



## Important Word Meanings

Good answers to essay questions depend in part upon a clear understanding of the meanings of the important directive words. These are words like explain, compare, contrast, and justify, which indicate the way the material of your answer is to be presented. Background knowledge of the subject matter is essential. But mere evidence of this knowledge is not enough. If you are asked to compare the work patterns of farmers and factory workers, you will get little or no credit if you merely describe them. If you are asked to criticize the Indian Removal policy of Andrew Jackson, you will not be answering the question if you merely explain how it operated. An essay is satisfactory only if it answers directly the question that was asked.

The words that follow are frequently used in essay examinations. Learn their meanings.

Analyze	to separate into parts; to examine in detail. <u>To analyze one's feelings is very difficult.</u>
Assess	judge the value or character of something; appraise; evaluate. <u>Assess the relative importance of social factors and economic factors as causes of the Reformation.</u>
Compare	examine to note similarities and differences. <u>Compare the leadership qualities of Lenin and Stalin.</u>
Contrast	compare in order to show unlikeness or points of difference. <u>Contrast the rights of serfs in Western and Eastern Europe.</u>
Criticize	make judgments as to merits and faults; criticism may approve or disapprove, or both. <u>Criticize the Alien and Sedition Acts.</u>
Define	give the meaning of (a word, phrase, concept); determine or fix the boundaries or extent of. <u>Define the term enlightened despotism.</u>
Describe	give an account of; tell about; give a word picture of. <u>Describe the events that led to America's entrance into World War II.</u>
Discuss	talk over; write about; consider or examine by argument or from various points of view; debate; present the different sides of. <u>Discuss the policy of internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II.</u>
Enumerate	mention or list separately; name one after another. <u>Enumerate the main points of the Bill of Rights.</u>
Evaluate	give the good points and the bad ones; appraise; give an opinion regarding the value of; discuss the advantages and disadvantages. <u>Evaluate the role played by the United States in the Westernization of Japan.</u>
Explain	make clear or plain; make known in detail; tell the meaning of; make clear the cause or reason of. <u>Explain how the Medici family was able to rule without holding office.</u>

- Illustrate make clear or intelligible as by examples. Illustrate the ways in which Europeans exploited Africa and Africans in the nineteenth century.
- Interpret explain the meaning of; make plain; present your thinking about. Interpret the processes by which medieval civilization declined.
- Justify show good reasons for; present your evidence; offer facts to support your position. Justify American isolationism in the 1930s.
- Prove establish the truth or genuineness of something by giving factual evidence or logical reasons. Prove that the industrial revolution was or was not a benefit to humankind.
- Summarize state or express in concise form; give the main points briefly. Summarize the major causes of the Protestant Reformation.
- Trace follow the course of; give a description of the progress of; ascertain by investigation. Trace the course of nineteenth-century French-German relations.





## WRITING GOOD PARAGRAPHS

A paragraph usually develops one central purpose or idea. For the writer, careful paragraphing is an aspect of accurate thinking and logical organization. For the reader, clear and orderly paragraphs help comprehension by marking thought units and giving a sense of separation and progression.

### 1) Express the main idea of a paragraph in a topic sentence

Most paragraphs contribute one block of thought within a theme, and usually that thought is summed up in one predominant sentence. The connection of that **TOPIC SENTENCE** to others in surrounding paragraphs should be easily apparent, and it should be clear how other sentences in the paragraph are tied to the dominant sentence and how they are related to each other. Nearly always the topic sentence comes at the beginning of a paragraph because that is where the reader needs to know the direction of the paragraph. Topic sentences supply that direction. Other sentences add evidence, make refinements, develop the main idea, but as a rule they do not control the purpose of the paragraph or reveal where the essay is going. Taken together topic sentences are a sort of skeleton, and reading only the topic sentences should show a writer whether his/her lines of thought are clear.

### 2) Write unified paragraphs. Be sure that each sentence is clearly related to the main idea.

Every sentence in a good paragraph bears on the main point. A good paragraph does not change its course and remain there or switch off to another point and then attempt to return. The length of a paragraph is usually decided by the importance and complexity of its central idea and the richness of detail that develops it.

### 3) Develop paragraphs adequately.

Do not omit examples, proof, explanations, or exceptions that make good paragraphs. Instead of merely mentioning points, you should develop and clarify them. Details flesh out your ideas. Paragraphs may develop their topics in many ways: They may define, classify, or move from cause to effect or effect to cause; from generalization to facts or from a body of facts to a generalization about them. Usually the material on a subject so clearly dictates its pattern that the writer does not have to decide to write a paragraph of a certain kind. One thinks about the subject and material, and the method takes care of itself: You might begin with the least important item and end with the most important, you might write everything about one point and then everything about another, or write alternating points of thought. Use transitions to show relationships between sentences within paragraphs. Transitional devices help the reader see how and why you progress from one point to another and how your ideas are related. They can contribute materially to clarity, coherence, and the movement of discussion.



# **HOW TO WRITE LESS BADLY**

## **1. Writing is an exercise.**

You get better and faster with practice. If you were going to run a marathon next year, would you wait for months and then run 26 miles cold? No, you would build up slowly. You might start on the flats and work up to more difficult terrain. To become a decent writer, write. Don't wait for that monster paper to work on your writing.

