



# Writing the CLAST Essay

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You will be given **two essay questions**. You can choose one. Your answer will be your essay.

You may find it comforting to know that these two essay questions will be within your **personal experience** or your **academic instruction** so that you will have knowledge to draw upon when developing the essay.

Your essay will be **evaluated for the quality of its form, not its content**. You will not be evaluated on your choice of details for support or your ideas (unless those ideas are illogical).

The essay question will be **expository** in nature. Therefore, you will not be arguing but **explaining** or **informing**.

The topics you select from are chosen so that you should be able to **use facts, logic, and illustrations for support**.

## The Length of the Essay

You will need to write your essay in approximately 4 to 6 paragraphs.

This paragraph requirement translates into words numbering between 400-750, so your paragraphs should consist of at least 4 sentences, but 6 to 7 would provide for more detailed support.

A rule of thumb: if you are writing paragraphs that contain about 4 sentences, you will need all 6 paragraphs. If your paragraphs consist of 6 or 7 sentences, 4 paragraphs will probably be sufficient.

Under no circumstances should you compose two-sentence paragraphs. Paragraphs of this length do not allow for enough specific supports to prove any point convincingly.

You should compose your essay using:

1. a thesis statement (first paragraph; 3 points for discussion)
2. paragraph topic sentences (first sentence)
3. proper grammar
4. sentence variety

## TIPS FOR TAKING THE CLAST ESSAY

1. Get rid of all barriers that stand between you and the essay. **Believe that you can and will write an acceptable essay.** You should have this attitude when you sit down to take the test.
2. When you are permitted to look at the possible essay topics, study them for a little while (jot brief notes about each if you can to get your thoughts going). **Make sure you understand what kind of expository writing (process, cause/effect, classification, etc.) the topic calls for;** knowing the rhetorical base will help you think with greater focus. When you've given both some thought, choose the one you know the most about and feel most comfortable with. Once you've made your choice, stick with it; you don't have time for indecision. **This step should take about 2 minutes.**
3. Once you have your topic and know the kind of writing (rhetoric) it calls for, **think about questions and jot down as many areas of development (answers) as you can as quickly as you can.** You'll be surprised at how many support areas you can generate once you get the first and second ones down; the thing you must do is stick with it. Allow no doubt to interfere and slow you down. **This should take about 3 minutes.**
4. Look at all the answer areas (support topics) you have come up with and **choose the three (or four) that, again, you are most informed on or comfortable with** and select these as the basis for your supporting paragraphs. Do not, at this point, totally disregard the other areas you generated, for you might find that some can be used as supporting details for your main topics of support. Even if not, you have the basic topical structure for your essay's body. So, quickly arrange them by order of importance-either climactically or anticlimactically; in so doing, come up with cohering words and phrases which will indicate the rank of each topic in the essay, for this will show you the technique of topical order, one important skill. **This should take about 3 minutes.**
5. Since you're writing an expository essay, **you can state your thesis--**a second main essay writing technique. For this--fundamentally--combine your overall essay topic with the names of or number of your support topics and include qualifying/limiting terminology. This will tell the reader what you're writing about, how/why the topic is important and what areas will demonstrate that importance (example: Stress (topic) can be effectively handled (limiter) by three simple means (qualifier)--the reader knows he will hear about stress overall and specifically the three ways it can be handled). In or after the thesis, name the specific supporting topics and you will have a map. **Together, these should take about 2 minutes.**

Note: When you develop one or two sentences which indicate your essay topic and lead to/link with your thesis and map, you will have the introductory paragraph for your essay. You can develop these lead sentences at this point or wait until you're ready to assemble all the sections of the essay into the "final" form--you decide.

6. You are now ready to develop **your support topics (Step 4) into thoroughly detailed paragraphs** of at least four sentences (topic sentence + 3 factual sentences of evidence). Your topic sentence ought to name your essay topic again, name your support topic, make a point with value word/phrase for the qualifier/limiter and include a ranking device to indicate the topic's order or general importance in the essay (example: One effective way of handling stress is to talk out your problems with people you trust). Support your topic sentences with specifically worded factual and/or logical sentence sets to show the validity of your topic sentence. In other words, explain or discuss what you've claimed to be so in the topic sentence. If you get stuck for facts, come up with one or more illustrations/examples or create logically sound syllogisms (If this, then this: Thus this; and so on) which also support the topic. By being careful to write clear and concretely worded sentences, you have a good chance of creating substantial and effective paragraphs. However, at base, think out your topic (use who, what, where, when, to what degree, how, etc.--the primary reason questions that when answered provide topically related detail).

