

## **IMPORTANT WORDS IN ESSAY QUESTIONS**

The following terms appear frequently in the phrasing of essay questions. You should know their meanings and answer essay questions according.

**COMPARE:** Look for qualities or characteristics that resemble each other (similarities). Some instructors, though, **mean** compare/contrast, or describe both similarities and differences, when they use the term compare; therefore, make sure that you understand which definition your instructor means.

**COMPARE/CONTRAST:** Describe both the similarities and the differences of the given topics.

**CONTRAST:** Stress the dissimilarities, differences, or unlikeness of things, qualities, events, or problems.

**DEFINE:** Give, concise, clear, and authoritative meanings. Don't give details, but make sure to give the limits of the definition. Show how the thing you are defining differs from things in other classes or groups.

**DESCRIBE:** Recount, characterize, sketch, or relate in sequence or story form.

**DIAGRAM:** Give a drawing, chart, plan, or graphic answer. Usually you should label a diagram. In some cases, add a brief explanation or description.

**DISCUSS:** Examine, analyze carefully, and give reasons pro and con. Be complete, and give details.

**ENUMERATE:** Write in list or outline form, giving points concisely, one by one.

**EVALUATE:** Carefully appraise the problem, citing both advantages and limitations. Emphasize the appraisal of authorities and, to a lesser degree, your personal evaluation.

**EXPLAIN:** Clarify, interpret, and spell out the material you present. Give reasons for differences of opinion or of results, and try to analyze causes.

**ILLUSTRATE:** Use a figure, picture, diagram, or concrete example to explain or clarify a problem.

**INTERPRET:** Translate, give examples of, solve, or comment on, a subject. Usually you should also give your judgment about the subject.

**JUSTIFY:** Prove or give reasons for decisions or conclusions, taking pains to be convincing.

**LIST:** As in **ENUMERATE**, write an itemized series of concise statements.

**OUTLINE:** Organize a description under main points and subordinate points, omitting minor details and stressing the arrangement or classification of things.

**PROVE:** Establish that something is true by citing factual evidence or by giving clear, logical reasons.

**RELATE:** Show how things are related to, or connected with, each other. Or show how one thing causes another, correlates with another, or is like another.

**REVIEW:** Examine a subject critically, analyzing and commenting on the important statements to be made about it.

**STAFF:** Present the main points or facts in condensed form, like the summary of a chapter, omitting details and illustrations.

**TRACE:** In narrative form, describe progress, development, or historical events from some point or origin.

Much of the list and the sense of the definitions was adapted from C. Bird and D. M. Bird's *Learning More by Effective Study* (New York: Appletome Century Crofts, 1945, pp. 195-98) by the Oklahoma State University Career Information and Learning Resource Center.