

Exam and Essay Command Words

What the question is really asking you to do

Describe

- say what something is like

Compare

- say how things are alike and different

Analyze

- break it into parts and show how they connect

Justify

- support your answer with reasons or evidence

Define

- give the exact meaning

Discuss

- give several sides, with reasons

Explain

- say how or why, with reasons

Contrast

- say how things differ

Evaluate

- weigh strengths and weaknesses and reach a judgment

Summarize

- restate the main idea briefly in your own words

Outline

- give the main points without detail

Interpret

- explain what it means or shows, such as in a graph or poem

Tip: Circle the command word in the question before you write a single line of your answer.