

IMPORTANT WORDS IN ESSAY QUESTIONS

The following terms appear frequently in the phrasing of essay questions. You should know their meaning and answer accordingly.

Compare – Look for qualities or characteristics that resemble each other. Emphasize similarities among them, but in some cases also mention differences.

Contrast – Stress the dissimilarities, differences, or unlikeness of things, qualities, events or problems.

Criticize – Express your judgment about the merit or truth of the factors or views mentioned. Give the results of your analysis of these factors, discussing their limitations and good points.

Define – Give concise, clear and authoritative meanings. Don't give detail, but make sure to give the limits of the definition of the definition. Show how the thing you are defining differs from things in other classes.

Describe – Recount, characterize, sketch, or relate in sequence or story form.

Diagram – Give a drawing, chart, plan, or graphic answer. Usually you should label a diagram. In some cases, add a brief explanation or description.

Discuss – Examine, analyze carefully, and give reasons pro and con. Be complete, and give details.

Enumerate – Write in list or outline form, giving points concisely one by one.

Evaluate – Carefully appraise the problem, citing both advantages and limitations. Emphasize the appraisal of authorities and, to a lesser degree, your personal evaluation.

Explain – Clarify, interpret, and spell out the material you present. Give reasons for differences of opinion or of results, and try to analyze causes.

Illustrate – Use a figure, picture, diagram, or concrete example to explain or clarify in giving your judgment about it.

Justify – Prove or give reasons for decisions or conclusions, taking pains to be convincing.

List – As in “enumerate,” write an itemized series of concise statements.

Outline – Organize a description under main points and subordinate points, omitting minor details and stressing the arrangement or classification of things.

Prove – Establish that something is true by citing factual evidence or giving clear, logical reason.

Relate – Show how things are related to, or connected with, each other or how one causes another, correlates with another, or is like another.

Review – Examine a subject critically, analyzing and commenting on the important arguments to be made about it.

State – Present the main points in brief, clear sequences, usually omitting details, illustrations or examples.