

POWER Method of Answering Essay Test Questions

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- P** What is the *Purpose* of the question? Make sure you know the difference between compare, contrast, discuss, define, trace, and evaluate.
- O** *Organize* and *Outline* your answer before you attack the blue book. Use a separate sheet of paper to develop your opening statement, the reasons why that statement is true, and a conclusion.
- W** Okay, now begin to *Write*. Using the outline, flesh out the facts, and add in new facts or ideas as they occur. You'll be amazed at how much you really know. Don't forget to double space in case you want to elaborate on a point later.
- E** *Edit*. Go back through what you've written. Make sure the sentences have a subject and a verb and make sense. Check grammar and spelling.
- R** *Review* and *Revise*. Make sure you've answered the question. Add in a sentence if necessary, or asterisk a paragraph and insert it at the appropriate place.

(over)

The Language of Essay Questions

There are several common key words and phrases used in essay questions. They are listed below along with the usual meanings of each:

- DISCUSS** Consider all important aspects, characteristics, or main points about the topic. Give as much information as possible.
- COMPARE** Discuss how items are the same. Mention all important similarities. Include details and examples. Some instructors use the word “compare” more generally, and intend that you should discuss both similarities and differences.
- CONTRAST** Discuss the differences between the items mentioned in the question. Show how the items differ by including details and examples.
- DEFINE** Give a clear meaning of the term, along with some detail to indicate that you really understand it. A good definition should show the limits or restriction of the term, as well as how it differs from similar things in its class.
- EXPLAIN** When explaining a concept, trend, or idea, you are expected to describe and include sufficient detail to demonstrate that you understand and have thought about the idea. Be as specific as possible, including examples, illustrations, and reasons.
- TRACE** In paragraph form, describe the development or progress of the particular trend, usually in chronological order.
- EVALUATE** React to the topic or problem in a logical way, applying theories and principles you have learned in the course. If available, include opinions of authorities, as well as your own reactions. Be sure to include reasons and the background information that you used in forming your *evaluation*.