

Blue Book Exams 2.0

*Guide
& Tips*



Blue Book Exams 2.0

Dr. Hartnell's Tips for Blue Book Exams

Ernest Hemingway once said, "There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed." While a tad overdramatic, there is truth in this conviction. Possessing the ability to convey your thoughts in written form is both rewarding and necessary. The work it takes to be able to do so, however, is tough - and like most things in life, requires practice. While Dr. Hartnell knows Blue Books are not customary in high school, he feels students transitioning out of middle school need help with their critical thinking and writing skills. After surviving Blue Books in college himself, Dr. Hartnell decided to introduce them to Westerville North when he began teaching honors in 2003.

USE YOUR IMAGINATION™

Blue Book

EXAMINATION BOOK

TRUE STORY

NAME _____
SUBJECT _____
CLASS _____
SECTION _____
INSTRUCTOR _____
DATE _____

Students can thank Professor Walker and his Mexican Economics class at Michigan State University for molding Dr. Hartnell. Dr. Walker was a terrifyingly large man! A Vietnam Vet with a machine-gun emblem on his belt buckle, he had a penchant for sarcasm. Sporting a shaved head and bushy goatee, he wore a black cape (seriously), held office hours at 4am... and loved to used Blue Book Exams.

According to Dr. Robert A. Hatch, a professor at the University of Florida, "Blue Book Exams are a normal part of academic life. Academic life, of course, is not normal. But, it does present a socially acceptable way to focus on personal skills. Properly pursued, the whole process aims to bring about change we associate with learning. As one of many academic avenues, Blue Books offer a way to approach yourself and to confront what you know and how well you communicate your thoughts and beliefs. What is sometimes most scary is that we don't like what we find. What we want for ourselves and what we have are different. Learning focuses on this difference, and Blue Book Exams provide a practical and periodic way to organize what you have learned and what is missing. It is designed to challenge. It is difficult to write persuasive prose under pressure. Blue Books ask that you present your understanding and interpretations of course material in lucid, persuasive prose. This 'Blue Book Challenge' is not designed for fun. But the process can be gratifying."



HARTNELL UNIVERSITY



Blue Book Exams 2.0

Dr. Hatch hit it on the head. Like the professor's examinations, Dr. Hartnell's Blue Book Exams are not designed for enjoyment. Rather, they are designed to be rigorous and as a way to truly push the limits of his honor students. Being able to write... and write well... is such an important skill to possess. While it'll help you pass all future essay exams in high school and beyond, it'll also allow you to be a functioning (and productive) member of society. And that is a skill far more rewarding than any "A" in a history class. Dr. Hartnell WILL make you a better writer (and learner)... but like with any challenge, you MUST trust the process. You MUST stay the course.

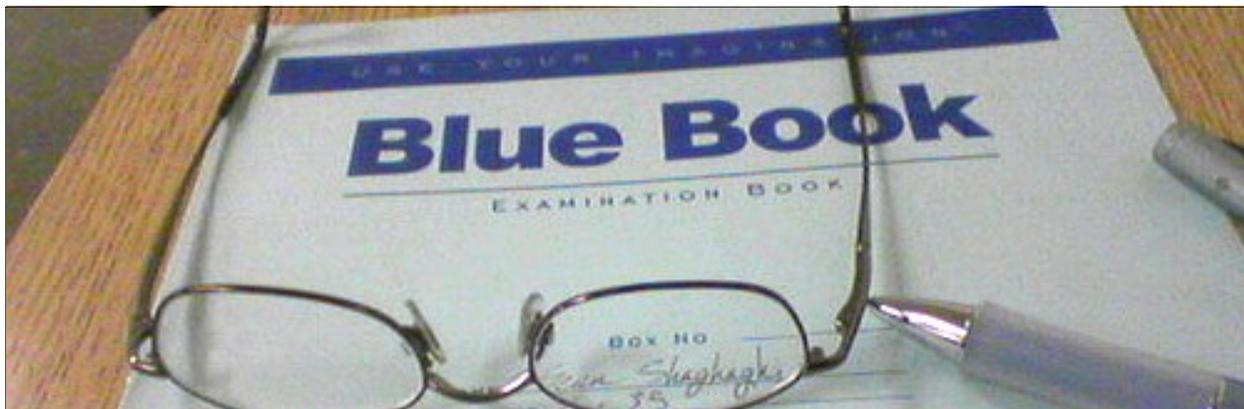
What's a Blue Book Exam?

Blue Book Exams are taken inside college blue books, which are booklets of eight sheets (or 16 pages front-and-back) of lined notebook paper. They were first used at Yale University, which is why the covers are sky blue in color.

Blue Book Exams consist of one essay question (worth 100% of the grade). Blue Book Exams are open-note, take-home examinations generally given over a traditional two-day weekend. Students have this one weekend to complete their Blue Book Exam.

