



Key Words in Essay Topics & Exam Questions

Analyse	Take apart. Describe in turn the component parts of the subject, how they inter-relate and contribute to the whole.
Argue	Give reasons or present facts for and against an issue; try to prove by giving reasons or evidence for and against
Assess	Briefly analyse, then make a careful judgement of the worth of something (e.g. a theory) in the light of its truth, usefulness etc. Give supporting evidence. You might include your opinion to a lesser extent, or refer to other things (theories) in assessing the subject for a lengthy assignment.
Compare	Look for similarities, though differences may be mentioned, and come to a conclusion.
Contrast	Look for differences, though similarities may be mentioned, and come to a conclusion.
Criticise	Express your judgement about the merit (or correctness) of theories or opinions under consideration. Analyse the subject and describe to what extent it is supported by evidence. In a lengthy assignment you might also analyse alternative theories and describe the extent to which evidence supports them, and make a comparison.
Define	Give concise, clear meanings. Show that the distinctions implied in the definition are necessary to distinguish this particular item from all others in that class.
Describe	Give a detailed account of something as easy to understand as necessary, sometimes relating in narrative form.
Diagram	Present a drawing, chart, plan or other graphic representation. Label the diagram. Sometimes you may be required to add a brief explanation.
Discuss	This term appears often in essay questions and requires you to examine, analyse carefully and present considerations for and against items involved. An opinion is implied in the question and you may agree with, disagree with, or modify it, but always supported by evidence which you should examine from various points of view.
Enumerate	This specifies a list or outline. Recount the points required one by one, concisely.

Evaluate	Present a careful judgement of the problem, stressing both advantages and limitations. Evaluation implies authoritative and, to a lesser degree, personal opinions/ judgement of both advantages and limitations.
Explain	Clarify and interpret the material you present. State the 'how' and 'why', the results, and where possible causes. The aim is to make plain the conditions that give rise to whatever you are examining.
Illustrate	Explain or clarify your answer by using specific examples, a figure, picture, diagram, graph, drawing or other visual concepts.
Interpret	Express the meaning of, translate, exemplify (give examples of), solve, or comment upon the subject. Usually you will give your judgement or reaction to the problem, but always make use of evidence.
Justify	Give reasons for your decisions or conclusions. Evidence must be presented in a consistent form.
List	See Enumerate, above.
Outline	Give the main features of general principles of a subject. Emphasise structure and arrangement. Do not include minor details. Present the information in a systematic form.
Prove	This demands confirmation and verification. Show whether something is true or false. Establish something with certainty by evaluating and giving experimental evidence or by logical reasoning.
Relate	Emphasise connections and associations in descriptive form, or by a narrative which shows how things are connected to each other.
Review	Critically examine or make a survey of the subject. Analyse the major points of the problem in organised sequence and briefly comment on them.
State	Present in brief, clear form.
Summarise	Give the main facts in shortened form. Do not include details and examples
Trace	Follow the development or history of a topic step by step from some point of origin.