
Take a moment to gather any and all information or instructions you have for **YOUR upcoming exam.**

Syllabus, notes from class, instructor emails, notes from office hours, assignment sheets

Essay Exam Prep

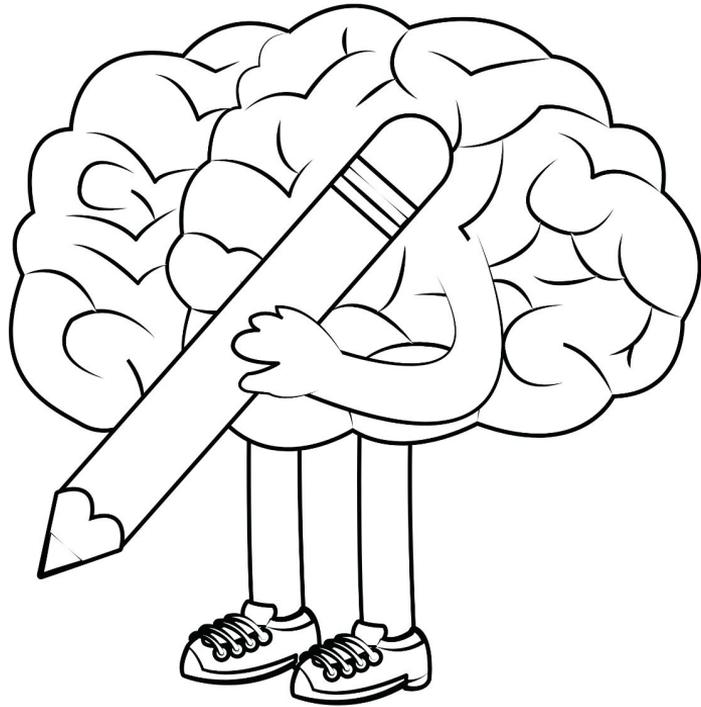
A Writing Guide Presentation

Kirkwood Adams

Maria Baker

CK Kirch





Today's Workshop: Essay Exams!

1. How do I figure out what to prepare?
2. How do I prepare?
3. How do I write the essay in the moment?

SPONTANEOUS PERFORMANCE?

SPONTANEOUS PERFORMANCE?

NO!

Gillis, M. K.; Olson, Mary W. "Do College Students Who Plan before Writing Score Better on Essay Exams?" 1990. *ERIC*.

Abstract:

A study examined the differences in the essay exam scores of college students **who did no planning, some planning, or extensive planning** before writing answers to questions on essay exams.

...

Results indicated that **students who did some planning scored better than students who did no planning**, and ***students who did extensive planning scored better than students who did no or some planning.***

TAKE-HOME PROJECTS VS ESSAY EXAMS

WRITING PROJECT

Prewrite

Download thoughts

Draft from easy to hard

Do multiple drafts

Early drafts: ideas

Later drafts: reader

Proofread at the end

ESSAY EXAM

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When you think about preparing for an
essay exam, you can say:

Oh, CRAP

To prepare for an essay exam, CRAP, and then CRAP again.

C.R. = CLOSE-READ exam info

A = ASSESS the exam objectives

P = PLAN your strategy

C.R. = CLOSE-READ the prompt

A = ASSESS your approach

P = PLAN/PREWRITE before drafting

CR = CLOSE READ
THE EXAM INFORMATION

CR = CLOSE READ

the basic exam
information

All effective close reading begins with basic observations.

As a first step, make observations about the essential facts of the exam.

Date: When is it?

Time: What time?

Location: Where?

Duration: x hours x minutes

Exam format(s): **What formats will the exam include?**

- Long essay
- Short essay/response
- Fill in the blank
- Multiple choice

Materials: **What materials can you bring? (not sure? ask!)**

- Notes? (of any length or limited?)
- Course texts? (with or without annotations?)
- None? (if it doesn't say, this is the default)

Exam medium: **Is it handwritten or taken on a computer?**

What other basic information seems relevant?

In the workbook!

CR = CLOSE READ

the basic exam
information

All effective close reading begins with basic observations.

As a first step, make observations about the essential facts of the exam.

In the workbook!

Date: When is it?

Time: What time?

Location: Where?

What is your schedule before the exam on that day?

Can you arrive early?

What are you eating/drinking (or not) before the exam?

When are you going to sleep the night before?

When are you waking up the next morning?

