

IMPORTANT WORDS IN ESSAY QUESTIONS

These words provide critical and essential instructions in essay questions. (Many of them have overlapping meanings.)

ANALYZE

Break down a topic into all its parts. Be sure to include all the parts and to tell what makes each part different from the others.

Analyze the role that computers play in simplifying registrations procedure at UMass Boston.

APPLY

Show the extent to which a theory or framework works with a specific example.

Apply Postman's and Powers's theory about connotative language and pictures to CNN's coverage of 9-11.

COMPARE

Show how two subjects are both alike and different. Be sure to discuss each subject and give both likenesses and differences. (Check with your instructor to be sure that differences are to be included.)

Compare the sculpture of Renaissance Italy with classical Greek sculpture.

CONTRAST

Point out the differences between two subjects. Be sure to talk about each subject.

Contrast the nervous system of a flatworm with the nervous system of a frog.

DEFINE

Give the meaning of a word, phrase, or concept appropriate to the context. Show how what you are defining is different from everything else of its type.

Define the word table as it is used in mathematics.

DESCRIBE

Mention the chief characteristics of a situation or retell the essential features of a story.

Describe the conditions on the ships that brought slaves to America.

DISCUSS

Examine and give reasons. Be complete. Give examples.

Discuss one of the rebellions that occurred on a slave ship.

EVALUATE

Carefully appraise an idea or theory, citing both advantages and limitations. Emphasize the appraisal of authorities and, if instructed to, include your personal evaluation.

Evaluate the following: The first six weeks of life are the most important period in a child's emotional development.

EXPLAIN

Give the main reasons why and/or how an event mentioned happened or happens.

Explain why ocean tides are not high at the same time every night. Explain how the phenomenon occurs.

IDENTIFY

Select a definition, example, theory, or argument and explain how it is distinct from the others provided or associated with it. When necessary, show why the item you selected is the appropriate choice.

Identify the best example of Stanley Kubrick's use of music to reinforce visual symbols in his film 2001.

ILLUSTRATE

Give one or more examples to support a general statement. Be sure to relate each example to the general statement. Where appropriate, provide a diagram or figure.

Illustrate the impact China's Cultural Revolution had upon Chinese theater.

INTERPRET

Translate, solve, or comment on a subject or problem, usually giving your judgment. Be sure to go beyond just repeating facts. The questions may specify a method of interpretation to use.

In 1910, Beantown, Kansas, had 502 farm workers, 37 blue collar workers, and 13 white collar workers. Interpret these statistics in terms of Beantown's social composition for that year.

JUSTIFY

Provide reasons for decisions or conclusions.

Justify Henry Clay's interpretation of the Constitution.

LIST

Itemize important points.

List the parts of the body's immune system.

OUTLINE

Organize your answer into main points and subordinate points. It is not necessary that your answer be in outline form.

Outline the contributions that immigrants made to the quality of American life in the years 1865-1925.

PROVE

Establish that something is true by providing factual evidence or, where appropriate, a logical or mathematical proof.

The Industrial Revolution allowed some people to accumulate great wealth. Prove this statement using material that you studied this semester.

REFLECT

Reexamine a situation or experience to determine what can be learned from it.

Reflect on your semester's work as a volunteer tutor for elementary students who need help in arithmetic.

RELATE

Show the connection between the things mentioned in the question. (Note: This does not mean to compare, so if you are asked to relate the American and the French revolutions, you are not to compare them, but to show how one influences the other.)

Relate the evolution of the horse to the changes in its environment.

REVIEW

Examine a subject critically, analyzing and commenting on the important statements to be made about it.

Review Durkheim's theory of anomie.

STATE

Present the main points in a brief, clear sequence, usually omitting details, examples, or illustrations.

State the economic factors leading to World War II.

SUMMARIZE

Give the main points in condensed form, omitting details and examples.

Summarize Comte's principles of sociology.

SYNTHESIZE

Bring together and/or combine various arguments and examples, and show how they work as part of a larger whole or framework.

Synthesize the contributions that Einstein, Penrose, and Hawking have made to cosmology in a way that shows why the Big Bang Theory has gained wide acceptance.

TRACE

List a series of important events, steps, or stages leading up to a final item or point.

Trace the process of cell division.