

## Instruction words in essay and short answer questions

**Analyze:** Examine the statement or subject in a critical manner. This involves breaking the subject into separate parts and discussing and interpreting each part, e.g. cases, key factors, results, and then demonstrating how each part fits together to form the whole.

**Assess:** Briefly describe the subject, analyze the positive and negative characteristics, state results or consequences. Using these points to support your answer, offer an opinion or judgment on the value or the character of the subject.

**Cite:** Make mention of, bring forward as proof, e.g., Cite the reasons the philosopher Hobbes gives for saying that humans are inherently selfish and competitive.

**Compare:** Present similarities or resemblances between two things. Emphasize these similarities but also present differences, e.g., compare the British and Canadian parliamentary systems.

**Contrast:** State the ways in which the subjects are not similar, e.g., Contrast the Canadian parliamentary system with the American system of government.

**Criticize:** Make your own judgment about a subject, defining its merits and shortcomings. Give evidence for what you say, e.g., Criticize the conservative argument that NATO countries must maintain troops in Afghanistan for global security. Say what you think, why, and support your judgment with evidence.

**Define:** Tell the meaning or significance of the term, e.g., Define and state the significance of 'gerrymandering' as it applies to the Canadian electorate system.

**Describe:** Mention the chief characteristics of a situation or retell the central features of a story, e.g., Describe Dante's *The Inferno*.

**Discuss:** Give a complete and detailed presentation of the topic. Describe the subject, provide reasons on both sides of the argument or for various views held about the subject, e.g., Discuss the implications of a separate Palestinian state.

**Distinguish between:** Define each term to show the main differences between them, e.g., Distinguish between the following film genres: mystery and horror.

**Elaborate on:** Provide more specific details regarding the subject. Note the connection with or the impact of this subject on other related areas of thought.

**Evaluate:** Appraise the issue giving both advantages and disadvantages. Quote other sources if possible and include your opinion. Always support your opinions with evidence.

**Explain:** Give an interpretation of the subject which clarifies it. This may mean analyzing the causes or reasons for an event or situation, e.g., Explain the Communist Chinese government's shift from a closed economy to a market economy.

**Illustrate:** Give specific examples of something which demonstrates the meaning or situation, e.g., Illustrate what is meant by —the middle way in Buddhism.

**Interpret:** State the meaning in simpler terms, using your own judgement, e.g., Interpret George Bernard Shaw's ideas of heaven and hell in *Man and Superman*.

**Outline:** Organize your answer into main points and subordinate points. Make a short summary using headings and subheadings, e.g., Outline the wave particle duality of light.

**Relate:** Show the connection between the ideas mentioned in the question; how one influences the other. This does not mean compare and contrast. E.g. Relate the American and the French Revolutions.

**State:** Explain precisely, e.g., State the three dimensions involved in Weber's model of power.

**Trace:** Show the main points from the beginning to the end of an event, e.g., Trace the rise of Islamic fundamentalism at the end of the 20th century.