

Key Words: General Studies Mains Answer Writing

Define	To give in precise terms the meaning of something. Bring to attention any problems posed with the definition and different interpretations that may exist
Describe	Provide a detailed explanation as to how and why something happens
Discuss	Essentially this is a written debate where you are using your skill at reasoning, backed up by carefully selected evidence to make a case for and against an argument, or point out the advantages and disadvantages of a given context. Remember to arrive at a conclusion
Explain	Clarify a topic by giving a detailed account as to how and why it occurs, or what is meant by the use of this term in a particular context. Your writing should have clarity so that complex procedures or sequences of events can be understood; defining key terms where appropriate, and be substantiated with relevant research.
Elaborate	To give in more detail, provide more information on.
Illustrate	A similar instruction to 'explain' whereby you are asked to show the workings of something, making use of definite examples and statistics if appropriate to add weight to your explanation.
Demonstrate	Show how, with examples to illustrate.
Analyse [Critically]	Break an issue into its constituent parts. Look in depth at each part using supporting arguments and evidence for and against as well as how these interrelate to one another.
Assess	Weigh up to what extent something is true. Persuade the reader of your argument by citing relevant research but also remember to point out any flaws and counter-arguments as well. Conclude by stating clearly how far you are in agreement with the original proposition.
Compare	Identify the similarities and differences between two or more phenomena. Say if any of the shared similarities or differences are more important than others.
Contrast	Similar to compare but concentrate on the dissimilarities between two or more phenomena, or what sets them apart. Point out any differences which are particularly significant.
Examine [Critically]	Look in close detail and establish the key facts and important issues surrounding a topic. You should try and offer reasons as to why the facts and issues you have identified are the most important, as well as explain the different ways they could be construed.
Comment upon	Pick out the main points on a subject and give your opinion, reinforcing your point of view using logic and reference to relevant evidence, including any wider reading you have done.
Give an account of	Means give a detailed description of something. Not to be confused with 'account for' which asks you not only what, but why something happened.
To what extent	Evokes a similar response to questions containing 'How far...'. This type of question calls for a thorough assessment of the evidence in presenting your argument. Explore alternative explanations where they exist.
Critically evaluate	Give your verdict as to what extent a statement or findings within a piece of research are true, or to what extent you agree with them. Provide evidence taken from a wide range of sources which both agree with <i>and</i> contradict an argument. Come to a final conclusion, basing your decision on what you judge to be the most important factors and justify how you have made your choice