

Words to Watch for in Assignments

The following words are commonly found in writing assignments and essay test questions. Understanding them is often essential to generating a successful response.

Analyze

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

Compare

Examine two or more things. Identify similarities and differences. Comparisons generally ask for similarities more than differences.

Contrast

Show differences. Set in opposition.

Criticize

Make judgments. Evaluate comparative worth. Criticism often involves analysis.

Define

Give the meaning; usually a meaning), specific to the course or subject. Determine the precise limits of the term to be defined. Explain the exact meaning. Definitions are usually short.

Describe

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

Discuss

Consider and debate or argue the pros and cons of an issue. Write about any conflict. Compare and contrast.

Enumerate

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

Explain

Make an idea clear. Show logically how a concept is developed. Give reasons for an event.

Evaluate

Give your opinion or cite the opinion of an expert. Include evidence to support the evaluation.

Illustrate

Give concrete examples. Explain clearly by using comparisons or examples.

Interpret

Comment upon, give examples, describe relationships. Explain the meaning. Describe, then evaluate.

Outline

Describe main ideas, characteristics, or events. (Does not necessarily mean write a Roman numeral/letter outline.")

Prove

Support with facts (especially facts presented in class or in the text).

Relate

Show the connections between ideas and events. Provide a larger context.

State

Explain precisely.

Summarize

Give a brief account. Include conclusions. Avoid unnecessary details.

Trace

Show the order of events or progress of a subject or event.

If any of these terms are still unclear to you, go to your unabridged dictionary. Thorough knowledge of these words helps you give the teacher what she/he is requesting.