

How to Answer an Essay Question

Your assignments include answering short essay questions. These are there to help you develop your writing skills in biblical topics, analyze and master concepts, and hone your research and critical thinking skill set. Below are some suggestions for developing acceptable answers to essay questions.

1. Essay questions nearly always have key “direction” words which require care in answering. Such words and their intent are shown below:

<i>Direction Word</i>	<i>Intent</i>
Analyze	Examine critically to show essential features.
Criticize	Point out strong and weak points (evaluate).
Compare	Show differences and similarities (resemblances) between two or more concepts or things.
Contrast	Compare to show differences only.
Define	Give a clear, detailed, and precise meaning (who or what-never when or where).
Describe	List physical characteristics but often means discuss, explain, identify or give an account of.
Discuss	Present essentials and their relationships (comment).
Elaborate	Develop theme or idea in greater detail.
Evaluate	Appraise carefully, giving, positive and negative aspects (critique).
Explain	Clarify and interpret details of the problem, theory, etc. Present a step-by-step account of or analysis (how and why).
Illustrate	Explain or clarify by giving clear, pertinent examples (Give examples of).
List	Set down under each other a series of facts, names, dates, etc. Write a series of numbered items.
Outline	Organize facts by arranging them in a series of headings and subheadings to show relationships.
Prove	List all logical arguments supporting the statements.
Summarize	Present concisely all main points.

2. Once you discern the key direction of the question, organize your answer in a logical way. Your task is to develop a clear, coherent answer that addresses the issues implied in the essay question.
3. Most essay questions are of the discussion essay type involving your developing a coherent answer based on several concepts. Many discussion essays have several parts that logically follow each other. In composing your essay, you must first understand the question or topic, and then develop your answer in light of the evidence provided in your readings. Before developing your answer read

through the assigned readings and materials; then reread the information in the context of the question.

4. Be sure you have answered the entire question, that is, answer all parts of the question. A brief answer may illustrate incomplete comprehension of the material. An expanded answer, supported by references to known authorities, including your own thoughts and comments is best. Avoid "padding." A lot of rambling is a sure sign that a writer doesn't really know what the right answer is and hopes that somehow, something in that overgrown jungle of words was the correct answer.
5. When a question asks you to indicate yes or no, or whether you agree or disagree with a particular viewpoint, you should state your position explicitly in the opening line of the answer; then proceed in a step by step manner to provide evidence to support your viewpoint. Do not just assert something is true, prove it. What facts, figures, examples, tests, etc. support your point? In many cases, the difference between an A and a B as a grade is due to the effective use of supporting evidence.
6. Quote from your textbook as little as possible. However, when you do quote use quotation marks and cite your source, giving page numbers from your text and all bibliographical information for sources other than your text.
7. Write your essay in clear, coherent sentences that say exactly what you intend to say, using good grammar. Check your spelling.