

Answering Essay Questions

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Teachers use certain **key direction words** in essay questions to let you know how they expect you to answer the question. Identifying the key words first will help you earn the most points you can.

When the question includes the following key words:

Describe *Discuss* *Explain* *List*
Outline *Prove* *Review* *State*

You should **write all the relevant information you know about the topic.**

When the questions includes the following key words:

Criticize *Evaluate* *Interpret* *Justify*

You must write your opinion backed up by facts.

Some key words require specific facts written in a specific way:

Compare: Write about the similarities.

Compare and Contrast: Write about the similarities AND differences.

Contrast: Just write about the differences.

Summarize: Give a brief account with a focus on main ideas.

Define: Write the meaning of the word, term, subject.

Illustrate: Give examples that explain the topic.

Diagram: Draw a chart, timeline, table, etc.

Strategies

1. Read all directions and questions before you start.
2. Find and circle the key direction words in each question so that you know what is required.
3. Decide how much time you need to spend on each essay.
4. For each question, jot down your ideas in the margin or a scrap piece of paper.
5. Answer the easiest questions first.
6. Restate the question in your introductory sentence.
7. Use essay structure: Introduction, supporting ideas, conclusion.
8. Be specific and use relevant facts.
9. Proofread for grammar, punctuation, clarity and legibility.