WRITING TIMED ESSAYS

Writing timed essays can often be a source of anxiety; however, this handout will describe some steps you can take to stay on track and produce a clear, coherent essay even in a short amount of time.

STEPS FOR WRITING TIMED ESSAYS

Here are three steps many writers follow when they have to write timed essays:

Prepare ahead of time: Complete any readings and review your class notes before the exam time. You might also brainstorm ideas about various topics you think might be asked about on the exam, especially if your instructor has given you possible essay topics.

Read the essay prompt or question(s) carefully:
- Look for keywords in the question(s), such as analyze, compare, define, describe, evaluate, explain, and summarize, which give you clues about what you need to do when writing.
- Look for language that defines the topic you will discuss, how broad or narrow your discussion of the topic should be, the types of examples you should include, and/or specific terms you must address.
- Annotate the essay prompt by highlighting, underlining, or taking notes on any keywords or other language that will help you remember what to do as you write.

Map out your time:
- Aim to spend approximately 15% of the exam time reading and annotating the essay prompt, and brainstorming, generating ideas, and/or creating an outline.
- Spend approximately 75% of your time drafting paragraphs with clear topic sentences and supporting evidence.
- Spend approximately 10% of your time editing and proofreading to check for grammatical errors and revise sentences.

OTHER HELPFUL TIPS

- Get a good night's sleep beforehand so you are well-rested.
- Eat foods that are protein-rich and drink plenty of water.
- Take deep breaths to help you stay calm and focused.
- Respond to the question(s) asked because that is what your instructor will look for when grading.
- Be clear and concise in your writing so that your ideas come across and you do not run out of time.
- Focus on your ideas rather than spelling and grammar mistakes as you write. If there is time left over, you can go back and make edits to any errors you see.