

DIRECTIONAL WORDS IN ESSAY QUESTIONS

A key step in responding to essay questions is accurately interpreting the question. In addition to identifying key words which indicate the general focus of the question, it is also crucial to understand the directional words in essay questions. These directional words reveal the approach or strategies required for an effective response to the question.

ANALYZE – take the subject apart and highlight the interrelationships of the parts; examine similarities, differences, cause and effect, pros and cons. Don't forget to support your statements with evidence from facts, quotes, etc.

COMPARE – draw out similarities and contrasts. This term usually emphasizes but differences can be shown.

CONTRAST – by stressing and explaining differences and highlighting unrelated qualities.

CRITIQUE – analyze an idea in detail and present your judgment and reasoning supported by facts, statements or quotes about the subject.

DEFINE – explain the meaning in concise (short), clear terms, including any limitations of the definitions. Keep in mind the class or group to which the subject belongs and what makes it different from or the same as others in the group.

DISCUSS – examine a subject by giving information, reasons, details, examples about all sides of a subject including similarities, differences, cause and effect, pros and cons. Don't forget to support your statements with evidence.

EVALUATE – clarify and interpret the subject. Answer questions *what*, *why*, and *how*, and, where appropriate, *where* and *when*. Explain any differences of opinion or experimental results.

ILLUSTRATE – give examples of how an idea works in different circumstances or examples of why an idea works.

INTERPRET – describe and clarify the subject's meaning and relate it to examples or circumstances.

JUSTIFY – explain why, giving reasons.

LIST – itemize concepts in brief form, explaining them, if necessary.

OUTLINE – sketch and/or explain the main points, showing the structure and meaning of the subject matter.

PROVE – present documented facts and evidence that support a point of view.

RELATE – draw connections between dissimilar ideas, using evidence.

STATE – use precise terms to describe rules, laws, options.

SUMMARIZE – give a concise overview that explains the subject.

TRACE – give historical progression or development of a subject.