



Note-taking and essay questions

Some things to think about when taking notes and answering essay questions

Note taking tips

- Only write key points like names/dates/statistics.
- Use different coloured highlighter pens to highlight the most important points.
- Colour code notes according to the class/subject.
- Find out what unfamiliar words mean - ask your lecturer or other students about anything you are not sure of.
- Read your notes after the lecture and again before your next lecture.
- Write the date on each page of notes.
- Write down sources of information - you may need this later.
- Ask permission from your lecturer to record lessons in case you feel you've forgotten something after it.
- Keep a goal in mind - write it at the top of the page of notes. For example 'Photosynthesis 3 key facts'.

Questions to think about when writing your lecture notes

What was the topic of the lecture - what were the key themes?

What questions or thoughts do you have about the materials?

What questions might be asked of you in a test or essay?

Tips for answering essay questions

Look at the question and highlight the key words. Identify which words are:

- **Instruction words** – words that tell what you need to do, for example, describe, compare, discuss.
- **Subject words** – words that tell you the topic of the question.
- **Key aspect words** – words that tell you the limit of the question.
- **Other significant words** – words that give you more information.

Take the following question as an example:

'Compare and contrast forms of rural settlement in at least two European regions in the latter Middle Ages.'

The **instruction words** are 'compare and contrast'.

The **subject words** are 'forms of rural settlement'.

The **key aspect words** are 'at least two European regions'.

Other significant words are 'latter Middle Ages'.

Meaning of instruction words

Account for: explain why something is as it is

Analyse: separate the topic into parts and discuss each of them

Compare: show how things are similar

Contrast: show how things are different

Criticise: give strengths and weaknesses

Define: give clear meanings to show how something is different to similar things

Describe: explain features of a subject - use a pattern such as the order in which something happened or where it occurred

Discuss: analyse carefully and give reasons for and against using detail

Evaluate: give your opinion based on facts - emphasise what experts have said and indicate how well or badly something works

Examine: divide up and describe different parts or sections

Explain: give reasons for differences of opinion or results and try to analyse causes

Illustrate: use statistics or examples to explain an issue

Interpret: give examples to explain the meaning and give your own judgement

Justify: prove that something is correct or incorrect and give reasons for your conclusions

List: make concise points one by one

Outline: give the main points of a topic

Show: point or demonstrate the topic of the question and show how things are linked or follow on from each other

State: give the main points

Suggest: give evidence of whether something has value or not

Summarise: give the main points and leave out the details

Trace: describe the progress or development of an event or idea