

Ec104: Twelve Steps

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One way to do well

- There are many ways to do well on the exam. But in case you aren't sure how to approach it, here's a 12 step plan you can use.

Step 1. Before the exam: Be prepared

- Before the day of the exam, take notes:
 - Take notes on **each** lecture, **each** chapter of Koyama and Rubin, and **each** chapter of Baten, filling about 2 sides of A4 for each one.
 - You now have $2 \times 40 + 2 \times 10 + 2 \times 10 = 120$ pages of notes.
 - This task may be easier if you have a study group – but *be sure to use your own words* in the exam.
 - If you have not completed this already, you are behind.
- Before the day of the exam, take condensed notes:
 - Why? This is a form of revision and the act of taking notes helps you commit knowledge to memory. Pencil and paper are more effective than taking notes by computer.
 - For each lecture or chapter, take condensed notes of 1 page.
 - You now have $1 \times 40 + 1 \times 10 + 1 \times 10 = 60$ pages of notes.
 - This task may also be easier if you have a study group, but don't expect to be able to just understand someone else's terse summary of a chapter or lecture. Be careful about just using someone else's notes, and always use your own words in the exam.
- Read your long notes within one week of the exam and your condensed notes a day or two before.

Step 2. The first five minutes: Check the question

- I'm going to make a schedule where you submit 9 hours after the exam is released.
- When the exam is up: look up the exam and read the questions. This should take 5 minutes.
- Mull the questions over in your mind for a few minutes before you write anything.
- For the rest of these slides, I'll provide examples based on an exam-style statement: "Is colonization responsible for how the world became rich? Here the evidence is mixed. Yet there is little controversy regarding the damaging role that colonization played on the colonized. Discuss."
- ... and 5 minutes have passed ...

Step 3. The rest of the first hour: Identify what's relevant

- Steps 3 to 7 are all before you start writing; a good essay requires thought.
- Go through your notes, and copy-paste into a word document the points you think are relevant to the question.
- Make sure to keep a record of where you got each point (which lecture, or which chapter/page). This will help a lot later.
- For example, for the exam-style statement above, I might seek out examples of colonization enriching colonizing countries and of colonization damaging colonized countries.
- I'd also try to find examples of the opposite: examples where colonization did not enrich the colonizer, or did not damage the colonized.
- Point? I'd try to find of evidence from my notes both for and against the exam statement.
- ... and 1 hour has passed ...

Step 4. The next half hour: Group points into topics

- If you haven't done it already, re-order these notes into a set of topics. These will eventually form the basis of paragraphs (or blocks of multiple paragraphs) that support individual propositions that together constitute your eventual argument.
- For example, I might re-order the points I have copy-pasted into my word document into the topics:
 - ① Resources taken from colonized countries.
 - ② Institutional consequences of colonization in colonizing countries.
 - ③ Institutions in colonized countries.
 - ④ Public goods in colonized countries.
- ... and 1.5 hours have passed ...

Step 5. The next hour: Build an argument

- Identify a proposition you can defend about each of the topics you identified in the previous step.
- For example, for topic 3), my proposition might be: “In settler colonies, colonialism created inclusive institutions that primarily benefitted the settlers. In non-settler colonies with resources, colonialism created extractive institutions that have prevented growth over the long run. And in non-settler colonies without resources, colonialism had little effect on indigenous institutions.”
- Be strategic. You want an argument that isn't obvious, and that makes your essay stand out.
- Take each of your propositions. Group them into a single paragraph. Rewrite them.
- Congratulations! This rephrased group of propositions is now your introduction. The set of propositions themselves will each be the start of a paragraph or set of paragraphs.
- ... but this step is not over ...

Step 5, continued. Refine an argument

- Read this draft of your introduction. Does it make sense? Is it a coherent argument? If not, revise.
- Do you have more than six propositions? You're going to go over the word limit. Condense topics together and rethink your propositions.
- Do you have fewer than four propositions? You're writing a clichéd five paragraph essay, and it won't stand out from the pile. Your argument may lack insight or sophistication.
- Do you actually have an argument? If not, revise your propositions. You shouldn't just "talk about some topics." That would be somewhere between a weak argument and no argument.
- For each topic, you need a proposition that is nontrivial and falsifiable. You need to write an essay that shows that you can think, understand, and process ideas. This is more demanding than simply regurgitating what you have been taught. Regurgitation caps your mark.
- ... and 2.5 hours have passed ...

