Learning Skills

Understanding the Terms Used in Short-Answer or Essay Questions

Look for the key word in the instructions or question that tells you how to answer that problem. You will lose marks if you misunderstand what the instructor wants.

Discuss consider important characteristics and main points

Illustrate explain using examples or figures that clarify a point or idea

Describe recount, characterize, sketch or relate in a narrative form

Summarize cover the major points in brief form

Criticize express your judgment by discussing limitations & contributions

Explain give facts and details that make the idea clear & understandable;

reconcile any differences in opinion or experimental results

Compare show how items are similar, discover resemblances

Contrast stress dissimilarities or differences

Evaluate appraise the strengths and weaknesses of the topic in a logical way

Define give an accurate meaning of the term with sufficient detail;

differentiate the particular object from all others in its class

Trace describe the development of a process/event in chronological order

List recount, one by one, in concise form

Review analyze and comment briefly on the major points of the problem

Justify prove or show grounds for decisions using convincing evidence