A handout with up to three essay questions will be given to students prior to their examination weekend. In the event of multiple prompts, students may choose which they wish to answer.

Students will receive only one Blue Book to use for the exam. This will be stamped and must be the same one returned.





Blue Book Exams 2.0

Tips for the Blue Book:

1. You may use pencil or pen. You are permitted to use your notes, reading assignments, *Pathways Packet*, and other CLASSROOM materials in order to complete your answer. Citations are required (see Tip #22). Your answer must fit inside ONE Blue Book.

2. All paragraphs should have a minimum of five and a maximum of 15 sentences in them. The introductory paragraph MUST include the thesis AND have it underlined, although it doesn't have to be the first or last sentence. Your thesis is NOT supposed to be the entire paragraph! The last sentence of the intro should contain a transitional "hook" that moves the reader to the second paragraph.

3. Just like a good meal has a great smell, a good essay has a great thesis. While it generally restates part of the question, a thesis does more than just that. It's like the first sentence that comes up after a Google search. It lets the reader know what to expect by teasing her/him with bits and pieces of the whole picture. However, make sure to deliver on all promises! In this introduction, don't tell the reader something s/he can expect in the paper and then forget to include it! The same is true with smelling Thanksgiving dinner. If I smell turkey but turn the corner to find red cabbage, we're going to have some problems.

4. Never suggest that you don't know what you're talking about or that you're not enough of an expert that your opinion should count. Your reader (ME!) will quickly turn to something else, like a better Blue Book Exam. Avoid phrases like: "I'm not sure about this, but..." or "I don't really know for sure, but..."

5. There are ways to let the reader know what you are going to discuss without flatly telling her/him. Avoid phrases like: "In this essay I will..." or "The purpose of this essay is to..."





Blue Book Exams 2.0

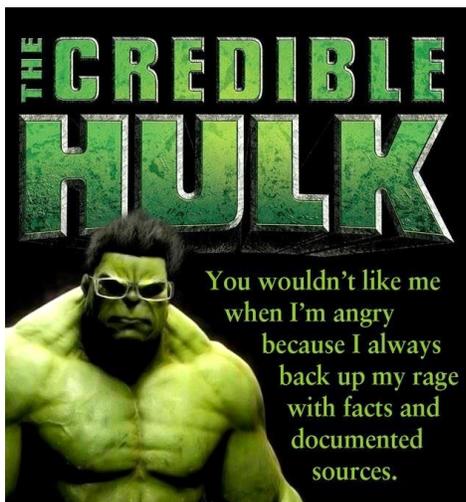
Tips for the Essay:

continued...

6. I already know what essay you chose... because I gave it to you! Avoid phrases like: "I chose to write my essay on..." This sort of introduction is better suited for that awful science presentation in 3rd Grade.

7. Always move confidently into your essay. Many writers incorrectly write a warm-up paragraph (or two, or three, or four, or...) to get them in the "mood" of their essay before getting to their introduction. Hello? Anyone out there? Yoo-hoo? Sometimes writers pump as much information into these random paragraphs that they essentially present their entire argument BEFORE they begin. Bad idea. You're wasting valuable space. Don't do that.

8. Avoid phrases like: "Webster's defines..." or "According to Encyclopedia Britannica..." Although definitions are useful, you want to avoid this hackneyed beginning. You may begin with a definition, just don't add "Webster's defines such-and-such as...". Save this for your Best Man's speech that no one will really listen to because they're all wondering why you're the Best Man... you know why.



9. A good essay moves seamlessly into the supporting or body paragraphs (the "meat 'n' taters"). This is where you support or prove your thesis by providing carefully selected examples. With historical writing, there is no need to adhere strictly to the five paragraph essay format (which is one introductory, three supporting, and one conclusion). Why? It's simple. You're going to need more than three supporting paragraphs!





Tips for the Essay:

continued...

10. With Blue Books, as long as you have the introductory and conclusion paragraphs, you may have as many "meat 'n' taters" paragraphs as you see fit. However, just like with Thanksgiving dinner, you don't want to overload on the details (*a.k.a. butter and gravy*), or you'll run out of room for pumpkin pie. Academically speaking, if you have too many supporting paragraphs, you'll bog down your essay and run out of space.

11. Just as a good meal ends with a great burp, so, too, a good essay ends with a great conclusion. This part of the essay is meant to summarize what the reader has just been told throughout by the supporting paragraphs. Simply put, a well-written conclusion keeps the "taste" of the essay in the reader's mouth. In this final paragraph, you want to restate your thesis (but NOT word-for-word), include any final remarks, and be on your merry way.

12. Don't underline your conclusion. The only sentence that should be underlined in your Blue Book is your thesis statement.

13. Please don't finish your Blue Book (or any project, really) by saying, "I had fun..." or "I learned a lot...". You did NOT have fun spending your weekend writing this exam, especially on a topic you couldn't choose. It's probably a given that you had much better things you'd rather be doing. So, don't do it... liar.

