

Preparing for Essay Questions

To answer the question *fully* and *completely*, you must first understand what it is asking for.

1. What are the **specific things** the question is asking for? **How many parts**, subparts to the question?
2. Who are the **relevant authors and models**? What **concepts or terms** do you need to **know, define, and/or provide an example** for?
3. What kind of essay is it asking for? For example, is it asking for you to: **compare** two or more theories; **critique** a view; **apply and evaluate**; **synthesize** two views; **explain a mechanism**, etc. This will help you devise your essay's thesis and structure, which you can map in an outline.

Sample questions:

Perfect competition requires one specific kind of equality between all economic agents. Morality requires another kind of equality between all economic agents. What is the difference between these two different kinds of equality, and on what grounds would you defend each type of equality.

We have discussed four different normative stances on how to attain distributive justice when the market fails to do so. Choose one of these stances and use it to criticize another of the four, explaining why the one criticized should not be used to make judgments about distributive justice.

Defend or Criticize: Radical redistribution of wealth every 20 years or so is the only way to keep price setting rent-seekers from moving the economy further and further away from allocative efficiency forever. But given the need for postponable consumption to drive economic growth, this way of leveling the playing field is a cure worse than the disease.

Hampton and Ostrom identify the need for a political entrepreneur in order for a collective action problem to be solved. Exactly what features of the strategic interaction problems they identify require political entrepreneurs. What exactly does the political entrepreneur need to do? What incentives does the political entrepreneur have to do this work?

Frank's Passions Within Reason, Sugden's "Spontaneous Order," and Ostrom's "Collective Action and the Evolution of Norms," all accord a critical role to norms individuals accept in the explanation of the emergence and persistence of social institutions. What is a norm, how could it emerge among selfish egoists, which norms are indispensable to the survival of societies composed of selfish egoists.