

## THE ESSAY QUESTION

There is a technique to writing an answer to an essay question. In order to keep on the question, many students make a point of rephrasing the question in the first sentence of their answer. Thus a rephrasing of the controlling question is their thesis statement.

In the examination in American history, a teacher asked his class to describe the major advantages held by the North on the eve of the civil war. Among one hundred and ten other answers he received the following four:

### **Answer #1** **Incomplete Thoughts**

Good resources, like money, etc... manufacturing and commerce were centered in Northern cities instead of south. This gave the north quite an advantage. (It seems to me that this question is unfair since the material was never covered in class.

### **Answer #2** **Too Brief, Not Specific Enough**

The North possessed the following advantages:

It had a larger population on which to draw (22,000,000 as against 9,000,000).  
It held a commercial and financial advantage (foreign commerce and banking capital).  
It had almost a complete monopoly on production of war materials (iron, steel, etc...)

### **Answer #3** **Irrelevant Information**

To the student of American history, nothing is more interesting than our own Civil War, or – as the Southerners like to call it – The War Between the States. This was a war that had been brewing for a long while, all the way back until the Missouri Compromise, or, if one wanted to be really precise, all of the way back until 1619 when the first slave was imported into Virginia. This is a long time. In spite of the attempts of many honest people to resolve the differences, War came, and along with it great change. The Four Horsemen (death, famine, etc.) really rode rough-shod. On the eve of this war both sides held certain advantages but we are particularly interested in the advantages of the North. The North was a most populous area. The result was that many people lived in the North and thus the North had a greater population upon which to draw. Besides this, it had almost all of the steel and iron mills in the country in cities like Pittsburgh, etc. This meant that the North could have the “mostest” even if it didn’t have the “fustest”. (Indeed, the South during the early years usually got there the “fustest”.) The advantages of the South were not to be despised.

#### **Answer #4**

##### **Rephrasing of Question, Linking of Phrases, Specific Examples**

On the eve of the Civil War the North held at least three advantages. In the first place, it had a larger population to draw on for army service. In 1860 there were roughly 22,000,000 in the North whereas there were only 9,000,000 in the South.

The difference was even greater than these figures would indicate because more than one third of the South's nine million were slaves and thus, were not especially fitted for army service.

In the second place, the North held certain important commercial and financial advantages. (For example, it controlled most of the foreign commerce, since trade had centered in ports north of the Potomac River. Even foreign goods destined for the south had poured through the Northern warehouses.

Finally, the North had an almost complete monopoly on the production of war materials. Not only were almost all the iron steel, textile, and munition factories in the Northern possession, but almost all of the technician and skilled labourers were also there.

**Answer #4 is obviously the best**