



Definition of Terms Used in Essay Examinations

- Compare:** When you are asked to compare you should examine qualities or characteristics in order to discover resemblances. The term compare is usually stated as compare with, and it implies that you are to emphasize similarities, but differences may be mentioned.
- Contrast:** When you are instructed to contrast, dissimilarities, differences or the unlikeness of associated things, qualities, events or problems should be stressed.
- Criticize:** In a criticism you should express your judgment with respect to the correctness or merit of the factors under consideration. You are expected to give the results of your own analysis and to discuss the limitations, good points and contributions of the work in question.
- Define:** Definitions call for concise, clear and authoritative meanings. In such statements details are not required, but boundaries or limitations of the definition should be briefly cited. You must keep in mind the class to which a thing belongs and whatever differentiates that particular object from all others in the class.
- Diagram:** For a question that specifies a diagram you should present a drawing, chart, plan or graphic representation in your answer. Generally, the student is also expected to label the diagram and, in some cases, to add a brief explanation or description.
- Discuss:** The term discuss, which appears often in essay questions, directs you to examine, analyze carefully and present considerations, both pro and con, regarding the problems or items involved. This type of question calls for a complete and detailed answer.
- Enumerate:** The word enumerate specifies a list or outline form of reply. In such questions you should recount in concise form, one by one, the points required.
- Evaluate:** In an evaluation question you are expected to present a careful appraisal of the problem that stresses both advantages and limitations. Evaluation implies an authoritative and, to a lesser degree, personal appraisal of both contributions and limitations.

- Explain:** In explanatory answers it is imperative that you clarify, elucidate and interpret the material you present. In such an answer it is best to state the “how and why”, reconcile any differences in opinion or experimental results and, where possible, state causes. The aim is to make plain the conditions that give rise to whatever you are examining.
- Illustrate:** A question that asks you to illustrate usually requires you to explain or clarify your answer to the problem by presenting a figure, picture, diagram or concrete example.
- Interpret:** An interpretation question is similar to one requiring explanation. You are expected to translate, exemplify, solve or comment upon the subject and usually give your judgment of or reaction to the problem.
- Justify:** When you are instructed to justify your answer, you must prove or show grounds for decision. In such an answer, evidence should be presented in convincing form.
- List:** Listing is similar to enumeration. You are expected in such questions to present an itemized series or a tabulation. Such answers should always be given in a concise form.
- Outline:** An outlined answer is an organized description. You should give main points and essential supplementary materials, omitting minor details, and present the information in a systematic arrangement or classification.
- Prove:** A question that requires proof is one that demands confirmation or verification. In such discussions you should establish something with certainty by evaluating and citing experimental evidence or by logical reasoning.
- Relate:** In a question that asks you to show the relationship or to relate, your answer should emphasize connections and associations in descriptive form.
- Review:** A review specifies critical examination. You should analyze and briefly comment in organized sequence upon the major points of the problem.
- State:** In questions which direct you to specify, give, state or present, you are called upon to express the high points in brief, clear, narrative form. Details, as well as illustrations or examples, may be omitted.
- Summarize:** When you are asked to summarize or present a summarization, you should give in condensed form the main points or facts. All details, illustrations and elaborations are to be omitted.
- Trace:** When a question asks you to trace the course of events you are to give a description of progress, historical sequence or development from the point of origin. Such narratives may call for probing or for deductions.