

BLUE BOOK EXAMS

Definition

A blue book is a small booklet of line-ruled pages, traditionally with a blue cover. The blue color came from blue rags, often the cast-offs from sailors. Because blue paper was cheap, it was often used for the covers of throwaway books. Traditionally, students use blue books to respond to questions on a particular subject in an essay or short-answer format.

It was 1857 when Harvard approved the first use of blue books in the New World. The rationale was that this was a better test of a student's analytic and writing skills than the traditional oral exams. By 1865, Yale followed suit and blue books spread from there.

As one of many academic avenues for testing, blue books offer a way for the students to confront, approach, and demonstrate what they know and how effectively they can communicate their thoughts and beliefs in a limited time frame.

Blue Book Assessment vs. Traditional Examinations

The argument against traditional examination is that this is not a very valuable standard. These tests ask the kind of questions that students may never be asked again in their lives, in detail that they may never be asked again in their lives. Traditional examinations can be arbitrary and abstract, an inauthentic gauge of learning, knowledge, understanding, or wisdom. The better approach is a more integrated approach: the method of classical assessment.

The final exam “has the singular power to force students to go back over material, think critically about what they have read, review hard-to-grasp-topics once more, and even talk about the subject matter with classmates and instructors—all of which enhance learning” (Robert Bangert-Drowns, dean of the school of education at the University at Albany SUNY). Blue books better enable the parent or director to answer the question, “Is the student more skilled at thinking critically now than when (s)he started?”

Benefits of the Blue Book Exam

The blue book format offers the opportunity to evaluate and assess classically:

- Grammar: Demonstrate what you know, its meaning, and its significance.

- Dialectic: Demonstrate what you understand about a subject.
- Rhetoric: Demonstrate your writing and conversant ability on a subject.

Content Suggestions and Examples

Below are sample questions a director could use for Challenge A Blue Book exams. These are only ideas on how to organize these assessments and what to include. Directors have the flexibility to include what is most suitable for their students, knowing that it will probably change from year to year.

Logic

Tell me everything that you know about this problem.

$$3x^2 + 6xy - 9x$$

Solve the problem below, step by step. Next to the problem, for each step, indicate which laws, properties, or rules you used to solve it.

$$\frac{3}{4}x + 12 < 15$$

Grammar

Write out all the declension endings studied this semester.

Debate

Draw the world and label as many countries, capitals, and features as possible.

Research

Compare two creations you have researched this semester using a comparison chart.

Exposition

Write a persuasive essay about which Challenge A novel is best, which common topic is best, or which canon of rhetoric is best. Include an exordium and amplification.

Rhetoric

List six of your favorite fallacies, define them, and using your favorite novel from Challenge A, write out an appropriate example of each fallacy.