

## Mastering the Essay Test

Instructors frequently remark that a major reason that students don't receive higher grades on essay exams is because they do not follow directions even when these directions are included in the question. These instructors add that many students don't seem to know how to recognize words in questions that give directions on how to construct an essay answer and what to include.

A list of important words in essay questions/key words is given below to help students answer essay questions with the kinds of responses that instructors seek. As you begin an essay exam, highlight the keywords in the questions before answering the question. It will help you to answer the real question being asked.

<b>Analyze</b>	Explain, step by step or point by point while writing. Pay attention to who, what, where, when, why, and how in the answer. Include strengths, weaknesses, pros and cons, research for and against.
<b>Compare</b>	Stress similarities and differences between objects, concepts, or ideas. (For example: "Compare Operant and Classical Conditioning")
<b>Contrast</b>	Emphasize the dissimilarities, differences, or unique and distinguishing characteristics in the response.
<b>Define</b>	Clearly state the meaning, list qualities, traits, or characteristics.
<b>Describe</b>	Include traits, characteristics, or retell a story including those facts that summarize the essential features.
<b>Discuss</b>	Present significant characteristics, pros and cons, pertinent research, and the significance of each. Develop the arguments for and against or analyze the advantages, disadvantages, or problems.
<b>Evaluate</b>	Emphasize positive and negative aspects. Include opinions and support these with some kind of proof, information, or examples. Normally, instructors don't like unsupported opinions from college students.
<b>Examples</b>	Use brief stories, analogies, relevant events, or similar instances to support general statements and main ideas.
<b>Explain</b>	Give reasons or justifications for something, or present causes, rationalizations, or how or why something occurred.
<b>Interpret</b>	Cover existing understandings of a topic. Paraphrase, translate, condense, simplify, and/or diagnose as you write.
<b>Justify</b>	Present rationale, reasons for conclusions, recommendations, or results. Use proof, research, examples, or quotes to support justifications.
<b>List</b>	Record topics in numerical, developmental, or chronological order. Many times a brief description or explanation is expected but the questions will usually request it if desired. If in doubt, ask your professor.
<b>Outline</b>	Present your answer in terms of major points followed by clarifying details or facts. No elaboration is usually necessary. It is wise to find out if your instructors prefer listing only main and subordinate points in numbered phrases or in

	narrative paragraphs.
<b>Prove</b>	Include factual evidence, research, logic, and/or scientific proof that substantiate a case, a specific position, or a set of hypotheses.
<b>Relate</b>	Clearly point out connections or relationships between 2 or more ideas.
<b>Review</b>	Mention important ideas, major points, and/or list topics from lecture or the textbook. Sometimes review means critically evaluate and/or give your opinion.
<b>Summarize</b>	List major ideas, concepts, and consequences in a short paragraph or a sentence. Could also mean present a brief abstract of main ideas, compose a concise paragraph covering only the highlights and relevant details.
<b>Trace</b>	Discuss according to a pattern such as chronological order, according to a definite sequence, or by presenting phases or stages in order.

Adapted with permission from *Copyright © Dennis H. Congos, Certified Supplemental Instruction Trainer. University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL 32816*