What are you wearing? What's comfortable?

What can you do to best prepare for yourself to be physically & emotionally ready?

A meme featuring Leonardo DiCaprio and Matt Damon from the movie Inception. They are shown in a close-up, looking towards the right. The text "WE NEED TO GO" is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif font with a thick black outline at the top of the image.

WE NEED TO GO

DEEPER

A = ASSESS
THE EXAM OBJECTIVES

A = ASSESS

the exam
objectives

Professors may not be
explicit about what questions
will be on the exam...

...but you may have more
information than you think!

A = ASSESS

the exam
objectives

Professors may not be explicit about what questions will be on the exam...

...but you may have more information than you think!

~~trying to predict the exact question that will be asked~~



determine what tasks the exam is assessing



use that to determine what and how we study



study strategically

A = ASSESS

the exam
objectives

Professors may not be explicit about what questions will be on the exam...

...but you may have more information than you think!

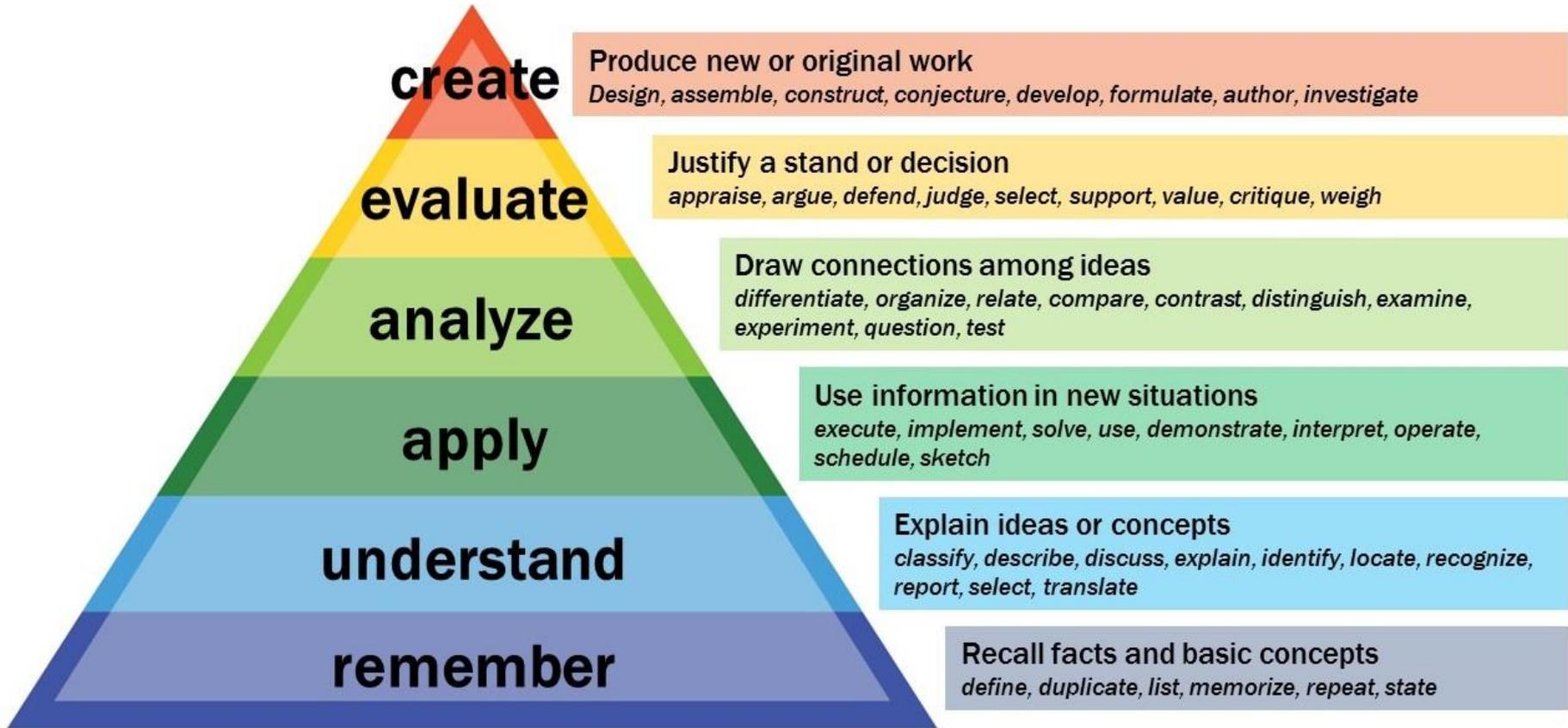
How to determine what tasks the exam is assessing: **look for the verbs.**