## **2. Set goals based on output, not input.**

"I will work for 3 hours" is a delusion. "I will type 3 double-spaced pages" is a goal. After you write 3 pages, do something else. If later in the day you feel like writing some more, good. But if you don't, then at least you wrote something.

## **3. Give yourself time.**

Many smart people tell themselves pathetic lies like, "I do my best work under pressure." It's just not true. If you are writing about profound things, why would you think that you can write something important off the top of your head in the middle of the night just before the deadline? Writers sit at their desks for hours, wrestling with ideas. Don't worry that what you write isn't very good or isn't immediately usable. You get ideas when you write.

## **4. Everyone's unwritten work is brilliant.**

And the more unwritten it is, the more brilliant it is. We have all met people who have all the answers. They can tell you just what they would write about and how great it would be. Don't be fooled. When you are actually writing and working as hard as you should be if you want to succeed, you will feel inadequate, stupid, and tired. If you don't feel like that, then you aren't working hard enough.

## **5. Write, then squeeze the other things in.**

Put your writing ahead of other work. Make sure you get in the habit of reserving your most productive time for writing. Don't do it as an afterthought or tell yourself you will write when you get a big block of time. Writing comes first.

## **6. Not all of your thoughts are profound.**

Many people get frustrated because they can't invent some grand analytical answer to big questions. So, they don't write at all. Start small. It is hard to know how your argument will work until you have actually started writing it down.



**7. Your most profound thoughts are often wrong.**

Or, at least they are not completely correct. "The Answer" will not come easily if the question is hard. You will learn by doing, and sometimes what you will learn is that you were wrong.

**8. Edit your work, over and over and over again.**

Have other people look at it. One of the great advantages of a university community is that we are mostly all in this together, and we all know the terrors of that blinking cursor on a blank background. Exchange papers with a spouse or friend--buy them a cup of coffee or a meal--and when you are sick of your own writing, reciprocate by reading their work. You need to get over fear of criticism or rejection. Nobody's first drafts are any good. The difference between a successful paper and a failure is not an innate talent or gift for writing. If you have trouble writing, then it's because you just haven't written enough.



## A DEFINITION AND DISCUSSION OF PLAGIARISM

The academic equivalent of a bank embezzler or manufacturer who mislabels products is the plagiarist, the student or scholar who leads readers to believe that what they are reading is the original work of the writer when it is not.

If we could assume that the distinction between plagiarism and honest use of sources is perfectly clear in everyone's mind, there would be no need for this explanation. But apparently even people of good intentions can be found guilty of plagiarism simply because they are unaware of the illegitimacy of certain kinds of "borrowing" and of the procedures for correct identification of materials used beyond those gained through personal and independent research and reflection.

The spectrum for plagiarism is a wide one. First, is word-for-word copying of another's writing without enclosing the copied passage in quotation marks and identifying it, both of which are necessary. It hardly seems possible that anyone of college age or beyond could do that without clear intent to deceive. Second, there is the almost casual slipping in of a particularly apt term that you have come across that so admirably expresses your own opinion that you are tempted to make it personal property.

Between these poles fall two other groups:

1) Close to outright or blatant deceit but more the result of laziness than bad intent is the patching together of random jottings made in the course of reading, generally without careful identification of their source, and then woven into the text, so that the result is a mosaic of other people's ideas and words, the writer's sole contribution having been the cement to hold the pieces together.

2) Indicative of more effort, though still dishonest, is the paraphrase, a skillful abbreviation or restatement of someone else's analysis or conclusion without acknowledgment. In actuality, the purpose of paraphrase should be to simplify or throw a new and significant light on a text. It requires much skill if it is to be honestly used and should rarely be resorted to by the student.

Failure to footnote appropriately, then, is plagiarism, which is academic dishonesty of the highest order. When an author claims words, thoughts, ideas, or interpretations that are not his/her own, either committed consciously or inadvertently, it is plagiarism.



# HOW TO WRITE GOOD

1. Avoid Alliteration. Always.
2. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
3. Avoid cliches like the plague. They're old hat.
4. Comparisons are as bad as cliches.
5. Be more or less specific.
6. Writes should never generalize.
- Seven: Be consistent!
8. Don't be redundant; don't use more words than necessary; it's highly superfluous.
9. Who needs rhetorical questions?
10. Exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement.





THE FUMBLERULES OF GRAMMAR (William Safire)

1. Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read.
2. Don't use no double negatives.
3. Use the semicolon properly, always use it where it is appropriate; and never where it isn't.
4. Reserve the apostrophe for it's proper use and omit it when its not needed.
5. Do not put statements in the negative form.
6. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
7. No sentence fragments.
8. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.
9. Avoid commas, that are not necessary.
10. If you reread your work, you will find on rereading that a great deal of repetition can be avoided by rereading and editing.
11. A writer must not shift your point of view.
12. Eschew dialect, irregardless.
13. And don't start a sentence with a conjunction.
14. Don't overuse exclamation points!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
15. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences of ten or more words, to their antecedents.
16. Hyphenate between syllables and avoid un-necessary hyphens.
17. Write all adverbial forms correct.
18. Writing carefully, dangling participles must be avoided.
19. It is incumbent on us to avoid archaisms.
20. Steer clear of incorrect forms of verbs that have snuck in.
21. If any word is improper at the end of a sentence, a linking verb is.
22. Take the bull by the hand and avoid mixing metaphors.
23. Avoid trendy locutions that sound flaky.
24. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies.