

Sp Cm 305 Exam FAQ

Are exams open book? No, but you can bring in *one page of handwritten notes*. They have to be handwritten to make sure that they are prepared by *you*, not by someone else. If bringing in something else to the exam would help you better show your true learning in this class, ask me for permission.

How should I study for exams? In addition to reading and reviewing on your own, I *strongly* encourage you to get together with at least one other person in this class and work together, especially on your essay questions. Explaining your ideas to someone else, and listening to their perspective—hopefully, their *different* perspective—will help you develop the good arguments I'm looking for in the essays. Plus you can share any information or reading you've done.

Last semester, most students ignored this advice for the first unit exam. The second unit exam, many of them studied with their group. The class average on the exam went up from 77% to 81%. Learn from their mistakes.

What are the short answer questions like? The short answer questions will ask you to explain one of the "Big Ideas" noted each day in lecture. Example questions:

Explain the "Whorf Hypothesis".

What are the "basic color experiments."

If you or your group wants to propose some short answers to me, do so! I will happily draw at least one question from student proposals.

What is a good answer to a short answer question?

1. It is *accurate*. (These questions DO have a right answer).
2. It is *in your own words* (NOT repeated from the lecture—repetitions will be *marked down*).
3. It is *brief and relevant* (it does NOT include unnecessary information—excess information will be *marked down*).
4. It gives an example, if that would help (and not an example from the lecture—a repeated example will be *marked down*).

What are the essay questions like? The essay questions will ask you to *apply* the most important and complex ideas in this class to some real-world problem. They do not have one right answer; they ask you to show how your thinking skills have developed. This is meant to test whether you are really learning the ideas in this class. The Application Essay will not be announced in advance. Example Application Essay question are:

1. Design an experiment for testing whether members of different cultures *think* about plants differently.
2. On May 15, 2005, an alien spacecraft lands near Des Moines. Will we be able to *talk* with the aliens within a year?

The Case Essay question will be announced in advance, on the first day of the unit.

What is a good answer to an essay question? There won't be a single right answer to the essay questions; you are going to be graded on how well you *argue* for your answer. In specific:

1. It takes a clear position on the question.
2. It supports the position with direct, thorough and relevant use of ideas from the course. In other words: it answers the question by mentioning lots of course concepts, in a useful and accurate way. Failure to use course concepts will be *marked down*.
3. It supports the position with personal knowledge and what you've learned through your reading.
4. If appropriate, it recognizes the existence of other positions and replies to them.
5. It is well organized and well enough written to be understandable.

Are there any alternatives to writing the essay questions? Yes.

You may write the Case Essay question in advance. This would mean that you convert the Case Essay question into a small paper. I'd expect it to be typewritten, and include proper citations and a bibliography of any materials used. You might want to write the essay in advance if you perform better without the pressure of the exam.

With permission, you may take one or both essay questions orally. This would mean that you come to my office, explain your position and why you take it (5 minutes), and then talk with me about it, answering my questions & objections (ca. 15 minutes). You might want to take the exam orally if you're better at talking under pressure than writing under pressure.

With permission, you could take the Case Essay exam as a group. This would mean that your group would write up your Case Essay answer together, and hand it in during the exam. Then within 24, your group would meet with me for approximately 15-20 minutes, where I would ask questions of each group member about the exam. (In other words, *everyone* in the group is responsible for understanding the group's answer.)

BUT REMEMBER: You *MUST* have permission from me before you take the exam orally or as a group. If you do not have permission *before* the exam time, you have to take the written exam.

Are there make-up exams? If you miss an exam, or want to try for a higher score, you can take the optional final exam during finals week. This exam will be cumulative (bad), but it will substitute for your lowest exam grade (good). The optional final will have the same format as the previous exams, except that it will not have a Case Essay.