

# CLUE WORDS IN ESSAY QUESTIONS

Every essay question contains certain words called **clue words** that tell you exactly what to do. Clue words are extremely important in essay questions. Your instructor will not usually ask you to “write a short essay on Socrates.” Instead, s/he might ask you to “contrast the philosophy of Socrates with that of the Ionians.” Contrast is the clue word here. S/he has chosen this word because s/he wants a certain kind of answer. If s/he asks you to “list the parts of \_\_\_: s/he wants a list, not a story or an argument. List is the clue word here.

CLUE WORDS	ACTION REQUIRED
<b>ANALYZE</b>	Find the main ideas and show how they are related and why they are important.
<b>COMMENT ON</b>	Discuss, criticize, or explain its meaning as completely as possible.
<b>COMPARE</b>	Show both the similarities and differences.
<b>CONTRAST</b>	Show the differences.
<b>CRITICIZE</b>	Give your judgment or reasoned opinion of something, showing its good and bad points. It is not necessary to attack it.
<b>DEFINE</b>	Give the formal meaning by distinguishing it from related terms. This is often a matter of giving a memorized definition.
<b>DESCRIBE</b>	Write a detailed account or verbal picture in a logical sequence or story form.
<b>DIAGRAM</b>	Make a graph, chart, or drawing. Be sure you label it and add a brief explanation if necessary.
<b>DISCUSS</b>	Describe giving the details and explaining the pros and cons of it.
<b>ENUMERATE</b>	Name and list the main ideas one by one. Number them
<b>EVALUATE</b>	Give your opinion or some expert’s opinion of the truth or importance of the concept. Tell the advantages and disadvantages
<b>ILLUSTRATE</b>	Explain or make it clear by concrete examples, comparison, or analogies.
<b>INTERPRET</b>	Give the meaning using examples and personal comments to make it clear.
<b>JUSTIFY</b>	Give a statement of why you think it is so. Give reasons for your statement or conclusion.

<b>LIST</b>	Produce a numbered list of words, sentences, or comments. Same as enumeration.
<b>OUTLINE</b>	Give a general summary. It should contain a series of main ideas supported by secondary ideas. Omit minor details. Show the organization of the ideas.
<b>PROVE</b>	Show by argument or logic that it is true. The word “prove” has a very special meaning in mathematics and physics.
<b>RELATE</b>	Show the connections between things, telling how one causes or is like another.
<b>REVIEW</b>	Give a survey or summary in which you look at the important parts and criticize where needed.
<b>STATE</b>	Describe the main points in precise terms. Be formal. Use brief, clear sentences. Omit details or examples.
<b>SUMMARIZE</b>	Give a brief, condensed account of the main ideas. Omit details and examples.
<b>TRACE</b>	Follow the progress or history of the subject.

This list is too long for most students to memorize, but try to remember the six most often used clue words:

