

Key Words 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.

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.

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.

Illustrate: Give concrete examples; explain clearly by using comparisons or examples.

Interpret: Comment upon, give examples, describe relationships. Explain the meaning. Describe, then evaluate.

Outline: Describe main ideas, characteristics, or events.

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.