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.*