KEY WORDS IN ESSAY QUESTIONS

Verbs asking for everything:

**Comment**  Explain, illustrate, or criticize the meaning or significance of a subject.

**Describe**  Give either a detailed or a graphic account of a subject.

**Discuss**  Investigate a subject by argument, going into its pros and cons.

**Narrate**  Tell a story; that is, a series of events in the order in which they occurred. You may be also asked to interpret or explain something about the events you are narrating.

**Review**  Survey and examine a subject critically—either a summary, an analysis or criticism.

**State**  Describe a subject in precise terms or reproduce a definition exactly.

Verbs asking for main points:

**Analyze**  Break the subject up into the main ideas and discuss the main points.

**Enumerate**  Present a list of the main ideas composing the whole of the subject.

**List**  As in “enumerate,” write an itemized series of concise statements.

**Outline**  Summarize in a series of headings and sub-headings (theme, main ideas, supporting and subordinate ideas), often a two-stage outline omitting detail.

**Relate**  Show how things are related to or connected with each other or how one causes another, correlates with another or is like another.

**Tabulate**  Organize the main ideas into a scheme of headings such as a table of contents, but sometimes form into a table.

**Trace**  Follow the development or history of your subject from the point of its origin.

**Summarize**  Make a brief, concise account of the main ideas of a theme, concept, principle, development or procedure, omitting details and examples.

Verbs asking for certain specific characteristics or certain limited facts:

**Compare**  Show the similarities and differences of two or more subjects.

**Contrast**  Show the difference between two or more subjects.

**Define**  Give the meaning of a word by fitting it into a general category and then distinguishing it from closely related subjects, sometimes developed by examples and illustrations.

**Diagram**  Describe with graphs, sketches, etc.

**Explain**  Account for by clearly stating and interpreting the details around a thing or make clear its character, causes, results, implications, etc.

**Identify**  Briefly state dates, people, places or events which set this fact or figure apart or makes it outstanding. Show that you know what it is.

**Illustrate**  Clarify by giving examples, comparisons, analogies, or by giving figures or diagrams.

**Label**  Point out and name specific parts of a figure or illustration.

**Prove**  Establish that something is true by giving clear logical reasons and factual evidence.

Verbs asking for your supported opinion:

**Choose/Select**  Make a choice between one of several interpretations, explanations, etc.

**Criticize/Critique**  Analyze and judge something, either positively or negatively, as the case warrants. Support your conclusions with facts.

**Evaluate**  Carefully appraise the problem, citing both advantages and limitations. Emphasize the appraisal of authorities and your personal evaluation.

**Interpret**  Expound the meaning of something, make it clear and explicit and evaluate it in terms of your own knowledge and belief.

**Justify**  Prove or give reasons for decisions or conclusions; try to be convincing.