

# Essay writing





# Questions – post-it notes



▶ What makes a good essay?

▶ If you were marking an essay, what would you look for?



# To essay.....

- ▶ The verb “to essay” means “to put to the test, to attempt something difficult”.
- ▶ Essays give you opportunities to come to terms with new knowledge.
- ▶ Writing an essay helps you to measure how much you really understand.

# Planning



- ▶ Take into consideration your purpose, audience (the examiner) and information;
- ▶ Develop a thesis with support
- ▶ Prove your assertions with evidence;
- ▶ Guide your reader (s) with transitions.

# Purpose

- ▶ Usually you write a research paper to learn more about your selected topic; however, you write essay exams to **demonstrate** your knowledge.
- ▶ You also are not only conveying information, but also proving to... the examiner--that you have **mastered** the information and can work with it.
- ▶ In other words, **your purpose is both informative and persuasive.** Keeping this purpose in mind will help you both prepare for and write the essay.

# Make the connections

- ▶ Your examiner is not looking for a collection of unrelated pieces of information.
- ▶ Rather, he or she wants to see that you **understand the whole picture**, i.e., how the generalizations or concepts create the framework for the specific facts, and how the examples or details fill in the gaps.
- ▶ So, when you're studying, try to think about how the **information fits together**

# Read the question – 2 or 3 times

- ▶ Take a few minutes before writing your essay to read the question carefully in order to **determine exactly what you are being asked to do.**
- ▶ Most essay exam questions, or "prompts," are carefully worded and contain specific instructions about **what** you are to write about as well as **how** you should organize your answer.

# Key COMMANDS (prompts)

- ▶ **classify:** Into what general category/categories does this idea belong?
- ▶ **compare:** What are the similarities among these ideas? What are the differences?
- ▶ **contrast:** What are the differences between these ideas?
- ▶ **critique:** What are the strengths and weaknesses of this idea?
- ▶ **define:** What does this word or phrase mean?
- ▶ **describe:** What are the important characteristics or features of this idea?
- ▶ **evaluate:** What are the arguments for and against this idea? Which arguments are stronger?
- ▶ **explain:** Why is this the case?
- ▶ **identify:** What is this idea? What is its name?
- ▶ **interpret:** What does this idea mean? Why is it important?
- ▶ **justify:** Why is this correct? Why is this true?
- ▶ **outline:** What are the main points and essential details?
- ▶ **summarize:** Briefly, what are the important ideas?
- ▶ **trace:** What is the sequence of ideas or order of events



# Plan your time

- ▶ Jot down the main points you intend to make as you think through your answer.
- ▶ Then, you can use your list to help you stick to the topic.
- ▶ In an exam situation, it's easy to forget points if you don't write them down.

# Support EVERY point - PEEL

- ▶ **Then, proceed immediately to explain, develop, and support your answer**, drawing upon materials from text(s), notes, and class discussions.
- ▶ Be sure to support any and all generalizations with concrete evidence, relevant facts, and specific details that will convince your reader that your thesis is valid.
- ▶ Make your main points stand out by writing distinct paragraphs, and indicate the relationship between them with transitions.

# Every paragraph

Paragraphs structure thoughts and help the reader

Each paragraph should contain

- ▶ one clear idea
- ▶ support sentences – the most important word in an essay

Support sentences add to the topic sentence, e.g.

- ▶ explain ideas raised
- ▶ define terms more fully
- ▶ give supporting detail



# Every paragraph

For every paragraph, ask:

- ▶ Is there one main idea here?
- ▶ **Is it stated clearly?**
- ▶ **Is it properly supported with evidence?**
- ▶ **Have I commented on the evidence?**
- ▶ Does it link with the previous paragraph and anticipate the next?



