

## DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Gaining or losing points on an essay or short answer items on a test can depend on how well you understand what you are asked to do on each item. To receive maximum credit on an essay or short answer item on a test, it is important that you DO EXACTLY WHAT YOU ARE ASKED TO DO and NO MORE!

It is almost always a mistake to try to write down everything you know (or think you know) about a topic. You are seldom asked to do that. Among the many pitfalls in doing so are:

1. You may waste valuable test time because writing everything you know is so time consuming;
2. You may "talk around" the question without answering it;
3. You may stretch your knowledge of the topic thin and end up showing what you don't know as well as what you know.

Of particular importance are the verbs that tell you what to do on each essay item. The following verbs, with explanations of what you are to do when each verb appears, are common in essay or short answer test items. Some of these verbs have more than one meaning. Determine from the test item itself which is the most appropriate meaning.

### DESCRIPTION/ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

Word	Explanation	I know this word.	I need to know this word.
ANALYZE	Separate and examine the stated subject into the parts or elements of which it is composed. Tell what assumptions are necessary in order to accept an idea as valid.		
DEFINE	State the meaning of a topic.		
DESCRIBE	Give an account of; tell about; give a word picture of.		
DEVELOP	From a given starting point, evolve a logical pattern leading to a valid conclusion.		
DISCUSS/REVIEW	Write about a specific topic with a certain amount of detail. Bring out main points and organize your answer.		
ENUMERATE/LIST/ITEMIZE	Write an itemized list of concise statements.		
IDENTIFY	List several facts or events which support your main thesis; include a brief description of how these support the thesis.		
MENTION	This usually indicates that certain items need to be brought up in the essay but not in much detail.		
ORDER	Place in proper sequence. Arrange.		
OUTLINE/SUMMARIZE	Give the main points briefly. Make generalizations based on details already discussed.		
TRACE	Tell the sequence of events in the development of (or leading up to) a topic.		

## EXPLANATION/PROOF QUESTIONS

Word	Explanation	I know this word.	I need to know this word.
CITE/DOCUMENT	Give evidence related to the topic. Quote or refer to authorities.		
DEFINE/ FORMULATE	Classify subject, and specify its unique qualities and characteristics.		
DEMONSTRATE	Explain or prove by use of examples.		
DISCUSS	Talk about the topic. Present various views of a topic.		
EXPLAIN	Restate the subject in simpler terms; analyze causes.		
ILLUSTRATE	Explain fully by means of diagrams, charts, or concrete examples.		
PROVE/JUSTIFY	Demonstrate validity by test, logical argument, or evidence.		

## COMPARISON QUESTIONS

Word	Explanation	I know this word.	I need to know this word.
CLASSIFY	Place within a group with others having similar characteristics.		
COMPARE	State the similarities of two or more subjects. (Note: Some instructors use "compare" to mean both similarities and differences.)		
CONTRAST/ DISTINGUISH/ DIFFERENTIATE	State the differences of two or more subjects.		
RELATE	Give an account of a topic. Establish the connection between two or more subjects.		

## PERSONAL JUDGMENT QUESTIONS

Word	Explanation	I know this word.	I need to know this word.
CRITICIZE/ EVALUATE	Judge the subject on its merits or advantages and limitations. Justify your conclusions.		
INTERPRET	Explain and evaluate in terms of your own knowledge and beliefs.		
EXPLAIN WHY/ SUPPORT	Show why something is true or false. Provide evidence for your argument; don't just give vague generalizations.		