

Test Taking Strategies: Essays

Objective vs. Subjective Essay Questions



OBJECTIVE

When it comes to objective essay questions, the only thing that distinguishes them from multiple-choice questions is the type of memory that is required. Multiple-choice questions require recognition memory while objective questions require recall memory. In these cases, the professor wants to test whether you can remember a theory or concept.

Example: *Explain one difference between a covalent and an ionic bond, and give an example of each.*

Objective essay questions are very straightforward and require the memorization of definitions, key concepts, and thought out examples. These types of questions often have a grading structure. In this scenario, the question may be worth three points: one point for explaining the difference and one point for each correct example.

SUBJECTIVE

Subjective essay questions tend to be more demanding because they may ask you to define key concepts and ideas but then require you to go beyond the course material and use it in a meaningful explanation.

Example: *Based on the key concepts of leadership and authority, would you define Hitler as a leader? Why or why not?*

Questions such as these require you to:

1. **Apply.**

Use your knowledge of the course concepts to apply what you know and provide clear, concise examples. These questions determine whether or not you are able to use the knowledge in a meaningful way.

2. **Integrate.**

A question may ask you to integrate several different concepts or course themes. It is important to show that you have not only memorized definitions, but you can identify how concepts relate to each other. How does A relate to B?

3. **Analyze.**

Professors want to see you analyze the problem or question based on the material you have learned in the course. These questions are difficult because they require you to go beyond definitions and explain the material in a meaningful way. Instructors often use words such as “compare/contrast”, “defend”, or “describe” in the instructions to let you know they want more than a definitive response.