

Short Answer Exams

Short answer questions are designed for students to show their understanding of the concepts in a subject. Understanding involves not only being able to remember facts and ideas but also being able to explain the connections between them.

Preparation for the exam

Here are some study tips to make your study *much easier* when it comes to exam time.

Attend

Turn up to classes, particularly the first and last lectures when it is most likely that the lecturer will talk about what will be on the exam.

Actively participate – do the readings before class, listen, take notes, ask questions about the things you don't understand.

Talk about the subject with other people in the unit. Create or join a study group and share notes, ask each other questions, explain concepts to each other.

Read

Keep up with your readings each week. If you can't get through all the weekly readings at least make sure you do some. Don't wait until the end of semester to read.

Don't just read but also take notes of the main points. If you have a textbook start by reading the summary of the chapter set for the week and complete any revision questions. You will be surprised how often these questions are used in exams.

Rewrite

After attending classes and reading the assigned material each week, you need to rewrite the ideas in your own words. Use text, diagrams or concept maps to make the ideas memorable.

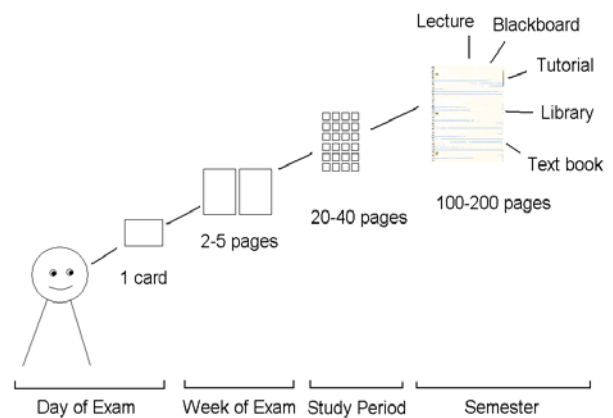
A suggestion for rewriting is set out in the table below.

| Main idea/Topic/Theme / | An explanation in your own words | Example of how, when, where, why can/do I apply this? | Notes on connections to any other concepts |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--|
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Chunk

When the time comes for you to revise for your exams you need to summarise all the information you have collected over the semester.

Memory works best when it has bite-sized pieces of information to track, like memorising a phone number in sets of 3 digits. 'Chunking' means to reduce large amounts of information into smaller components (see *Figure 1*). These chunks provide summary information to help you link back to more complex ideas.



Memorise

If you have followed the previous tips you will not need to spend hours memorising a vast amount of study material. Test yourself each time you chunk your notes to make sure you can move easily from the summary to the details you need. On the day of the exam, you should be able to move from a single concept map of the course to all of the materials required for the exam.

Responding to Short Answer Questions

The key to a good short answer in an exam is to specifically answer the question in the first sentence and then use the rest of the paragraph to explain your answer.

Analyse the question

Before you even put pen to paper in an exam, it is best to analyse the question first so you are clear about exactly what it is asking. Have a look at this question:

What is meant by the term Foreign Direct Investment? Describe the difference between the flow of foreign direct investment and the stock of foreign direct investment.

Analysis Strategy

First, if the question has more than one part, number each part separately.

Second, underline all the key points in each part of the question. These are the main bits of information which are asked for.

Third, circle the task words in each part of the question. These will tell you about what you are being asked to do with these bits of information.

Thus, your question would look like this:

1. What is meant by the term Foreign Direct Investment? **2.** Describe the difference between the flow of foreign direct investment and the stock of foreign direct investment.

There are two parts to this question. The first part **1** asks for a definition, the meaning of a term. The second part **2** asks for the difference between two concepts that are variations on that main term.

The beginning of your response

When you write your answer, start your response to each part of the question by answering the question directly. It is good to give your answer by *rearranging the exact words of the question*.

For example, in the question we have just analysed:

What is **meant** by the **term Foreign Direct Investment**? Describe the **difference** between the **flow of foreign direct investment** and the **stock of foreign direct investment**.

Using the words of the question, the beginning of your answer to the first part of this question, could be: The **term Foreign Direct Investment means** ...

Likewise, the first sentence of the second part of your answer, again using the words of the question, could be: The **difference** between **flow of foreign direct investment** and **stock of foreign direct investment** is ...

Doing this makes your answer easier to mark. Your marker will see the main information s/he is looking for right at the beginning of your response. An answer that is direct and to the point is more likely to gain higher marks.

The rest of your response

Your response overall should be structured in the same way as an essay exam response.

1. The direct answer to the question should be first.
2. There could also be some supporting sentences that explain your answer further, such as definitions of concepts
3. Use examples to clarify and illustrate your points
4. Finally, a concluding sentence would restate the main answer in your response.

Not every question will have every part mentioned here. However, this is a general guideline for responses that are clear and direct and, most importantly, easy to mark for the examiner.

