

# Essay Tests

## Important Words in Essay Questions

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Here are some words that appear frequently in essay questions. You should be familiar with the distinctions between these words so that your answers will be right on target. We recommend reading essay questions carefully and underlining these words when you find them.

#### Verbs Asking for Everything

- COMMENT: To explain, illustrate or criticize the meaning or significance of a subject.
- DESCRIBE: To give either a detailed or a graphic account of a subject.
- DISCUSS: To investigate a subject by argument, especially its pros and cons.
- RELATE: To show the connections between ideas or events; to provide a larger context.
- REVIEW: To survey and examine a subject critically through summary, analysis or criticism.
- STATE: To describe a subject in precise terms or to reproduce a definition exactly.

#### Verbs Asking for Main Points

- ANALYZE: To break the subject into the main ideas which compose it.
- ENUMERATE OR LIST: To present a list of the main ideas composing the whole of the subject.
- OUTLINE: To summarize in a series of headings and sub-headings (theme, main ideas, supporting subordinate ideas).
- SUMMARIZE: To make a brief, concise (no need for details or examples) account of the main ideas of a theme, concept, principle, development or procedure.
- TRACE: To follow the development or history of a subject from the point of its origin.

#### Verbs Asking for Certain Limiting Facts

- COMPARE: To show the similarities and differences between two or more subjects.
- CONTRAST: To show only the differences between two or more subjects.
- DEFINE: To give the meaning of a word by fitting it into a general category and then distinguishing it from closely related subjects; sometimes developed by examples and illustrations.
- DEMONSTRATE: To prove or explain through the use of examples.
- DIAGRAM: To describe with graphs, sketches, or other drawing figures.
- EXPLAIN: To account for or make clear by stating and interpreting the details, character, cause, results and implications of something.
- ILLUSTRATE: To clarify by giving examples, comparisons, analogies, figures or diagrams.

**CONSULT YOUR DICTIONARY FOR FURTHER DEFINITION AS NEEDED!**

*"Make a Map of Your Strategy" on back*

## **Make a Map of Your Strategy**

Instructors say the #1 problem with students' essay answers is that they are off base or filled with irrelevant information. Avoid this problem by making some pre-essay notes to organize your answer before you write it.

1. Take a few minutes (no more than 1/4 of your writing time) to make your notes. Start by turning the essay question into a statement, so your focus will be on answering the question directly. Write the statement at the top of your pre-essay notes.
2. Construct a brief outline that elaborates on your statement. If there are three points you wish to make, these would become the three sub-headings of your outline. Add details and supporting facts under the sub-headings.
3. Finally, write a thesis or topic sentence and include it in a brief introductory paragraph.
4. You're on your way! Continue writing about the points on your outline, following the order you have created.

**Using these writing process strategies can improve your thinking skills, essay answers, and research papers. If they work for you—use them!!**