Look for verbs in:

- Explicit exam information (e.g. “You will analyze a passage you haven’t seen before”)
- Instructions for previous assignments
- Class participation instructions
- The “course objectives” section of a syllabus

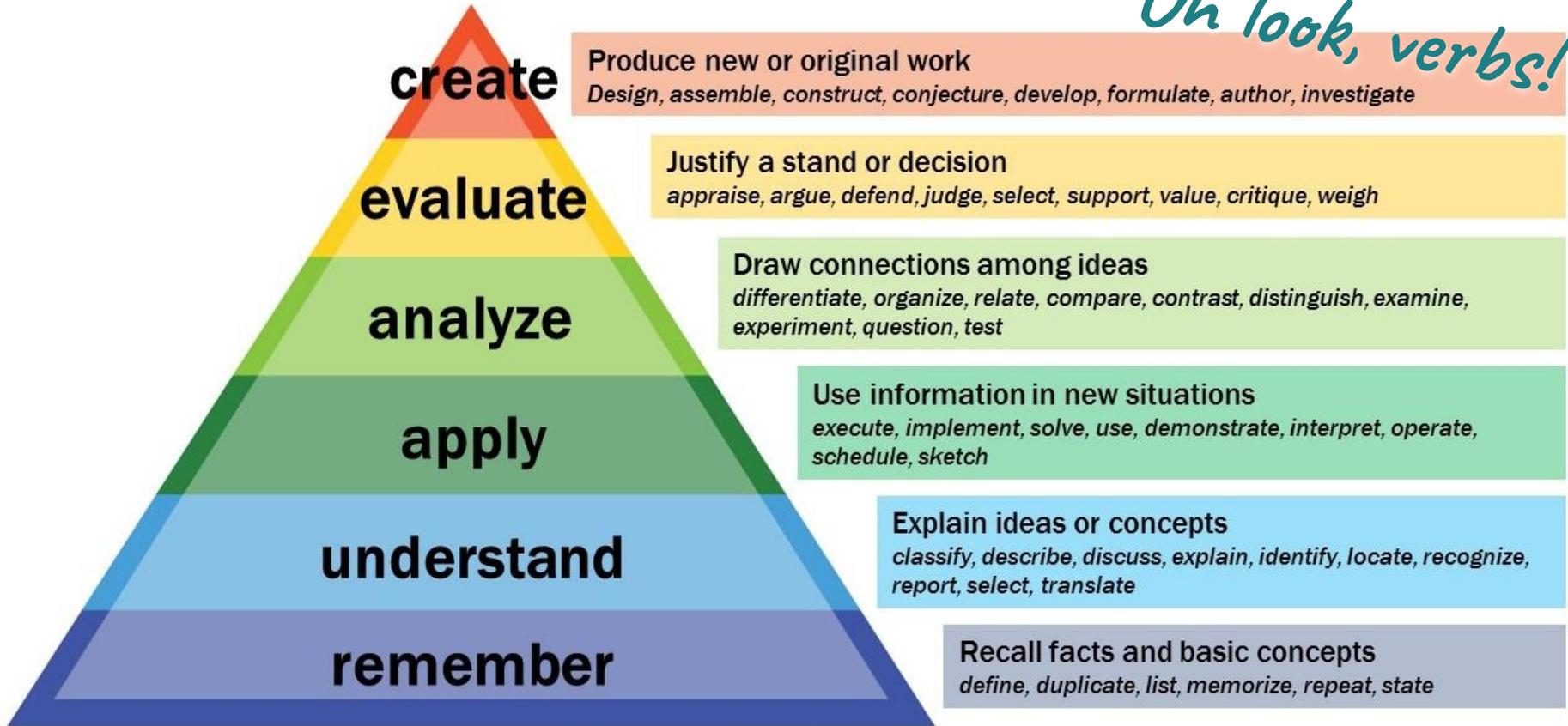
Write these verbs in your workbook!

