

Essay Command Words

Analyze – centers on how and why something occurred; determine component parts and examine nature/relationship; judge value or character; identify and discuss positive/negative points

Assess the Validity – determine accuracy of a statement

**NOTE – statement does not have to be all true, it can be true in one instance/circumstance and false in another

Compare – centers on how/why; examine similarities/differences

Process: identify central components or aspects that are similar and/or different.
detail variations

- key terms include: similarly, also, in addition, too, both/all, agree, in common

Contrast – centers on how/why; examine dissimilarities or points of difference

**NOTE – similar to comparison – added constraint is that ONLY differences should be detailed

- key terms include unlike, differently, disagree, on the other hand, conversely, however, neither/none

Compare and Contrast – must address both aspects described above; it is important to present both in a balanced manner – do not shortchange one side.

Process: The key to a well developed answer is to insure subject of each supporting paragraph is point being compared and/or contrasted with that paragraph NOT subjects/topics listed in the prompt.

It is NOT acceptable to have one paragraph center on points of comparison and another on points of contrast.

Critique – make judgments as to merits/faults; may approve or disapprove; requires a commitment to not agreeing with some position presented and calls for presenting reasons for disagreement

Define – meaning of a word, phrase or concept; give special characteristics by which a concept, thing, or event can be recognized

Describe – give an account; develop a word picture – list features as concisely as possible with details (express, tell)

Discuss/Examine – The most vague of all keywords – it allows for virtually any type of response. – talk over; write about; consider from various points of view; debate; present different sides of

Process: Begin by deciding on a more specific course of language action, probably several, since discussion always demands a large answer. Quote, then refute. Follow with a counter-statement, then prove or illustrate, and so on.

Establish – determine or fix boundaries or extent of; tell what it is and what it is not; place it in its general class, and then differentiate from other members of that class

Evaluate – determine which factor is most important; usually requires ranking several events/factors and specifying which is more/least significant; similar to critique, but allows writer to present more than one view – Use care to signal transitions when presenting an argument for a different point of view

To what extent – requires specification of a cause and effect relationship followed by assessing which causes are more important

Explain – make clear/plain; tell the meaning of – asks for relationships: causal/temporal/systematic, for the “how” and why – may require accounting for differences of opinion or bad connections between theory and data

Illustrate – Use details and/or examples to show relationships and interactions; find and present supporting details and/or examples to explain/clarify essential attributes of concept

Impact – centers on cause and effect; identifies subject as pivot point only; answer should briefly discuss background/cause and then address in detail specific effects, both intended and unintended

Process: think in terms of consequences/result

Interpret – explain meaning of; make plain

Justify – present reasons/evidence/facts in support

Prove/Validate – establish truth/genuineness by giving factual evidence/logical reasons

Summarize – state/express in concise form; give main points

Synthesize – condense; describe main points, omit minor details; summarize work of more than one source to show common parts

Trace - follow course of; give description of progress