW YOUR SUBJECT!

- ❖ READ THE ARTICLE
- ❖ RESEARCH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RELEVANT TO ARTICLE
- ❖ GUESS WHAT THE PROMPT MIGHT BE
- ❖ PRACTICE GENERATING IDEAS

DURING EXAM: BUDGET YOUR TIME!

25/50/25 (approximate)

