

INSTRUCTION / DIRECTION WORDS FOR ESSAY QUESTIONS

As you take essay tests, pay particular attention to the instruction or direction words to make sure that you are answering the specific question that is being asked.

ANALYZE	Break into separate parts and discuss, examine, or interpret each part.
COMPARE	Show similarities (and differences, if that is how the professor defines "compare").
CONTRAST	Emphasize the differences.
CRITICIZE	Make judgments. Evaluate comparative worth. Criticism often involves analysis.
DEFINE	Give the meaning. Explain it accurately and make it specific to the course.
DESCRIBE	Give a detailed account. Make a picture with words. List characteristics, qualities, and parts.
DISCUSS	Consider important characteristics, main points, pros/cons, conflicts, etc.
EVALUATE	React to the topic in a logical way. Discuss the merits, strengths, weaknesses, advantages, or limitations of the topic. Include evidence to support the evaluation.
EXPLAIN	Give facts, details, and reasons that make the idea or concept clear and understandable.
INTERPRET	Comment upon, give examples, and describe relationships. Explain the meaning. Describe, then evaluate.
JUSTIFY	Give reasons that support an action, event, or policy.
OUTLINE	Describe main ideas, characteristics, or events (usually with little elaboration).
PROVE	Support with facts. Demonstrate or establish that a concept or theory is correct, logical, or valid.
RELATE	Discuss the connections, correlations, relationships, and points of association among ideas and facts.

References: McWhorter, Kathleen. College Reading and Study Skills, 4th Ed.

Ellis, David. Becoming a Master Student, 5th Ed.