

Writing Essays for Liberal Arts Exams

Criteria considered important to all competent writing:

- **Perspective.** Good writing has a way of seeing, best expressed through a point of view or thesis.
- **Audience.** Good writing is appropriate to the reader, the purpose and the occasion.
- **Evidence.** Good writing makes use of detail to persuade or inform the reader.
- **Logic.** Good writing is coherent from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, beginning to end.
- **Correctness.** Good writing displays competence in grammar and punctuation, and accuracy in spelling.

Criteria considered important to essays:

- **Thesis.** A good introduction contains a thesis statement that clearly, concisely and directly answers the question or makes an argument.
- **Overview.** A good introduction pre-outlines the topics to be discussed and the order in which they will appear in the essay.
- **Paragraphs.** The body of the essay develops the thesis logically and coherently.
- **Support.** Each paragraph includes specific and relevant examples—with explanations—that support the argument.
- **Transitions.** A good essay moves from topic to topic in ways that demonstrate continuities or discontinuities.
- **Conclusion.** A good essay concludes with a restatement of the major ideas, inferences and evaluations and, possibly, a discussion of future directions.

A sample “C” introduction to a compare/contrast history question:

The Progressive Era occurred from 1900 to 1920. Woodrow Wilson’s presidency symbolized the ideas of the Progressive Era. In contrast, Republican President Warren Harding’s administration rejected the basic ideas that Progressives believed in. This essay will compare the two presidents and discuss the changes that took place in the way American politicians decided domestic policy and foreign affairs from 1900 to 1930.

A sample “A” introduction to a compare/contrast history question:

The Progressive Era, 1900-1920, was a period characterized by government activism. Democratic President Woodrow Wilson first applied the progressive ideals of democracy, social justice, efficiency, and regulation to domestic policy successfully. But when Wilson applied these ideals to international issues, his moralistic idealism hardened into stubbornness that produced a reaction. In 1920, Americans responded to Republic Warren Harding’s call for a “return to normalcy,” a campaign slogan that indicated a desire to return to traditional minimalist, pro-business government and an end to moral crusading and intervention in foreign affairs.