

Essay Exams Common Question Types

Identify	Explain	Compare	Argue	Assess
Questions which ask for short, direct answers and usually do not require fully developed essays. Ask yourself: “What is this idea or concept?” “What does this mean?” and “What are the main characteristics?”	Requires essays which are fully thought out and developed in as much detail as you have time for. Ask yourself: “Why is this the case?” and “What are the main points?”	Requires an analysis in essay form which emphasizes similarities, differences, and connections between these ideas or concepts. Ask yourself: “What are the similarities?” and “What are the differences?”	Requires that you take a position on an issue and defend your argument against reasonable alternatives. Ask yourself: “Why is this correct?” and “Why is this true?”	Involves describing acceptable criteria and defending a judgment on the issue, idea, or question involved. Ask yourself: “What does this idea mean?” “Why is it important?” “What are the strengths?” and “What are the weaknesses?”
Key Words: List, Summarize, Enumerate, Describe, Define, State	Key Words: Discuss, Analyze, Explain, Illustrate	Key Words: Compare, Contrast, Relate	Key Words: Prove, Justify	Key Words: Criticize, Evaluate, Interpret, Review

For Practice: Identify the key verb(s) in the sample questions below. What type of question are you being asked to answer? What type of approach should you use?

1. Discuss the differences between the movie version and the print version of the same story. Use specific examples from each version to argue which version is better.
2. Define what is meant by “freedom of the press.”
3. Argue whether computers will or will not simulate most aspects of human intelligence in the next ten years.
4. Explain how oxygen is absorbed in the lungs.
5. Explain what seems to be the source of aggression in human beings. What can be done to lower the level of aggression in our society?
6. Define briefly the systems approach to business management. Illustrate how this differs from the traditional approach.
7. Discuss the different services a junior college offers a community.
8. Compare the experience of owning a compact car to the experience of owning a full-sized car. Which would you rather own?