**Tips for Writing Under Pressure (Timed Writing)**

Often on exams or in other pressure situations that require writing, it seems that students throw all of the writing process steps out the window, as if the writing process only counts for essays.

**DO NOT MAKE THIS MISTAKE.**

Whatever the situation (and whatever the course – yes, even that math class) that requires writing under a time limit, you still use the process. It’s just adjusted a bit to meet the situation.

In an exam, take the following steps:

1. Preview the exam (see if it is all multiple choice, if there is an essay on the last page, etc.) This helps you budget your time so that you aren’t shocked to find an essay on the last page with five minutes left.
2. Read the essay question. In the margin of the test, or on separate paper if taking online, jot down ideas and notes of what you know right then needs to be included in that essay question. (Prewriting)
3. Do not answer the essay yet.
4. Go back through the exam and answer the questions you know. Skip those you don’t.
5. Both 3 and 4 build your confidence – you already have some ideas down for the big essay question, and now you are answering those you know for sure are right. This helps lower your anxiety.
6. As you go through the rest of the exam you may find hints or questions that trigger for you other ideas that need to be discussed in the essay. You can flip back to the essay and add these notes to the others you had previously.
7. Now you tackle the essay, but before you start writing, go through the notes you have in the margin or separate paper, add anything else that has come to mind, and number them in the order you want to discuss them. (Organizing)
8. Write your response. (Drafting)
9. Read through it, adding anything you forgot and fixing any errors you see. (Revising and Editing)
10. Now go back and complete any multiple choice, etc. that you weren’t sure about.

As you can see, the prewriting and organizing part of the writing process are much more condensed and informal. That doesn’t mean that they are less important or less helpful. Even in an exam or smaller writing assignment completed in-class, you need an organized essay response with paragraphs and the ideas in a specific order. Then your professor knows that you not only know the different components but that you understand how they all fit together.

If the exam/quiz/assignment is all essay questions, approach it similarly:

1. Preview the essay questions and budget how long you can spend on each.
2. Read each essay question carefully, and jot notes in the margin or on separate paper.
3. Tackle the essays in order of confidence, beginning with the one you are most confident in answering and ending with the one you are least confident in answering. That way, if you run out of time, it is on the one you already predicted would be your lower score.

4. As you approach each essay, think a bit more; then order your thoughts, and draft.

5. Read through your response, revising and editing – but keep in mind your budgeted time.

6. If you have time after answering all of the essay questions, go back and read through each one again, looking for places where you can elaborate more or for errors you can fix.

In general, always err on saying too much than not enough. You have to prove that you know the answer on the exam. Make sure you have said everything you know and have fully explained your ideas. Add examples, etc. I am always amazed when students write two or three sentences or one paragraph as an essay response on an exam where the essay is worth 20 or more points. You have to earn all of those 20 points. A couple of sentences is not going to do it.

**Most importantly, though, USE the process in ALL writing scenarios.**