

Tips for Taking the Ph.D. Writing Exam

The writing exam is divided into two parts.
Both parts are important and should be prepared for.

Part I Factual Writing

This section is factual writing. You should not express an opinion or speculate about information not given. Generally, this will be an illustration that you need to describe. There are five basic steps in all descriptions of graphs and tables.

1. General statement of the type of graph and what it shows or compares. This should not repeat the graphs title. Is it a bar graph? Pie chart?
2. Identification of the basic layout and key features of the graph. Is the information given in thousands of units? What years are covered?
3. Recognition of the highs and lows on the graph. Is there a peak? What is the lowest amount? Does the item level out at some point?
4. Comparisons and trends. All graphs and charts are used to either show trends or to compare data. Identify this information and use appropriate words for describing graph data and movements.
5. Conclusion. What does this illustration say to you? You might be able to predict something.

Part II Argument Essay

This section is argument writing. Your task is to present a main argument and reach a conclusion. Your arguments should be based on logic and evidence and include supporting arguments to help convince your audience. While presenting your argument, you also need to be aware of arguments *against* your argument. You have two options of how to organize your essay.

The first possible organization should look as follows:

1. One or two background sentences that identify the topic *and* a strong topic sentence (thesis statement) that expresses your argument. Here you have to make it clear that there are at least two sides of the argument.
2. First reason for your position. An example, explanation or detail that supports the first reason.
3. Second reason for your position. An example, explanation or detail that supports the second reason.
4. Third reason for your position. An example, explanation or detail that supports the third reason.
5. Conclusion. This should not add new information but should sum up the reasons and restate your position.

The second possible organization should include the following steps:

1. One or two background sentences that identify the topic *and* a strong topic sentence (thesis statement) that expresses your argument. Here you have to make it clear that there are at least two sides of the argument.

2. One reason against your position. An example, explanation or detail that supports this particular reason.
3. First reason for your position. An example, explanation or detail that supports the first reason.
4. Second reason for your position. An example, explanation or detail that supports the second reason.
5. Conclusion. This should not add new information but should sum up the reasons and restate your position.

Including some discussion of arguments that go against your position may be more effective: this way you are showing that the arguments for your position are more convincing.

REMEMBER: 1. Use your best grammar and word choices. 2. Always use academic English and avoid idioms, slang and informal style.