14. Remember what the Army says about organizing an essay:

a. Tell 'em what you're gonna tell 'em.

b. Tell 'em.

c. Tell 'em what you told 'em.





Blue Book Exams 2.0

Tips for the Essay:

continued...

15. Don't SKIP lines; be sure to use both sides of a page.

16. Don't number or label your paragraphs.

17. Don't use "I feel..." "I think...", or "I believe...". Don't say: "I believe the Roman Empire fell because it got too big." Say: "The Roman Empire fell because it got too big." Even if you're answering an opinion question, there is no need to be redundant by using "I". We know it's YOUR opinion because YOU'RE the one writing it.

18. Don't use "we", "our", or "us", especially in reference to the United States. Don't say: "We beat the Nazis in World War II." Say: "The U.S. beat the Nazis in World War II."

Speaking of the U.S., make sure to establish abbreviations early in your essay by spelling them out the first time you use them. Don't make an assumption that the reader knows your abbreviations in advance. So the first time you mention the U.S., be sure to write United States, then place () around the abbreviation - United States (U.S.) - and you're good to go!



19. Don't write in the margins. If you leave something out, try to find another place for it in your essay. For the love of everything holy, if you're six pages into your answer, don't erase everything just to add it. You only get one Blue Book, and submitting something that has been erased entirely and written over creates a poor presentation of your work.





Blue Book Exams 2.0

Tips for the Essay:

continued...

20. This is a formal essay, so moderate humor is acceptable. Classroom jargon or lingo shouldn't work itself into the essay. I might call the 1920s a "golden turd" during a discussion... but you don't. You say the 1920s were "skin deep".

21. Basic grammar rules apply! Indent paragraphs. Capitalize the start of sentences and proper nouns. Be careful with run-ons! Watch your spelling - it's a take-home essay! If you don't know how to spell something... look it up!

22. You MUST cite your sources throughout. The general rule of thumb for when to cite is when the material you're writing about is NOT common knowledge. A sentence such as "The U.S. has 50 states" is common knowledge and doesn't need to be cited. However, a sentence like "The earth weighs 81 times more than the moon" is NOT common knowledge and needs to be cited. While I'm not looking for formal citations and a bibliography page, I do expect you to include basic citations. You need to cite class lectures, the textbook, and EQs each time you present material that is not common knowledge. This means you will have multiple citations within one paragraph. (Using citations does NOT give you permission to plagiarize, so be careful.) Citation example:

The Compromise of 1850, signed by President Fillmore, settled the issue of California's statehood but further divided the nation (**lecture, 9/22**). When California petitioned to become a state, there was a major problem: it was technically "split" by the invisible Missouri Compromise line. This compromise line ruled that territory north of the line was "free" and should a state above the line enter the Union, it had to enter as a free state. Anything south of the line was "slave" and would have to enter as a slave state (**textbook, pp. 63-65**). For many years, the North and South walked the tight rope by admitting free and slave states at or around the same time (**lecture, 9/26**). California, however, wanted to enter as a free state and didn't wish to be split into a Northern and Southern California. This set off a nine-month debate in Congress (**EQ 1.10**).



HARTNELL UNIVERSITY - BLUE BOOK EXAM FEEDBACK SHEET



NAME: _____

ESSAY (100 points possible; 100% of final grade)

Question: _____

BB CRITERIA 1. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Was the thesis underlined? Did it provide a proper (but brief) snapshot of the entire paper?

BB CRITERIA 2. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Was the paper properly organized and structured? Did it contain an appropriate introduction that successfully began the student's presentation/argument?

BB CRITERIA 3. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Was the proper amount of information included to answer the question and demonstrate sufficient knowledge of the topic - but not too much so as to bog down the "flow" of the paper?

BB CRITERIA 4. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Did the student provide specific (and correct) examples of the who, the what, the when, the where, and the WHY throughout the paper?

BB CRITERIA 5. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Did the paper contain an appropriate number of supporting/body paragraphs that contained the necessary information?

BB CRITERIA 6. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Did the paper contain a proper conclusion that summarized the entire paper in a sufficient paragraph?

BB CRITERIA 7. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
As a whole, did the paper flow from paragraph-to-paragraph and not come across as "choppy"? Was it logically and systematically presented?

BB CRITERIA 8. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Was the paper (relatively) free of grammatical and spelling mistakes? In other words, the student did not say "I think", "I feel", or "I believe", or commit other classroom faux pas throughout their paper.

BB CRITERIA 9. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Was the paper properly cited throughout? Were the citations from course material?

BB CRITERIA 10. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Overall, was the student's paper a successful and well-written presentation? Did it demonstrate their mastery of the material?

FINAL GRADE: _____/100; _____ = _____

Comments:

BB #1: _____ BB #2: _____ BB #3: _____ BB #4: _____ BB #5: _____ BB #6: _____

