

Words to Know for Essay Questions

The following words are commonly found in essay test questions. Understanding them is essential to success on these kinds of questions.

Analyze	Break into separate parts and discuss, examine, or interpret each part.
Compare	Examine two or more things. Identify similarities and differences. Comparisons generally ask for similarities more than differences. (See Contrast).
Contrast	Show differences. Set in opposition
Criticize	Make judgments. Evaluate comparative worth. Criticism often involves analysis.
Define	Give the meaning usually a meaning specific to the course or subject. Determine the precise limits of the term to be defined. Explain the exact meaning. Definitions are usually short answers.
Describe	Give a detailed account. Make a picture with words. List characteristics, qualities, and parts.
Discuss	Consider and debate or argue the pros and cons of an issue. Write about any conflict. Compare and contrast.
Enumerate	List several ideas, aspects, events, things, qualities, reasons, etc.
Evaluate	Give your opinion or cite the opinion of an expert. Include evidence to support the evaluation.
Illustrate	Give concrete examples. Explain clearly by using comparison and contrast.
Interpret	Comment upon, give examples, and describe relationships. Explain the meaning. Describe, then evaluate.
Outline	Describe main ideas, characteristics, or events. (Does not necessarily mean, "write a Roman numeral/letter outline".)
Prove	Support with facts (especially facts presented in class or in the text).
State	Explain precisely.
Summarize	Give a brief, condensed account. Include conclusions. Avoid unnecessary details.
Trace	Show the order of events or progress of a subject or event.