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 main points.

**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.