What is my exam asking me to do? (Bloom's Taxonomy)



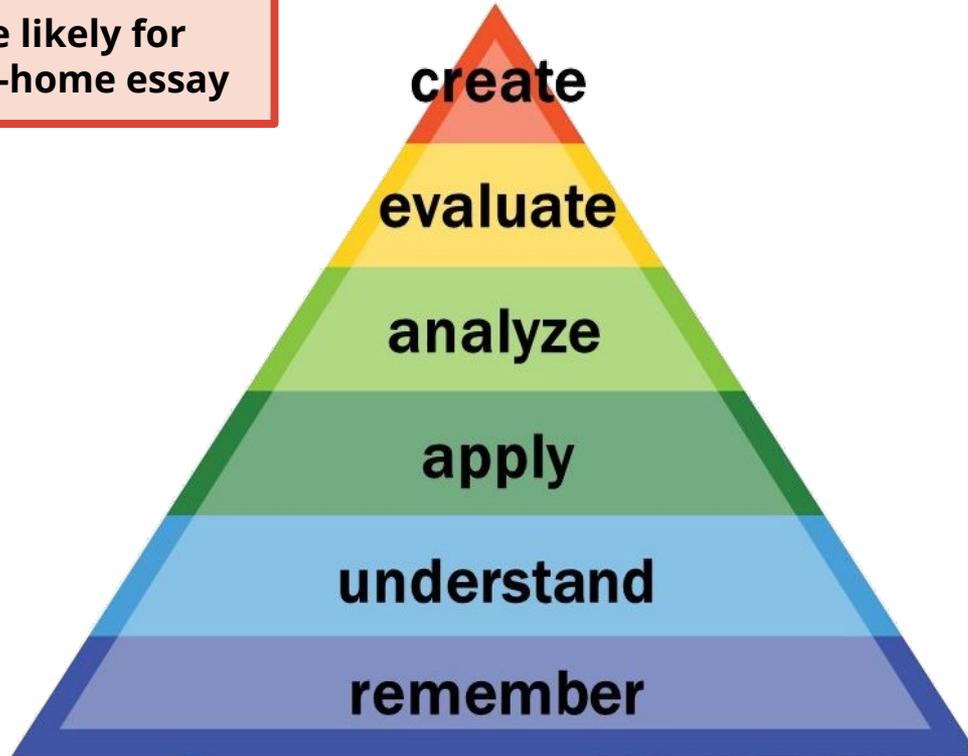
What is my exam asking me to do? (Bloom's Taxonomy)

Oh look, verbs!



What is my exam asking me to do? (Bloom's Taxonomy)

More likely for
take-home essay



More likely for multiple choice,
true/false, fill-in-the-blank exam
questions

A = ASSESS

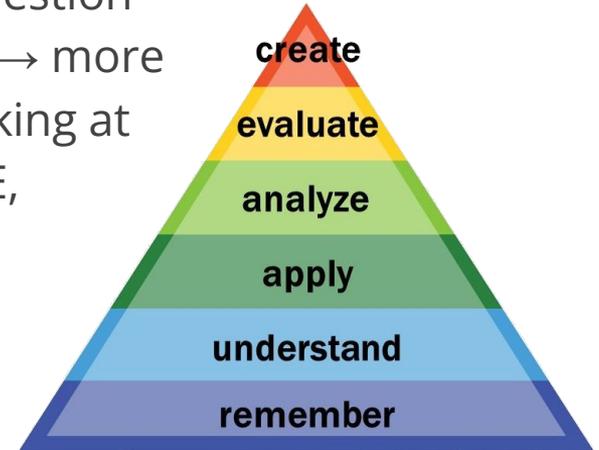
the exam
objectives

Professors may not be explicit about what questions will be on the exam...

...but you may have more information than you think!

What other information do you have that might give you hints as to what the exam will be asking you to do?

- Open book? → it's not testing REMEMBER!
- Short response? → UNDERSTAND or APPLY are more likely than CREATE or EVALUATE
- Have the full question ahead of time? → more likely to be working at the top (CREATE, EVALUATE, etc.)
- Other info?



P = PLAN
YOUR STRATEGY

P = PLAN

your strategy

Your study strategies should be tailored to the purpose and priority of the class and the essay exam itself.

Now that we know WHAT is being tested, we can determine HOW to study.

We can plan:

- What material to study
- How to study that material
- How to prepare notes (if allowed)

Space to reflect and plan in the workbook, but you may do that later!

