



What Does the Question Mean?

In most essay and exam questions there will be a key word which guides you towards the required treatment of the given subject matter. In order to successfully answer the question you will need to highlight and interpret these key words, targeting your writing accordingly.

Here are some of the most common key words and a suggested meaning for each.

- **Account for**
Explain the cause of
- **Analyse**
Separate down into its component parts and show how they interrelate with each other
- **Annotate**
Put notes on (usually a diagram)
- **Assess**
Estimate the value of, looking at both the positive and negative attributes.
- **Comment**
To make critical or explanatory notes/ observations
- **Compare**
Point out the differences **and** the similarities. This question needs to be carefully organised to produce a logical answer
- **Contrast**
Point out the differences only and present the results in an orderly fashion
- **Describe**
Write down the information in the right order

- **Discuss**
Present arguments for and against the topic in question. In discussion questions you may also give your opinion
- **Distinguish**
Identify the difference between.....
- **Evaluate**
Estimate the value of, looking at both the positive and negative attributes
- **Explain**
The word 'explain' means that you have to give reasons. You have to explain *why* rather than just *define*
- **Justify**
Here you will need to present a valid argument about why a specific theory or conclusion should be accepted
- **Outline**
Give the main features or general principles of a subject, omitting minor details and stressing structure
- **Relate**
 - *either* Show how ideas or events are linked into a sequence
 - *or* Compare or contrast
- **Review**
To make a survey of, examining the subject critically
- **Suggest**
This question may not have a fixed answer. Give a range of responses
- **Summarise**
State the main features of an argument, omitting all that is only partially relevant.
- **To what extent ...**
Asks you to justify the acceptance or validity of an argument stressing the need to avoid complete acceptance
- **Trace**
Follow the development or history of a topic from some point or origin