Six strategies for exam essays

1. Take time to choose the right questions
   - Read the whole paper carefully - tick questions you can attempt
   - Check you are clear re: the key words and content you need to know. Make a final choice.
   - Check amount of marks per question. Divide the time between questions in proportion to marks – note starting times for each.

2. Make quick plan of structure and content
   - Essential! - and jotting down points helps to calm nerves.
   - Make a quick plan or diagram – work out essential content to put in, and double-check the angle you need to address (Discuss? Explain? Compare?) Number your points in the order you will cover them.

3. Get to the point
   - The more relevant points you cover, the better your essay.
   - Don’t get ‘long-winded’ – if you start to ramble, stop yourself and go back to the plan.
   - Shorter sentences can help you stick to the point and say more.
   - For each point, check: am I still answering the question?

4. Stick to a time plan
   - As you write, keep to a time plan. Leave a gap if you can’t remember a name or fact – go back later.
   - Don’t risk missing out a question – attempt the right number.

5. Keep structure clear – ‘signpost’
   - Make your structure clear: intro, main body, conclusion.
   - Use linking words and phrases to ‘signpost’ the structure and help it flow - let the reader know when you move on to a new point or section, so they can follow the steps of your argument.

6. Intro and Conclusion
   - Keep these short but clear.
   - Introduction: say how you will address the question. Outline the order of your main points as a guide to your essay – stick to it.
   - Conclusion: Sum up main points briefly – and refer back to the question, to show how you have answered it.
   - Number questions/pages clearly. Obvious, but easy to forget...

Contact the Effective Learning Service for a more detailed leaflet, and for extra advice and support: elsl@qmu.ac.uk, or drop in to room 1153