

English Tutoring Lab Handouts

Writing a book report and writing a cause/effect essay

Key Directive Words Used in Essay Questions

Good answers to essay questions depend in part on a clear understanding of the meanings of important directive words. Always note what a question asks for. Be sure you have responded to the key directive words and have included in your answer ample support or evidence when called for. The instructor can only consider what you have written. Note how the following significant directive words differ:

- "Analyze" Separate or break into parts; examine and evaluate closely.
- "Compare" Show the similarities or likenesses of qualities or characteristics against a background of differences between two or more events, periods, people, ideas, problems, etc.
- "Contrast" Stress differences or dissimilarities against a background of similarity between two or more events, period, people, ideas, problems, etc.
- "Criticize" Exam closely and give your opinion or judgement of the merits and/or demerits of views mentioned; may include approval and/or disapproval supported by convincing factual evidence; include limitation and good points.
- "Define" Give clear, concise, and authoritative meanings. Make sure to give limits of the definition. Show how the thing you are defining differs from other things in a class.
- "Describe" Give a verbal account or word picture; give characteristics of or relate in sequence or story form.
- "Diagram" Give a drawing, chart, plan, or graphic answer. Label and add a brief explanation or description.
- "Discuss" Give pros and cons on an issue, event, person, etc. Consider it from various points of view; dig into causes, results, and possible implications; give details.
- "Enumerate" List or name by number reasons, attributes, causes, responses,
- items, results, advantages, etc.
- "Explicate" Analyze in detail the meanings, relationships, purposes, etc.

- "Evaluate" State your opinion pro and/or con about the value of something, its advantages, disadvantages, limitations, etc. You may include appraisal of authorities as well.
- "Explain" or "Interpret" Make clear or plain, usually in more simple or familiar terms; give meaning of; give examples; make it as concrete as possible.
- "Justify" Give good reasons, proof, or evidence for opinions or conclusions or decisions; present facts to support your opinion, position, or argument; be convincing.
- "List" As in "enumerate"; give an itemized series of concise statements as requested.
- "Outline" Organize a description or summary under main points and subordinate points, omitting minor details and stressing the arrangement or classification of things.
- "Prove" Establish convincing support by giving factual evidence or clear, logical reasons.
- "Relate" Show how things are connected with each other or how one causes another or correlates with another or is like another.
- "Review" Exam a subject critically, analyzing and commenting on the important statements to be made about it.
- "State" Present the main points in brief, clear sequence, including necessary illustrations or examples, but avoid excessive details.
- "Summarize" Give the main points or facts in condensed form, omitting details and illustrations.
- "Trace" Follow the course of a movement, event, development, process, or period from some point of origin, giving a description of the progress or highlights.

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