

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 un-likenesses of things, qualities, events, or problems.

Criticize/critique

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 details, but make sure to give the limits 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 a 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 a problem.

Interpret

Translate, give examples of, solve, or comment on a subject, usually giving your own judgment about it.

Justify

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

List

As in "enumerate" write in 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.