



# Analyzing Essay Exam Questions

Most essay questions have two requirements: task requirements and content requirements. Tasks tell you what to do and content defines the teacher's expectations for the essay's subject and its limits.

## Common TASK Words:

- **Analyze:** divide an event, idea, or theory into its component parts and examine each one in turn.
- **Compare and/or Contrast:** Demonstrate the similarities or differences between two or more events or topics. Be careful that each part of the essay deals with the same points.
- **Define:** Identify and state the essential traits or characteristics of something differentiating it from other (perhaps similar) things.
- **Describe:** Tell about an event, person, or process in detail, creating a clear and vivid image of it.
- **Evaluate:** Assess the value or significance of the topic.
- **Explain:** Make the topic as clear and understandable as possible by offering reasons, examples, and so on.
- **Summarize:** State the major points concisely and comprehensively.

That's the hard part; the content requirements are quite straightforward. The essay question will tell you how long it should be, what it should talk about, how many examples, etc. All you have to do is follow it!

## One-part Essay Questions:

- | (TASK)     | (CONTENT/TOPIC)  |
|------------|--|
| • Describe | the major effects of reconstruction.                         |
| • Discuss  | the function of the river in <u>Huckleberry Finn</u> .       |
| • Explain  | the advantages of investing in government securities.        |
| • Define   | the term "gender stereotype."                                |
| • Compare  | the stages of personality development in Piaget and Erikson. |
| • Discuss  | impressionism and expressionism in art.                      |

Practicing answering these types of questions will better prepare you to answer these prompt questions for essay assignments and essay exams.

If you have any questions, schedule an appointment with the Writing Center! We are always happy to help!