



Writing Center Academic Affairs

Tips for In-Class Writing

In-class writing is not all that different from other writing. You should still consider purpose, audience, and information, develop a thesis with support, prove your points with evidence, and use clear transitions.

To keep the right frame of mind for in-class writing, remember that your professor probably assigned the timed writing to give you an opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge on a particular topic. Your job is probably to a) convey information and b) prove to your audience (the teacher) that you have mastered the information and can work with it critically, not just regurgitate it. Focus on connections between ideas to show that you understand the “whole picture,” not just unrelated facts or details.

1. Be as prepared as possible. If you are given texts or materials in advance, underline key points and make notes for improved comprehension. If you receive possible questions in advance, try drafting answers to those questions for practice. Bring all your notes, texts, and other materials with you, even if you're not allowed to use them during the timed writing.
2. Consider asking the following questions before the day of the timed writing:
 - Is the assignment open-book or closed-book?
 - Which readings should be covered?
 - Are there specific questions or issues that might be addressed?
 - Should the essays incorporate textual material from memory?
 - How long will you have to write the essay?
 - Will you have a choice of essay questions on which to write?
 - What length of response does the professor expect?
 - What will the professor emphasize in his/her evaluation?
3. When you receive the assignment, read the question(s) completely and thoroughly. Circle the key words in the instructions to make sure you don't omit any important parts of the writing task (look for terms like explain, argue, evaluate, critique, interpret, summarize, identify, describe, compare, contrast, etc.). Keep the assignment in front of you during the entire writing process to be sure you stay on track.

4. Spend several minutes brainstorming and listing ideas you should cover (use a separate sheet). Keeping your assignment in front of you, make a rough outline of the order and content of each section you plan to write.
5. Begin writing! You have options here. For shorter essays, carefully craft a first sentence that acts as a thesis and provides direction for the rest of the essay. For longer essays, try an introduction paragraph. You do NOT have to start by writing an introduction, however; some writers feel more comfortable beginning with body paragraphs and adding the introduction and conclusion later. If you choose this option, just be sure you have a strong guiding thesis in mind while you write.
6. Be sure to include specifics. Your professor is likely looking for concrete evidence and relevant facts, not broad generalizations. If you're writing in response to a text or texts, make specific references to prove that you read and understood the concepts. (If you are allowed to use other texts, have useful passages marked in advance for quick reference.)
7. Keep paragraphs focused and use transitions to introduce new ideas. Even though your time is short, your reader will expect clarity and structure.
8. Leave several minutes at the end for proofreading. Make sure you have not left out words or used incomplete thoughts or sentences. Look for grammatical errors that may cause confusion. Ask in advance if you'll be allowed to use a dictionary. If you need to correct errors, draw neat lines through mistakes and insert corrections neatly. Also, use arrows and lines to insert added or moved text.

Sample “Time Budget” for In-Class Writing

If you have 1.5 hours, you should possibly budget your time in the following way:

- Brainstorming – 4 to 6 minutes
- Organizing – 3 minutes
- Outlining or mapping – 3 minutes
- Drafting – 45 minutes
- Revising – 22 minutes
- Re-reading/Proofing – 11 minutes