

The Differences between a Short Essay and a Short Answer: Your Instructor's Expectations

	Short Essay	Short Answer
Audience	Someone who has not even seen/read the assigned materials	Someone who assigned the reading materials and knows the information at an expert level.
Level of expertise	Assumes the reader has not been educated on the topic being discussed. Provide overview of the topic as a part of your essay.	Assumes the reader is an expert. This person who is reading the short answer is checking the knowledge of the author against a standard response.
Length of submission	Can vary in length, but ranges from 200-800 words (as a minimum). Since it is easier to write more rather than less, I do not set the maximum length of submissions. I consider the maximum to be an upper-division skill.	Often very short; 3-4 sentences in length is a good rule of thumb. Usually minimal is best: the more clearly you can express your knowledge, the better.
Content	While focused on a specific issue, the information that can be used may come from a variety of sources. By the selection of which sources to include, the author demonstrates his or her comprehension of the issue, rather than just knowledge of facts.	Demonstrates familiarity of a very narrow arena of knowledge (often fact-based). Number of details or examples limited (generally) to the required reading(s).
Format of submission	<p>At a minimum, write three paragraphs: the introduction; the body; and the conclusion (no matter the required length of the submission).</p> <p>The introduction should not be detailed, but a general overview of what is to come and tells why reading the submission is important to the reader.</p> <p>The body is where you provide the details of the essay. Depending on the required length of the essay, a rule of thumb is this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 200+ words (1-2 paragraphs in the body). • 400+ words (3-4 paragraphs in the body). • 800+ word (6-8 paragraphs in the body). <p>Students often try to squeeze several important ideas into a single paragraph (I call these mega-paragraphs). Remember: Each new point should be give 1-2 paragraphs of its own.</p> <p>The conclusion is where you wrap-up the essay. Remind the audience of your main points, suggest an action, generalize your findings, and similar types of writings.</p> <p>Do NOT introduce new data or new interpretations into the conclusion (a common error). This is your last chance to give the audience your understanding of what is significant about the topic.</p>	<p>Varies based on the specifics of the instructions. Usually will be a single sentence or a single paragraph.</p> <p>You will not have the time to provide the niceties of transition sentences which enhance the flow of a submission, but do pay attention to the order that you present the response.</p> <p>Short answers can be harder to write than short essays as they are often timed and you write less but have to select each word for its maximum effect (quickly).</p>
General no-no's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not ever start with a quote from the textbook in your first sentence. • Do not use dictionaries to define words for the audience; use the terms in the context of your paper. • Never write a paragraph that has only one sentence. The first sentence of a paragraph is too general and you do not demonstrate you facility with the readings if you do this. • Don't jump around between topics; organize what you want to say and then say it in some logical order (e.g.; temporally, procedurally, or in order 	

	of importance).
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