Step 6. The next half hour: Take a break

- Get a coffee, go for a walk, or do something else to step away for a bit.
- ... and 3 hours have passed ...

Step 7. The next half hour: Make an outline

- You should now have a) an introductory paragraph and b) a set of topics, each consisting of a proposition and some notes on that topic.
- For each topic, select from your notes the best examples and pieces of evidence that you will use to support each proposition. Delete the rest.
- Identify the relevant citation for each of the examples you have chosen to keep (e.g. Koyama and Rubin (2022, p. 121)). Specific page references are only needed for exact figures, not for general ideas, in case you are running low on words.
- *Do not simply copy-paste from the book or any other source.*
- ... and 3.5 hours have passed ...

Step 8. The next 90 minutes: Write a first draft

- Write. While it may sound daunting to just hammer out 1,200 words (my estimate given you've already written 300 words in the form of the introduction and the first sentence or two of every paragraph) in 90 minutes, keep the following in mind:
 - Everything you've done until this point is intended to make this step quick and easy. You already have a detailed outline. You're just taking bullet points and turning them into sentences.
 - Do not submit an essay that is made of bullet points unless you've literally run out of time.
 - Anything is better than nothing, but everything is worse than something better.
 - There is still time left in my plan for you to edit this draft.
 - Before Covid, students are usually given 2 hours, and typically wrote this much by hand without access to their notes.
- ... and 5 hours have passed ...

Step 9. The next half hour: Eat something.

- Take a break and have something healthy. Stay hydrated.
- ... and 5.5 hours have passed ...

Step 10. The next hour: Spot issues.

- Put yourself in the shoes of a grader looking at your essay. Where are the obvious problems that could cost you marks?
 - Have you followed the formatting guidelines?
 - Do you have a bibliography and citations?
 - Do you have a clear argument by the end of the first paragraph?
 - Have you cited evidence, and not simply regurgitated arguments?
 - Have you conspicuously cited material from the lectures before and after 1870?
 - Have you conspicuously cited material from Baten before and after 1870?
 - Have you conspicuously cited material from Koyama and Rubin before and after 1870?
- If not, fix these issues.
- ... and 6.5 hours have passed ...

Step 11. The next hour: Exercise.

- Now that you've digested, you should go running or something. Clear your head.
- ... and 7.5 hours have passed ...

Step 12: The last 90 minutes: Write a second draft

- By now, you have a first draft written, but it is probably too long, full of grammatical mistakes, and you can think of ways to improve your argument. So:
 - Re-order paragraphs and rephrase propositions until you are as happy with your argument as you can reasonably expect to be, given your time constraints.
 - Cut examples, combine sentences, and omit unnecessary words until you are within the word limit.
 - Cut unnecessary words and examples.
 - Edit the writing once by reading the essay on your computer.
 - Edit the writing a second time by printing off your essay and going through it using paper and a red pen.
 - Submit! Do this well before the deadline.
- ... and 9 hours have passed ...

Generally: Take care of yourself

- You'll notice that, although I have written this as if you submit 9 hours after you start, there are two hours of breaks spaced throughout.
- 7 hours of uninterrupted work would be crazy, particularly for mental work. You'd feel awful at the end of it, and you wouldn't give yourself time to think. So you'll see that I've added gaps.
- You could, of course, just work straight from start to finish, but hopefully you can see the downsides.
- Each break will give you a chance to refresh and recharge, and new insights and ideas may come to you while you're doing something else.

Generally: Don't be an idiot

- Look at the assessment criteria on the practice exam. You get 10 points for getting trivial things like the font and margins correct. Don't lose 10 points because you can't be bothered to set your margins correctly.
- Each of the three major sources (lectures, Koyama and Rubin, Baten) in each of the two major time periods (before 1870, after 1870) is worth 10 points. If you drop one, you lose 10 points. If you simply don't use Baten at all, you lose 20 points. Use all the major sources!
- Do not wait until the last minute. You have 24 hours to do the exam, but you don't want to be submitting at 23 hours and 45 minutes. What if your internet goes out? What if your computer suddenly needs to update and restart?