12 Characteristics of Good Exam Essays

1. Answers the precise question set, rather than presenting information that is broadly relevant to the topic.
2. Has a clear argument or perspective, so that the examiner knows from the outset what you intend to say, and can trace the development of your argument throughout the essay.
3. Is it critical and analytical, engaging with debates in the subject, and explaining why something is significant, rather than simply describing what research there is or what theorists have said.
4. Is structured: includes a brief introduction, short paragraphs each dedicated to one key conclusion, all structured around the main argument.
5. Provides reasons, based on sound evidence, to support the main argument.
6. Has good paragraphing: the main point of each paragraph is introduced clearly, and paragraphs follow logically from each other.
7. Evaluates different perspectives: it weighs up the relative value or significance of different points of view or theories, evaluating the key arguments and evidence for these, and making it clear why one set of arguments, reasons or evidence is more convincing than others.
8. Refers to theories and schools of thought relevant to the question, demonstrating an understanding of the significance of these to the subject.
9. Includes references: where relevant, exact references (names and dates) for key theories and research articles included.
10. Is selective: it includes just the information and detail that is most relevant to answering the question, and leaves out less relevant material.
11. Is written clearly and to the point, without waffle, repetition, grand generalisations, pompous language, unnecessary jargon, or personal anecdotes.
12. Has been proof-read to make sure it makes sense, and says what you intended to say. Minor errors are removed and all words made legible.