

## Taking an Essay Exam

Here are four basic steps to taking an essay exam and succeeding:

1. Read the question carefully.
2. Rephrase the question as a sentence that states the main idea of your answer. This would be a kind of thesis statement or topic sentence.
3. Make a quick outline of the points you want to cover.
4. Write your essay.

Here is an example of an **analytical essay-exam question** and a plan to answer it:

**Exam question:**

Write an essay in which you analyze three major causes of the American Civil War.

**Student thesis statement:**

Three major causes of the American Civil War are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

**Quick outline:**

Paragraph 1: Very brief intro that ends with thesis

Paragraph 2: First cause of American Civil War

Paragraph 3 Second cause of American Civil War

Paragraph 4: Third cause of American Civil War

Paragraph 5: Very brief conclusion

Here is an example of a **comparison-contrast essay-exam question** and a plan to answer it:

**Exam question:**

Write an essay that compares and contrasts Creationism and Darwinism.

**Student thesis statement:**

Although Creationism and Darwinism share a few basic similarities, the differences between the two theories are far more profound.

**Quick outline:**

Paragraph 1: Very brief intro that ends with thesis

Paragraph 2: Similarities between Creationism and Darwinism  
(This may take more than one paragraph.)

Paragraph 3: Differences between Creationism and Darwinism  
(This may take more than one paragraph.)

Paragraph 4: Very brief conclusion