



KEY WORDS COMMONLY USED IN ASSIGNMENTS OR EXAMS

Analyze, Explain, and Discuss

Identify the parts of an idea, argument, or subject, and show the importance of those parts as well as their relationship to one another. Give the significance of the idea in relation to the context of the information you have learned in the portion of the course being examined or assigned.

Cause and Effect

How (cause), **why** (cause), **reasons** (cause), **results** (effect) are all commonly used cause and effect discussion points. Make sure you are clear about which is which. Look for *all* causes and *all* effects (or the most important ones if you are limited to a certain number). Rank them in relative importance and show how they are related.

Tip: If you write that Mary and Ann (for example) are related, the reader does not know if this means that they are sisters, friends, colleagues, etc. You must clearly write *what* the relationship is. Likewise, avoid saying that something “changed.” Instead, write about *how* it changed.

Compare and Contrast

Do not compare very similar items, and do not contrast obviously different items. Instead, look for *significant* likenesses and influences. Sometimes the word “compare” is used interchangeably for compare and contrast. Ask for clarification if you are in doubt.

Describe

Give a detailed account of something in a logical sequence. Show what it is, how it works, what it looks like, and/or what it is for. This does not include your opinion; it is an informative process only.

Evaluate

Demonstrate the value of something. This is your opinion, but it must be supported by evidence. For example, is the argument valid? How well does the theory apply to a particular situation? Does the item do what it says it can do? How does what you are evaluating compare to something similar? What do others say about its value? Clearly support every assertion you make.

Illustrate

Give examples and supporting details.

Prove and/or Show

Establish something as true or valid through logical argument or experiment.

Summarize

Give main ideas in a brief but clear format.