Exam: Short Answer Questions

Online or in-person exams

There is nothing easy about short answer questions. However, having a strategy for answering them provides a clear structure to follow, which can be particularly valuable under the pressure of an exam.

The ability to answer short answer questions is an essential assessment skill in many subjects. While these questions may appear straight forward because of their length, the challenge lies in responding quickly, clearly, and concisely while maintaining a high level of accuracy. Effective answers must address the question directly, demonstrate relevant knowledge, and, where required, support claims with appropriate sources or references.

Expectations	Stages
• Answer the question! • Clarity • Precision • Brevity (be succinct)	• Analyse what is needed • Formulate your response • Write your response • Check your response

Look at the question

Example: *What is the quickest way from Morwell to Federation University, Churchill?*

This kind of question is an unlikely task because it seems so simple. But is it? Notice that there is an ambiguity in the question. "Quickest way" could be "most direct route", or it could mean "fastest mode of transport". It is likely that short answer tasks contain ambiguities to establish how well you really know the subject. *Beware of ambiguities!*

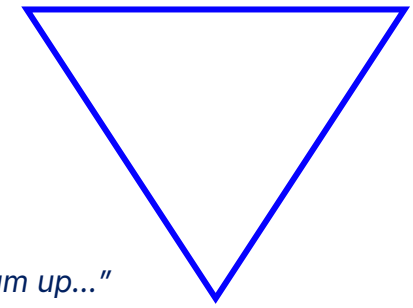
Analyse what is needed

In the example question below, first underline the key noun phrases, establish any ambiguities, and then get to work. Ensure your answer 'funnels' from a general response to the question, to the specific evidence/support, with a summary at the end.

General statement

Specific details of support

Concluding sentence:
"This is why...", "As a result...", "To sum up..."



Example question (from Media & Screen Texts)

The way a text addresses an audience is both social and textual. Refer to an example of a media text in the first four weeks of this unit. Explain how this text addresses an audience as part of society. What are a few specific elements of this text that address an audience?

Step 1: Identify noun phrases

The way a text addresses an audience is both social and textual. Refer to an example of a media text in the first four weeks of this unit. Explain how this text addresses an audience as part of society. What are a few specific elements of this text that address an audience?

Step 2: Establish what you have to do

In this example:

1. Outline the text and say why it addresses audience
2. Give a detailed response about how it does this
3. Identify and explain specific elements that address an audience

Weak: *Still images are used constantly within our modern society from advertisement to art to signs and everything in-between. The image elements are usually a clear indication of what the image will behold. A large red sign on the roads will often be linked to stopping but in an advertisement perspective popular companies will be linked (Coca Cola, Virgin etc.) The context in which the still image is in will give the audience a clear indication of what it is trying to convey. Visually pleasing pictures will be used to be drawing in an audience whereas the larger companies can rely on their established image. As we are a consumer-based society, the advertisement side of the still image can be easily recognisable, such as the Apple logo, and this aspect can not only influence our society, but can also build communities.*

Analysis

- This response is too vague or general. A more direct response is needed throughout.
- Incorporating a specific example from the unit would strengthen the response and demonstrate clearer understanding of the concepts being discussed.
- The discussion does not identify or analyse a particular media text in sufficient detail. Referring to a specific text and examining relevant features, themes, or representations would improve the quality of the analysis.
- The response would also benefit from secondary sources to support and substantiate its claims. At present, there is insufficient evidence to support the points being made.

Stronger: *Mode of address "refers to those processes that take place within a text to establish a relationship between the addresser... and the addressee" (Hartley 173). Socially, texts are tailored by "addressers" to be aimed at specific audiences based on factors such as gender, age, socioeconomic group and ethnicity (Hartley 173-174). Textually texts are presented to an audience based on previous knowledge relating to genre or style (Hartley 173-174). Using a movie poster for 'X-Men 3' from Printmag.com as an example (studied in week two), it can be said that the poster is aimed at a young male audience of teenagers and young adults. This is evident by the style of the poster as it uses mainly metallic colours and big blocky sans serif fonts with sharp edges. These elements address a young male audience by appealing to them visually. Another audience this poster addresses is based on textual knowledge of Marvel films. Fans of Marvel movies will be drawn to this poster because it is consistent with the Marvel style. In particular, the poster's inclusion of three claws directly addresses fans of the X-Men and Wolverine franchises by drawing on their existing knowledge. This example highlights some of the ways that the elements of an image can address an audience both socially and textually.*

*Written with MLA referencing

Analysis

- Gets straight to the point and addresses the question directly.
- Shows a clear understanding of social and textual address, and strong engagement with the prescribed reading.
- Uses a relevant and well-chosen example to support the discussion.
- Analyses specific elements of the text rather than remaining at a general level.
- Concludes with a concise sentence that effectively synthesises the main ideas and links them back to the question.
- Appropriately references ideas and incorporates supporting sources throughout.

Related helpsheets

- Exam: Managing Anxiety
- Exam: Strategies

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