

Approaches to Writing for Students' High School Equivalency, College, and Careers

First Literacy Workshop – November 18, 2016

KEY WORDS FOR ESSAY EXAMS

from: http://faculty.ccp.edu/dept/learn_lab/Ace/key1.htm (Community College of Pennsylvania)

The following words are commonly found in essay tests. Understanding them is essential to success on these tests. A sample essay question for each key word is also provided.

Analyze – Break into separate parts and discuss, examine, or interpret each part

Analyze the effects of acid rain on a freshwater lake.

Compare – Examine two or more things. Identify similarities and differences

Compare the political systems of England and France.

Contrast – Show differences. Set in opposition.

Contrast the music of Beethoven and Bach.

Criticize – Make judgments. Evaluate comparative worth. This often involves analysis.

Criticize the efforts of law enforcement to catch the sniper.

Define – Give the meaning, usually a meaning specific to a subject. Definitions are usually short.

Define serendipity.

Describe – Give a detailed account. Make a picture with words. List characteristics, qualities, and parts.

Describe a favorite restaurant.

Discuss – Consider and debate the pros and cons of an issue. Write about any conflict.

Compare and contrast.

Discuss the ethical issues of cloning.

Enumerate – List several ideas, aspects, events, things, qualities, reasons, etc.

Enumerate the steps to prepare for a test.

Evaluate – Give your opinion or cite the opinions of experts. Include evidence to support the evaluation

Evaluate the argument for the legalization of marijuana.

Explain – Make an idea clear. Show logically how an idea is developed.
Explain the forces that shaped the U.S. Constitution.

Illustrate – Give concrete examples. Explain with word pictures.
Illustrate how the U. S. aided Japan’s becoming a world power after World War II.

Interpret – Comment upon, give examples, and describe relationships. Explain the meaning, and then evaluate.
Interpret Marx’s statement that “religion is the opiate of the people.”

Outline – Describe main ideas, characteristics, or events. (not necessarily with Roman numerals and/or letters).
Outline the causes of the Civil War.

Prove – Support with facts (especially those from class or the text).
Prove that man descended from apes.

State – Explain precisely.
State the reasons for the separation of church and state.

Summarize – Give a brief, condensed account. Avoid unnecessary details. Include conclusions.
Summarize Barbara Ehrenreich’s essay “In Defense of Talk Shows.”

Trace – Show the order of events or progress of a subject or event.
Trace the rise of the Taliban to power.