

# Common Essay Question Words

There are two kinds of common essay question words.



**Descriptive writing** describes what is there but does not go deeper or beyond what is there.



**Critical writing** questions will involve a bit of descriptive writing, but they really place their emphasis on the value, significance, and/or implications of the topic. These questions go beyond just describing what is there and ask you to be responsive to and critical of the literature, using evidence to support your position.

## Key Words for Descriptive Writing

<b>Define</b>	give the precise meaning and look at the other possible definitions
<b>Demonstrate</b>	show clearly using valid examples and evidence from the literature as well as logical arguments
<b>Describe</b>	give a detailed full account of the topic in an objective or unbiased way
<b>Explain</b>	make plain and clear using evidence and examples
<b>Explore</b>	be exploratory and objective as you overview all viewpoints and finally provide any of your own arguments
<b>Identify</b>	point out and describe
<b>Illustrate</b>	explain and make clear using examples
<b>Outline</b>	briefly describe the main points, features and or general principles of your topic. Emphasis structure and system but leave out the details
<b>Summarize</b>	clearly outline the main points of a matter, leaving out details
<b>Clarify</b>	show the parts of an issue or topic, making the meaning clear and getting rid of misunderstandings
<b>Compare</b>	look for similarities between two or more viewpoints or topics. You can go deeper by identifying the roots of these similarities and their significance. While you should focus on the similarities you can also briefly emphasize any differences
<b>Contrast</b>	bring out the differences of viewpoints or topics
<b>Trace</b>	follow the development of a topic, concept, or debate starting at its origin

## Key Words for Critical Writing

<b>Analyse</b>	break the issue down into basic parts. Critically examine each part using supporting evidence for and against and show how the parts inter-relate
<b>Evaluate</b>	weigh up the worth of a topic considering its usefulness or truth being sure to show your own opinion or verdict
<b>Justify</b>	show your grounds for a viewpoint or conclusions regarding the topic and be sure to address the main objections likely to be made against your position
<b>Review</b>	summarize the literature and carefully evaluate its worth
<b>Assess</b>	weigh up all views on the essay topic (not just yours) and make an informed judgement about its value, strengths, or weaknesses
<b>Discuss</b>	using sound reasoning and valid evidence, make a case for or against the topic, being sure to cover all aspects of the debate
<b>Examine</b>	establish key facts and important issues to do with the topic by looking at them in close detail
<b>To what extent?</b>	this phrase asks how far you agree with the statement or idea in the question. Thoroughly assess the topic and the evidence you use in presenting your own position