

EXAM CLUE WORDS

Short answer and essay questions usually include a clue word that tells the test-taker what to do. How you answer the question depends on the word used; misinterpreting the question can be disastrous. A list of common exam clue words and their meanings is below. Once you identify the clue word in a test question, you can use its meaning to work out the best way to respond.

Clue Word	Meaning
Analyze	To find the main ideas, how they are related and why they are important.
Comment on	To discuss, criticize, or explain its meaning as completely as possible.
Compare	To show both the differences and the similarities.
Contrast	To compare by showing the differences.
Criticize	To give your judgment or reasoned opinion of something, showing its good and bad points. However, it is not necessary to attack.
Define	To give the formal meaning by distinguishing it from related terms. This is often a matter of giving a memorized definition.
Describe	To write a detailed account or verbal picture in a logical sequence or story form.
Diagram	To make a graph, chart or drawing. Be sure to label it and add a brief explanation if necessary.
Discuss	To present arguments for and against a point of view and reach a conclusion. The arguments must be supported with appropriate evidence.
Enumerate	To list. Name and list the main ideas one by one.
Evaluate	To give an opinion, supported by some expert opinions, of the truth or importance of a concept. Show the advantages and disadvantages.
Illustrate	To explain or make clear by concrete examples, comparisons or analogies.
Interpret	To give the meaning using examples and personal comments to make something clear.
Justify	To give a statement of why you think something is so. Give reasons for your statement or conclusion.
List	To produce a list of words, sentences or comments. Same as enumerate.
Outline	To give a general summary. It should contain a series of main ideas supported by secondary facts. Show the organization of the idea.
Prove	To show by argument or logic that something is true. However, the word 'prove' has a very specific meaning in maths and physics.
Relate	To show the connection between things, telling how one causes or is like another.
Review	To give a survey or summary in which you look at the important parts and criticize if necessary.
State	To describe the main points in precise terms. Use brief, clear sentences. Omit details or examples.
Summarize	To give a brief, condensed account of the main ideas.

REFERENCES:

University of New South Wales (2009). Clue words for exams. Retrieved from <http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/exkey.html>