



## KEY TERMS IN ESSAY QUESTIONS

In order to answer an essay question correctly, you first need to understand what the question is asking you to do. There are certain key terms in a question that help guide your response. Below are some common terms, with definitions, that can be found in an essay question.

### **Analyze**

Critically examine the text you are reading and look for arguments and evidence to support or deny the statement or look for elements of the topic that relate to each other.

*Example: Analyze the effects of immigration on Canadian economy.*

### **Compare**

Identify the similarities and differences between two or more elements.

*Example: Compare Princess Cruises to Disney Cruises.*

### **Contrast**

Point out any differences which are significant or note-worthy.

*Example: Contrast the government structures between Canada and the USA.*

### **Define**

Give the exact term a meaning and explain its importance.

*Example: Define cognitive dissonance and give an example.*

### **Discuss**

Essentially, this is a written debate where you are using your skill at reasoning, backed up by carefully selected evidence to make a case for and against an argument, or point out the advantages and disadvantages of a given context. Remember to arrive at a conclusion.

*Example: Discuss the importance of positive thinking, and how it relates to mental health.*

### **Explain**

Clarify a topic by giving a detailed description as to how and why it occurs, or what is meant by the use of this term in a particular context. Remember to define any key terms that help build your argument.

*Example: Explain why it's important for a company to know its target market.*

### **Identify**

Determine the key points within a topic as well as their implications.

*Example: Identify 3 major elements that resulted in the collapse of the Roman Empire.*

### **Summarize**

Give a condensed version drawing out the main facts and omit unnecessary information. Brief or general examples will normally suffice for this kind of answer.

*Example: Summarize the article below into 3 major points.*

### **References**

Student Learning Development (2009) *Essay Terms Explained*. Accessed 11/21/19.

<https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/writing/writing-resources/essay-terms>