Follow this "think first--write second" process for each support paragraph until you have them all finished in draft form. **Each paragraph should take you about 12 minutes to draft for a total of approximately 35 minutes** (perhaps a little more if you're working on 4-support paragraphs).

7. At this point **compose your concluding paragraph** to close off your essay's first draft. To conclude, all you need is two or three sentences. One should sum up your support points or emphasize the point you made in your thesis. The final sentence ought to give the reader an overall statement of evaluation, application, or signification of the topic or the essay as it relates to larger issues of meaning, use, values, and so on. **This should take about 4 minutes.**

NOTE: If you have trouble getting the conclusion down, try rereading all that you've previously written. This should give you a sense of the whole, how your thoughts develop, and how the sentences flow. You may get caught up in the flow of your thought and naturally come to summary/evaluative statements, or you may see one or more possible ways to end, which you should jot down and hold for the next step.

8. At this point, you've composed the essential elements of your essay and are ready to improve it. In other words, **you are now ready to revise and polish your work.** This means you should complete your introductory paragraph and add cohering devices to narrow logically to your thesis and map. You should also make sure that you've enough and various kinds of cohering devices throughout your supporting paragraphs and sentences to keep your order, rank, links, clear to the reader. Furthermore, you want to make sure you've kept consistent point of view

throughout your explanation; too, you want to use the active voice mainly for both clarity and economy of statement. You also want to check to make sure your verb tenses and moods are correctly chosen and consistently used. Correctness also applies to the words you choose and phrases you construct; you **want everything you say to mean what you want it to for exactness.** **Along with this, you should make sure you use different sentence structures** (simple, compound, complex, etc.) wherever appropriate both for enhanced logic and variety. Finally, if you can add devices such as analogies, verbal ironies (like clever puns) and careful hyperbole, you will add wit to your prose and increase its effectiveness (or reader interest) considerably. In short, you should go through what you have written and make what you say as succinct, clear, and exact as well as accurate, varied, and interesting as you can. **Revision of your essay should take about 10 minutes.**

9. In the 5 minutes that remain to you, proof your essay. Check your spelling, check your subject-verb and pronoun agreements, check for sentence fragments and run-ons and check for comma-semicolon-apostrophe use. You want to make sure your essay is as correctly written as possible. The more correct you can make your prose, the more likely it is that you will pass the test--at least minimally.
10. **You will not, however, have time to write a complete draft and then copy it over.** Double space so you will have room to make corrections which are acceptable as long as they are readable.

Correctness coupled with well stated and thoughtful/logical prose, however, will mean that you will pass the test with a good mark.

The steps just named and discussed take up all **60 minutes of the essay time**, but should help you produce an acceptable essay. Primarily, you need to use your time to think, plan, write, revise and correct.

1. Coming into the essay, you should **be as rested as possible but ready**--perhaps even eager to write this essay. (You can prepare even more for this moment if you will keep a daily journal or paragraphs and the like or if you write letters and reports for your friends and colleagues).
2. Next, you should **pick a topic that is to your advantage** and remember that you have an audience, that you are writing for a real person so be concerned that he wants to know what you know.
3. Following this, **spend some time planning and outlining**; you should have a general notion of how your essay is going to shape up and what thought/points it is going to contain before you begin to write.
4. With thinking and planning down, compose **carefully using facts, illustrations and the like**, unifying them with a controlling idea (a thesis) so that you have a substantially rather than shallowly developed body; with this, you should develop interesting/effective but brief introductory and concluding paragraphs.
5. Next, you should revise to improve the quality and manner of your writing so that your thoughts become polished and crystal-clear. Finally, proof to correct any writing errors you might have made. When you've done all this, you'll have put a **blast on the CLAST.**