

WORDS TO WATCH FOR



Here is a list of words commonly found in essay questions. You cannot answer a question correctly if you do not understand what is being asked of you.

Analyze

- Break the topic into its key parts, then discuss each part separately
- Provide your opinion on the strengths and weaknesses of each part, or how they relate to each other

Compare

- Identify the similarities and differences between two or more items

Contrast

- Focus on the differences between two or more items
- Particularly bold differences and clashing points of view

Criticize

- Criticism often involves analysis
- Judge the correctness or merit of the items you are to address
- What are their limitations and benefits?
- Positives and negatives?
- Evaluate the comparative worth of these items

Define

- Provide the exact meaning of an item
- Be specific to the course or subject
- Definitions are generally short and concise, emphasizing what is important

Describe

- Provide a detailed account (the whole picture)
- List characteristics, all parts (in proper sequence if there is one)
- Give detail (who, what, when and where)
- This is a narrative account

Discuss

- Break apart (analyze) and evaluate each part's strengths and weaknesses
- Write about any conflict
- Compare and contrast these parts
- Be specific (provide examples)

Document

- Support your arguments with scholarly research

Explain

- Make the meaning of an item clear
- Answer the "why" and "how"
- Show how a concept is developed
- Give the reasons for an event

Illustrate

- Provide specific examples

Interpret

- Provide your own conclusion and how you got there
- Your own personal understanding of an item(s)

Outline

- Take an idea, and provide the sub-ideas, main points or main examples of that idea
- This is an organized description
- No minor points, only the essential
- Sequence could be important, so keep in mind the *order* in which you address these points

Prove

- Provide facts from class or your textbooks
- Use evidence, examples and arguments to show something is true

Relate

- Provide connections and associations between items
- Be descriptive

Review

- Analyze the major points of an item
- This is an overview (summary) of these points
- Keep in mind that sequence could be important

State

- Explain simply and precisely
- No need for detail or examples
- Be precise

Summarize

- A brief, condensed account of important ideas
- Avoid filler with unnecessary details

Support

- Back your ideas with arguments, evidence and logical reasoning

Trace

- Provide the order or progress of an event
- You will show how something came to be, often by addressing its cause and the effects of this cause

Carter, Carol, Joyce Bishop, Sarah Lyman Kravits. *Keys to Effective Learning*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1998.

Cuseo, Joseph B, Aaron Thompson, Michele Campagna, Viki Sox Fecas. *Thriving in College and Beyond: Research-Based Strategies for Academic Success and Personal Development*. Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2016.

Ellis, Dave. *Becoming a Master Student*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006.