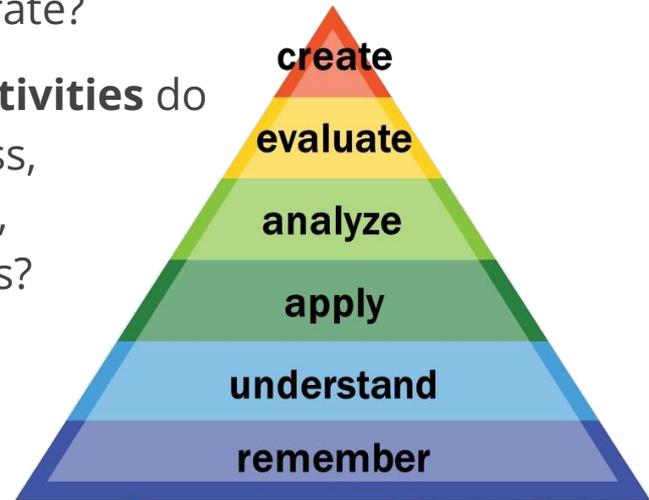
P = PLAN

your strategy

Your study strategies should be tailored to the purpose and priority of the class and the essay exam itself.

It's not just about studying content but about what you're being asked to DO with that content.

- What are you being asked to **do** with the course content in the exam?
- What **skill** are you being asked to demonstrate?
- What **scholarly activities** do you practice in class, during discussions, and in assignments?

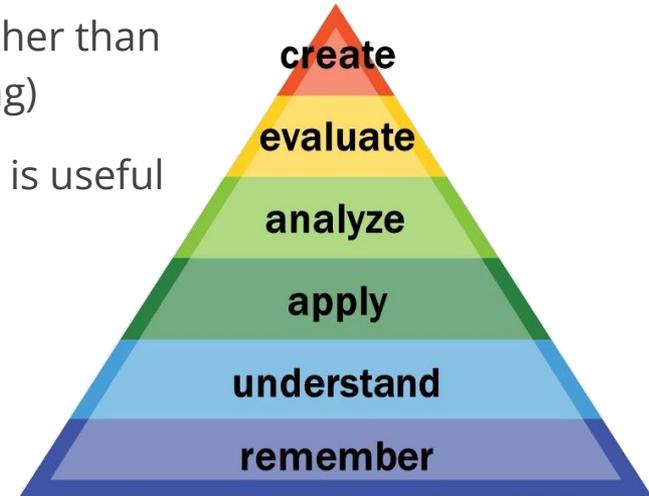


P = PLAN your strategy

Your study strategies should be tailored to the purpose and priority of the class and the essay exam itself.

Based on what you're being asked to DO with the content in the exam/course, how can you **study strategically**?

- Studying theories & how to tell when they're relevant
- Practicing applying methodologies and noting how to recognize when they can be applied
- Studying patterns (rather than memorizing everything)
- Noting what evidence is useful for which arguments



P = PLAN your strategy

Your study strategies should be tailored to the purpose and priority of the class and the essay exam itself.

Planning and Preparing Your Materials

What are you able to bring? (notes, texts, other?)

Based on what you're being asked to DO, **what would be most strategic or useful to include in your notes?**

If you have limited space: What is your...

- Highest priority? _____
- Second priority? _____
- Lowest priority? _____

How can you **organize** your materials? How can you make sure you can find what you need when you need it?

- Color-coded notes or highlighting?
- Sticky tabs to find specific pages?
- Bookmarks in a textbook?

In the workbook!

Quick recap:

C.R. = CLOSE-READ exam info

A = ASSESS the exam objectives

P = PLAN your study strategy

**We CRAP before the exam.
Now we're going to CRAP again.**

Planning effectively during the exam itself

C.R. = CLOSE-READ the prompt

A = ASSESS your approach

P = PLAN/PREWRITE before drafting

CR = CLOSE-READ the prompt

Depending on how much you were able to prepare beforehand, this can take more or less time.

Read the prompt carefully:

- Do I understand the instructions?
- What is this asking or directing me to do?

You may find it useful to annotate the prompt.

For example:

- You might underline (or rewrite) the main task you're being asked to do so it's front and center.
- You might circle class concepts the prompt mentions, especially if those are things you're supposed to include in your response.
- Perhaps there's other key info or requirements you want to mark to make sure you don't forget.
- You can also underline the verbs of the prompt to give you even more clarity on what you're being asked to do.

A = ASSESS

your approach

Now that you have the actual prompt instructions in front of you, you can decide on or modify your approach.

