



Academic Support Center

Key Words Used in Essay Questions

Key Word

What You Should Do

Compare

Show how the items are similar as well as different; include details or examples.

Contrast

Show how the items are different; include details or examples.

Define

Give an accurate meaning of the term with enough detail to show that you really understand it.

Describe

Tell how something looks or happened, including who, what, where, when, why, and how.

Discuss

Consider important characteristics and main points.

Evaluate

React to the topic in a logical way. Discuss the merits, strengths, weaknesses, advantages, or limitations of the topic.

Explain

Give facts and details that make the idea or concept clear and understandable.

Justify

Give reasons that support an action, event, or policy.

Prove

Demonstrate or establish that a concept or theory is correct, logical, or valid.

Summarize

Cover the major points in brief form; use a sentence and paragraph format.