

# Enhancing Learning and Critical Thinking in Essay Examinations

The Importance of Essay  
Examinations

# Objective versus Subjective

- Are Objective Examinations Really Objective?
- Are Essay Examinations Objective or Subjective?
- Preparation for Higher Academic Level Classes
- What Are We Asking Students to Do?

# What Are We Asking Students To Do?

- Require Students to Analyze
- Require Students to Argue
- Reveal Student's Mastery of the Content Knowledge
- Require Students to Synthesize Concepts
- Require Students to Combine Concepts into Coherent Whole
- Require Students to Learn to Think and Compose Rapidly

# The Questions To Be Asked? A History Perspective

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- How
- Why

# Who?

- Who Participated in the Event?
- Are these Who enemies, friends, collaborators, etc . . . ?
- Is Who Participated in the Event Important?
- Is who Participated Important Locally, Regionally, Nationally, Continentally or

# What?

What is the Importance of the Event, Person, Place, Item?

Does the Importance of the Event Change What the Event Is?

Defining the What? Battle, Revolution, Election, Creation, Destruction, etc. . . .?

Is the What Important Locally, Regionally, Nationally, Continentally or Planetwide?

# When?

- When Did this Event Happen?
- Is When the Event Happened Important?
- Does When the Event Happened Affect Its Importance?
- Is this Event Time Critical?

# Where?

- Where did this Event Happen?
- Does the Location of the Event Have Anything to do with Its Perception?
- Does Where the Event Happened Become Important?
- Is Knowing Where an Event



# How?

- How did this Event Happen?
- How did the Participants in Event React?
- How did Outsiders react to this Event?
- How did this Event Impact Other Areas of the Region, Nation, Continent, or Planet?

# Why?

- Why is this Event Important?
- Why did this Event Happen?
- Why did this Event Happen where it Happened?

# Problems

- Limited Content
- Not Reliable
- Scores Subjective or Objective
- Scores Related to None

# What Are You Testing For?

- Content Knowledge
- Content Progression (Cause and Effect)
- Thesis-Governed Arguments
- Pro-Con Arguments
- All About?

# Improvement in Essay Examinations

- In-Class Norming Sessions
- Practice Examinations
- Thesis Statement versus Non-Thesis Statement
- Group Thesis Statement Writing
- Showing Examples of A-Worth Examinations—Not Recommended

# Examples

- Revealing Potential Examination Questions in Advance
- Examination Preparation Notebook
- Crib Sheets—Not Recommended for History but Might be of use in Another Discipline
- Take-Home Examinations—the

# Improvements

- Limit Choice
- Each Question Should Be Short—Varies with Academic Level
- Avoid Subquestions or Hints—Varies with Academic Level
- Thesis versus Imperative Questioning
- Use of the Verbs Discuss, Analyze, Evaluate

# What You Should Do or Not Do In Grading

- Do Not Look At Student's Names
- If More than One Essay Question-Grade One Question at a Time
- Shuffle the Examinations After Grading Each Question
- Read a Random Sample Before Any Actual Grades are Assigned (Anchor Grades in A, B, C, Categories)