Direction Words Used in Essay Questions

**Compare**
Explain similarities and differences.

**Contrast**
Explain differences only.

**Criticize or evaluate**
Make a judgment about strengths and weaknesses, positive or negative aspects.

**Define**
Give a precise and accurate meaning.

**Describe**
Provide a detailed account.

**Discuss or explain**
Give reasons, facts, details that show you understand.

**Enumerate or list**
State points one by one and briefly explain.

**Illustrate**
Explain by using examples.

**Interpret**
Explain in your own words and discuss significance.

**Justify or prove**
Construct an argument for or against and support with evidence.

**Outline**
Describe in general and cover main points.

**Relate**
Show a connection among ideas.

**Summarize**
Briefly organize and bring together main ideas.

**Trace**
Describe a series of steps, stages, or events.