

# Common Words Used in Essay Exams

- Compare:** Examine qualities, or characteristics, in order to determine resemblances.
- Contrast:** Stress dissimilarities or differences of associated things.
- Criticize:** Express your judgment with respect to the correctness or merit of the factors under consideration.
- Define:** Write concise, clear, authoritative meanings, keeping in mind the class to which the item belongs, and whatever differentiated it from all other classes.
- Discuss:** Examine, analyze carefully, and present considerations pro and con regarding the problems or items.
- Enumerate:** A list or outline form of reply. Recount, one by one, in concise form, the points required.
- Evaluate:** Present a careful appraisal, stressing both advantages and limitations.
- Explain:** Clarify, elucidate, and interpret the material you present.
- Illustrate:** Present a figure, diagram, or concrete example.
- Interpret:** Translate, exemplify, solve, or comment upon the subject, and, usually, give your judgment or reaction.
- Justify:** Prove your thesis or show grounds for decision.
- List:** Present an itemized series or tabulation.
- Outline:** Give main points and essential supplementary materials in a systematic manner.
- Prove:** Establish something with certainty by citing evidence or by logical reasoning.
- Relate:** Emphasize connections and associations.
- Review:** Analyze and comment briefly, in organized sequence, upon the major points.
- State:** Express the high points in brief, clear form.
- Summarize:** Give in condensed form the main points or facts.
- Trace:** Give a description of progress, sequence, or development from the point of origin.

*Adapted from The Leader's Guide to Supplemental Instruction, University Missouri-Kansas City.*

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