# Clear answer and decision / closure

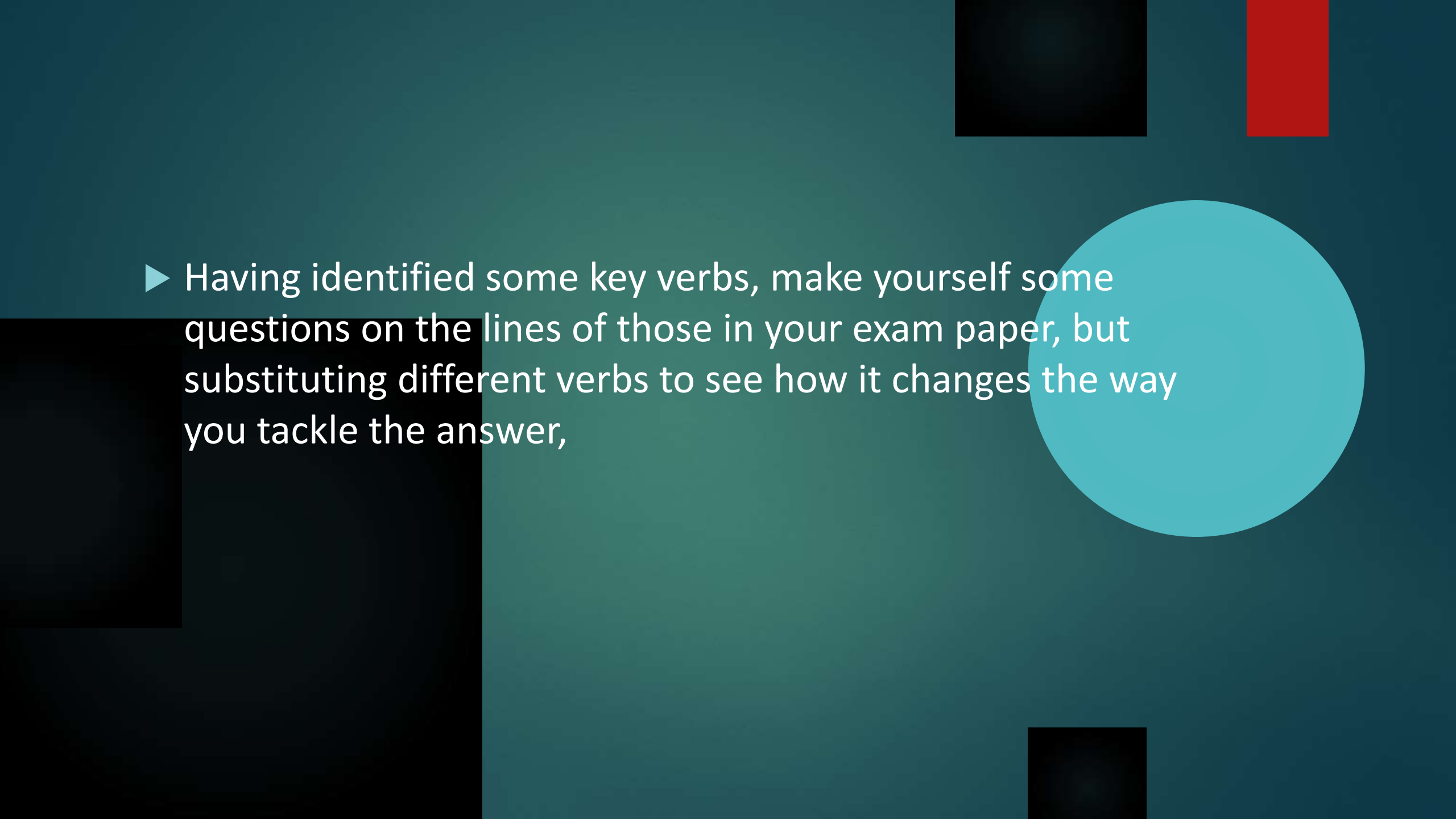
- ▶ **Finally, sum up your argument with a brief conclusion that lends your essay a clear sense of closure.**

Ensure you have:

- ▶ **Pulled the essay together.**
- ▶ **Showed where you stand in the debate (judgement).**
- ▶ **Stated conclusions or extract general principles (factual).**

# Next steps – ensure you know the commands

- ▶ Draw up a list of the key words which are used in your exam papers, and make your own glossary detailing what they mean.
- ▶ If you are in any doubt, look at the sample assessment materials online or past papers
- ▶ *This is essential preparation so that in the exam room you will be in no doubt about the kind of answer you are being asked to give*

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- ▶ Having identified some key verbs, make yourself some questions on the lines of those in your exam paper, but substituting different verbs to see how it changes the way you tackle the answer,