

KEY WORDS IN ESSAY QUESTIONS

Verbs asking for everything:

Comment	Explain, illustrate, or criticize the meaning or significance of a subject.
Describe	Give either a detailed or a graphic account of a subject.
Discuss	Investigate a subject by argument, going into its pros and cons.
Narrate	Tell a story; that is, a series of events in the order in which they occurred. You may be also asked to interpret or explain something about the events you are narrating.
Review	Survey and examine a subject critically--either a summary, an analysis or criticism.
State	Describe a subject in precise terms or reproduce a definition exactly.

Verbs asking for main points:

Analyze	Break the subject up into the main ideas and discuss the mainpoints.
Enumerate	Present a list of the main ideas composing the whole of the subject.
List	As in "enumerate," write an itemized series of concise statements.
Outline	Summarize in a series of headings and sub-headings (theme, main ideas, supporting and subordinate ideas), often a two-stage outline omitting detail.
Relate	Show how things are related to or connected with each other or how one causes another, correlates with another or is like another.
Tabulate	Organize the main ideas into a scheme of headings such as a table of contents, but sometimes form into a table.
Trace	Follow the development or history of your subject from the point of its origin.
Summarize	Make a brief, concise account of the main ideas of a theme, concept, principle, development or procedure, omitting details and examples.

Verbs asking for certain specific characteristics or certain limited facts:

Compare	Show the similarities and differences of two or more subjects.
Contrast	Show the difference between two or more subjects.
Define	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.
Diagram	Describe with graphs, sketches, etc.
Explain	Account for by clearly stating and interpreting the details around a thing or make clear its character, causes, results, implications, etc.
Identify	Briefly state dates, people, places or events which set this fact or figure apart or makes it outstanding. Show that you know what it is.
Illustrate	Clarify by giving examples, comparisons, analogies, or by giving figures or diagrams.
Label	Point-out and name specific parts of a figure or illustration.
Prove	Establish that something is true by giving clear logical reasons and factual evidence.

Verbs asking for your supported opinion:

Choose/Select	Make a choice between one of several interpretations, explanations, etc.
Criticize/Critique	Analyze and judge something, either positively or negatively, as the case warrants. Support your conclusions with facts.
Evaluate	Carefully appraise the problem, citing both advantages and limitations. Emphasize the appraisal of authorities and your personal evaluation.
Interpret	Expound the meaning of something, make it clear and explicit and evaluate it in terms of your own knowledge and belief.
Justify	Prove or give reasons for decisions or conclusions; try to be convincing