Short Answer Questions

There is nothing easy about short answer questions. Having a strategy to answer them, however, gives you structure to follow. This is helpful under pressure of an exam situation.

The ability to answer short answer questions is an essential assessment task for some subjects. While they can appear easy due to their length, the challenging is in the need to write quickly, clearly and succinctly, and with maximum accuracy. You must also source or reference your claims.

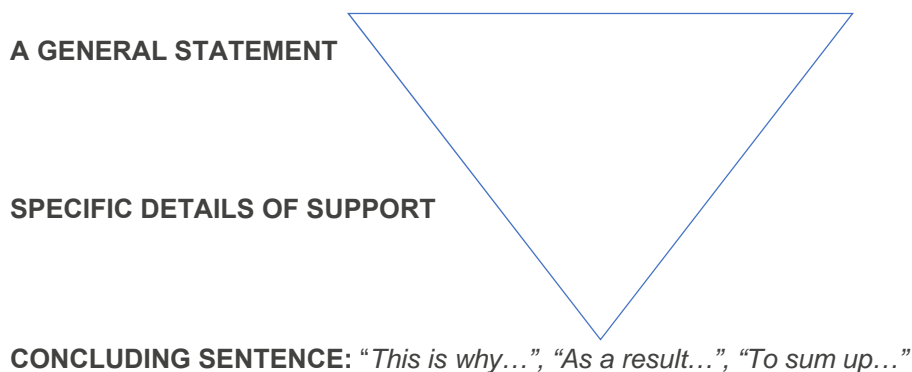| The Expectations	The Stages
• Answer the question! • Clarity • Precision • Brevity (be succinct)	• Analyse what is needed • Formulate your response • Write your response • Check your response

Look at the question

Simple example: *What is the quickest way from the Morwell to Federation University, Churchill?*

This kind of question is an unlikely task because it seems so simple. But is it? Notice that there is an ambiguity in the question. "Quickest way" could be "most direct route" or it could mean "fastest mode of transport". It is likely that short answer tasks contain ambiguities to establish how well you really know the subject. Beware of ambiguities!

Analyse what is needed

In the example question below, first underline the **key noun phrases**, establish any **ambiguities**, and then get to work. Ensure your answer "funnels" from a **general** response to the question, to the **specific** evidence/support, with a **summary** at the end.

A GENERAL STATEMENT

SPECIFIC DETAILS OF SUPPORT

CONCLUDING SENTENCE: "*This is why…*", "*As a result…*", "*To sum up…*"

Example question (from Media & Screen Texts)
The way a text addresses an audience is both social and textual. Refer to an example of a media text in the first four weeks of this course. Explain how this text addresses an audience as part of society. What are a few specific elements of this text that address an audience?

Step 1: Identify noun phrases

The way a <u>text</u> addresses an <u>audience</u> is both <u>social and textual</u>. Refer to an <u>example</u> of a <u>media text</u> in the <u>first four weeks of this course</u>. Explain how <u>this text</u> addresses an <u>audience</u> as part of <u>society</u>. What are a few <u>specific elements of this text</u> that address an <u>audience</u>?

Step 2: Establish what you have to do

In this example:

1. Outline the text and say why it addresses audience
2. Give a detailed response about how it does this
3. Identify and explain specific elements that address an audience

Weak:

Still images are used constantly within our modern society from advertisement to art to signs and everything in-between. The image elements are usually a clear indication of what the image will behold. A large red sign on the roads will often be linked to stopping but in an advertisement perspective popular companies will be linked (Coca Cola, Virgin etc.) The context in which the still image is in will give the audience a clear indication of what it is trying to convey. Visually pleasing pictures will be used to be drawing in an audience whereas the larger companies can rely on their established image. As we are a consumer-based society, the advertisement side of the still image can be easy recognisable, such as the Apple logo, and this aspect can not only influence our society, but can also build communities.

Analysis

- This response is too vague or general throughout. A more direct response to the question is needed.
- Using a specific example from the course would make this much clearer and stronger.
- It does not refer to a clear example of a media text or discuss specific elements of a text in enough detail.
- This response is also lacking any secondary support.

Stronger:

Mode of address "refers to those processes that take place within a text to establish a relationship between the addresser… and the addressee" (Hartley 173). Socially, texts are tailored by "addressers" to be aimed at specific audiences based on factors such as gender, age, socioeconomic group and ethnicity (Hartley 173-174). Textually texts are presented to an audience based on previous knowledge relating to genre or style (Hartley 173-174). Using a movie poster for 'X-Men 3' from Printmag.com as an example (studied in week two), it can be said that the poster is aimed at a young male audience of teenagers and young adults. This is evident by the style of the poster as it uses mainly metallic colours and big blocky sans serif fonts with sharp edges. These elements address a young male audience by appealing to them visually. Another audience this poster addresses is based on textual knowledge of Marvel films. Fans of Marvel movies will be drawn to this poster because it is consistent with the Marvel style. In particular, the poster's inclusion of three claws directly addresses fans of the X-Men and Wolverine franchises by drawing on their existing knowledge. This example highlights some of the ways that the elements of an image can address an audience both socially and textually.

Analysis

- Gets to the point
- Demonstrates understanding of social and textual address, and familiarity with the set reading
- Clear, relevant example
- Discussion of specific elements
- Brief concluding sentence draws together ideas and refers back to the question
- Ideas are referenced

Other helpsheets available

- Topic Analysis