How will you approach the TASK?

- What is the task? How is the prompt asking me to respond to the question?
- What skills am I supposed to be demonstrating? (hint: check the verbs!)
- Is this in line with the task/skills I prepared for?
- Do I need to modify my approach?
- How might my notes or other materials be useful?

How will you approach your TIME?

- How much time do I have?
- How will I divide that time?
- With what activities?

P = PLAN/ PREWRITE before drafting

Research shows that those
who plan before drafting
score higher on essay exams!

PREWRITING includes two steps:

- Generating ideas
- Arranging your ideas in a particular order

**P = PLAN/
PREWRITE**
before drafting

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who plan before drafting
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INVENTION STRATEGIES FOR GENERATING IDEAS

Freewriting

Listing

Questioning

Mind
mapping

Looping

**P = PLAN/
PREWRITE**
before drafting

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ARRANGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR OUTLINING

Numbered list (orders)

Diagram

**Outline (orders and
subordinate)**

TAKE-HOME PROJECTS VS ESSAY EXAMS

WRITING PROJECT



Prewrite



Download thoughts



Draft from easy to hard



Do multiple drafts



Early drafts: ideas



Later drafts: reader



Proofread at the end

ESSAY EXAM



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Dorothy L. Worden, "Finding process in product: Prewriting and revision in timed essay responses, *Assessing Writing*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2009, pp. 157-177, doi:10.1016/j.asw.2009.09.003.

"It is widely assumed that the constraints of timed essay exams will make it virtually impossible for students to engage in the major hallmarks of the writing process, especially revision, in testing situations. This ... **study examined the occurrence of prewriting and revision** in 890 timed essay responses as well as the impact of writing process on student scores. ...

While prewriting corresponded to higher scores, revision corresponded to lower scores."

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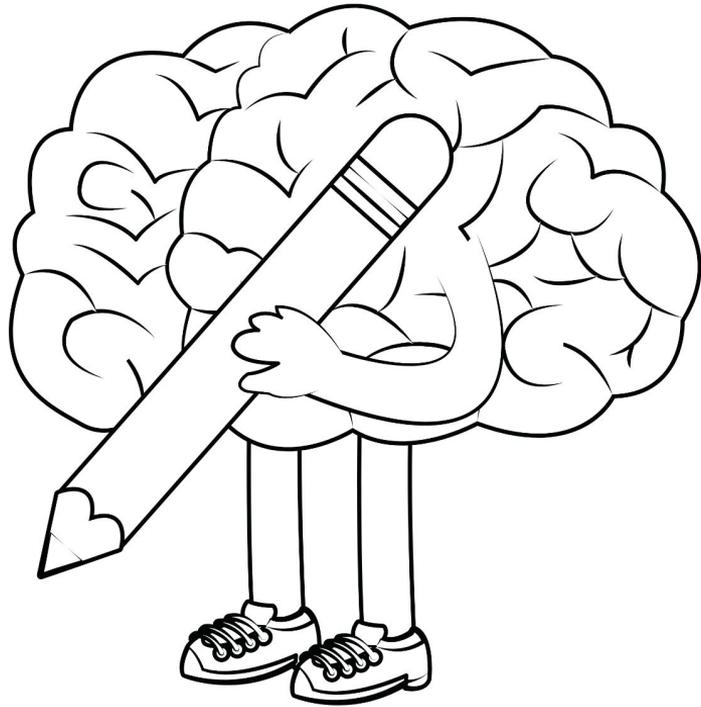
Some strategies for DRAFTING and REVIEWING

DRAFTING

- Use your plan to guide the drafting part of the timed essay exam
- You can choose to skip the introduction and come back - leave a few lines (or a half-page in a blue exam book) and then write your introduction there afterwards
- Consider your page space: Are you leaving space on the page (in the margins, in between lines, etc.) for later edits? Do you want to?

REVIEWING

- Review for local edits and readability (small changes, rather than global/structural/big adjustments) Someone (your instructor) has to read and evaluate this.
- Don't obsess about mistakes - flaws are inevitable in these timed-exam situations
- Whether you misspelled a word is not as important as the quality of the ideas and the execution of your skills (which all this pre-planning allows you to do!)



QUESTIONS?

With images & content from...

- Bloom's Taxonomy: image from Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching
- Dr. Sue Mendelsohn's "Dissecting the Essay Exam" presentation