History Exams – Helpful Hints

Preparation ahead of time

★ Do not cram!!
★ Know the format of the exam/test
  o Is it comprehensive?
  o Will you have choices as to which questions you answer?
  o What types of questions will you see on the exam?
  o How much time will you have?
    ▪ The answers to these questions will likely be on the syllabus.
★ Organize study materials
  o Group your notes into like sections
  o Use a study guide (if provided) to help you prepare
  o Do NOT try to memorize everything
    ▪ Look at the main ideas
    ▪ Link information in your mind
★ Try to anticipate questions
  o If the professor provides sample questions answer those fully
    ▪ Write the answers out – it will help you remember better
  o If the professor does not provide sample questions try to anticipate possibilities
    ▪ What are the course themes?
    ▪ On what did the professor spend a lot of time?
  o Try to figure out what is most important – your professor/TAs can help with that
★ Study with a group
  o Talk through questions
  o Work with people who have similar study habits
    ▪ You can always work with someone to study before an exam
    ▪ Check with your professor before working with others on a take-home exam!!!

Just before the exam

★ Get a full night’s sleep – staying up late to cram does not help
★ Put your notes away at least a half hour before the exam – give your brain a rest
★ Bring an extra blue book (if blue books are required)
★ Bring extra writing tools (sharpened pencils, extra lead for mechanical pencils, pens)
★ Bring a watch
Do not count on an accurate clock in the room
You will probably not be allowed to check your phone

Time of the exam

★ Relax
  o You prepared, so no need to panic
  o Take a couple deep breaths
★ Plan
  o Look at which questions are worth the most points
  o Spend more time on questions worth more points
★ Read the questions carefully
  o Answer the question asked
★ Develop a thesis before you write anything
  o Think about the question
  o Write down relevant points in an outline
  o Carefully construct your argument/thesis
  o Use terms, dates, and explanations to prove your thesis/argument
  o This few minutes can improve your answer immensely
★ Use the entire time provided
  o The professor has timed the exam to take all or most of the time available
  o If you finish early reread your answers – make sure they are complete

Things to avoid

★ Vague Answers (Fuzziness)
  o Use simple, direct language
  o Say what you mean
★ Skipping questions altogether
  o A partial answer is better than none at all
★ Assume the facts speak for themselves
  o Use details, dates, descriptions, etc. to illustrate your points
★ Spending too much time on any one question
  o Spend more time where you are less comfortable
  o Spend less time on questions of which you are sure