

Exam Preparation- Important Action words in Questions

Analyze

Separate and examine the elements

- Break the question/subject into its major parts
- Describe, define, explain, or interpret each part
- Explain how parts relate to each other
- Judge overall quality of what has been analyzed

Argue

Defend a position

- Provide reasons in support of your position
- Refute objections to your position
- Provide your objections to the opposing position(s)

Apply

Use an abstraction to explain a concrete situation

- Show how an abstract idea, concept, principle, model or method explains a concrete situation or solves a problem

Comment

Offer statements on something

- Critique, discuss, evaluate, explain, or illustrate the meaning of something and its implications

Compare

Demonstrate the similarities and differences between 2+ items

- Identify elements the comparison will be based on
- For each element, describe and support how items are similar or different
- Evaluate overall commonality and its significance in relation to what is being asked in the question

Contrast

Demonstrate the differences between 2+ items

- Identify elements that contrast will be based on
- For each element, describe and support how items are different
- Evaluate overall distinction and its significance in relation to what is being asked in the question

Critique

Make informed and discriminating judgments

- Identify positive/negative merit, validity/fallacy, etc.
- Offer support for your judgments

Define

State precisely the meaning of 'something'

- Give precise meaning in concise manner
- Meaning is usually specific to the academic discipline

Demonstrate

Explain/describe by use of experiments, examples, etc.

- Depending on context, 'demonstrate' could mean: to prove, provide evidence, or illustrate with an example

Describe

Give a mental picture or idea

- Identify main aspects, characteristics, components, and qualities
- Clarify through illustration, comparison, and contrast

Discuss

Explore various points of view

- Identify viewpoints and their respective positive/negative aspects
- Evaluate the positive and negative merits of a matter to provide an overall judgment on its validity, strength or worth

Evaluate

Determine the value of something

- Identify criteria by which something will be measured
- Appraise degree to which the matter satisfies the criteria
- Provide reasons that justify your appraisal
- Support your reasons with evidence and illustrations

Explain

Make plain or understandable

- In Science: provide a detailed presentation of the elements required to obtain the product
- In Social Sciences & Humanities: identify factors that influence outcome; provide evidence for each factor and demonstrate how factors are related

Summarize

Give a brief, condensed account

- Include conclusions
- Avoid unnecessary details