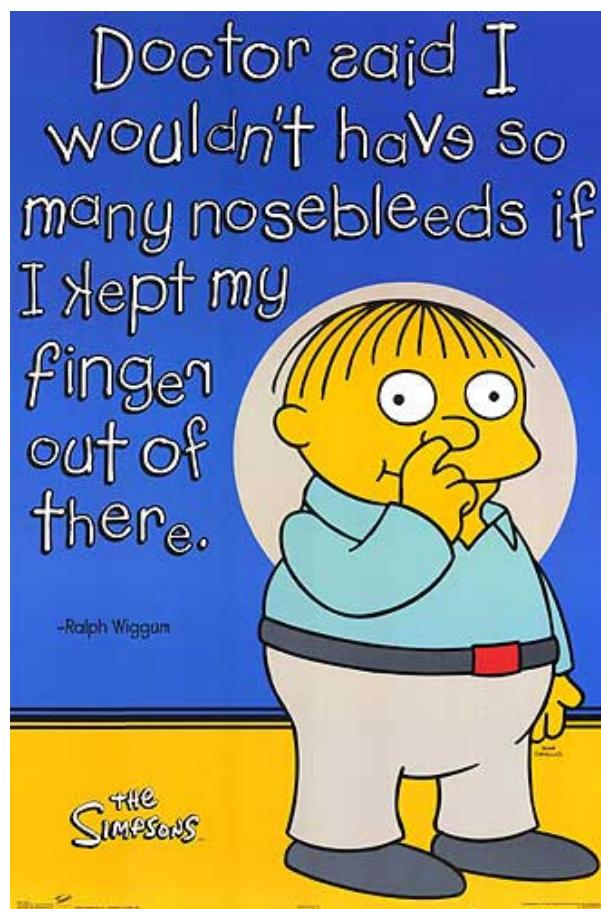


WRITING ESSAY EXAMS

BEFORE THE EXAM:

1. Find out from your professor the format that the exam will take: make sure you know how many questions you will be asked to answer, and how much time you will have.
2. Practice writing under exam conditions. If the exam calls for writing two essays in an hour, practice writing for a half hour to see exactly how much information you can physically place on the page in that amount of time. If you can, obtain old exams and use the questions for practice; if not, make up questions yourself based on the major themes of the course.
3. Be sure that you have all the class notes; consult classmates and your professor about anything you have missed or which seems vague to you.
4. For each text to be covered by the exam, make sure that you have five or six sections memorized that illustrate the main themes of the text. If the exam format is open book, make sure that you know where the main points in the text can be found; you can lose an excessive amount of time if you have to search for quotes in the exam itself.



IN THE EXAM:

1. Come prepared. Bring everything you could possibly need -- extra pens, pencils, erasers. Make sure that the pens you bring are easy to write with. If the exam is open book, bring all the books you need.
2. Try to pick out a seat that will be free from any possible distractions; preferably, choose one next to a wall, and away from windows.
3. **PREPARING TO WRITE.** Do not begin writing your answers immediately! First, perform a "memory dump," writing down all of the information you have had to memorize for the exam in note form. Do this somewhere in the exam book where your professor won't read it, such as an inside cover or back page. Be sure to cross it out before the end of the exam.
4. Next, read the instructions. Check that the format is what you were expecting. Plan on dividing your time according to the number of points each answer is allocated (i.e., if the exam is an hour long, and you're told to answer 4 questions worth 5 points each then write two small essays worth 40 points each, spend no longer than 5 minutes on each of the smaller questions, then 20 minutes each on the essays).
5. Now read the questions. The main difference between writing papers and essay exams is that papers can be written organically -- they can grow and develop over time. In exam conditions, however, you do not have that luxury, so you must keep a tight control on the organization. After reading the question, immediately formulate a thesis using wording from the question. This should be the first sentence of your essay; there is no time for an elaborate introduction. Then, on the top of the exam booklet page, write a brief outline that answers the thesis, using the points memorized from the text (the amount of time you have to write the essay will dictate the number of points you will be able to use -- in a half-hour essay, for example, you will only be able to use four or five points at most). Planning the essay should also take a proportional amount of time (up to six or seven minutes for the half-hour response).
6. **WRITING THE ESSAY.** Stick closely to your organization, and check the clock at regular intervals. If you're running short, take a few minutes to think of an additional point. If you're running long, do not go over the allotted time; even though you might do brilliantly on this one answer, you're not leaving yourself enough time to score full marks on the next essay. If you do start running out of time, write your response out in outline form; you may get partial credit for this.
7. **REVISING.** Allow sufficient time at the end of your essay to proofread (in the half-hour model, three or four minutes should be allocated for revision). Cross out the notes you made at the beginning. Check that the names of authors, characters, people, and places are all spelled correctly, and that any words written illegibly are crossed out and written neatly above.