

# Strategies for Subjective Tests

## *Test Taking*

Subjective exams ask you to write answers rather than choose from a set of possible answers. Thus, answering them is much like writing short papers on assigned topics. The information below provides you with information about the words instructors use in essay questions. It also provides guides for answering them. Essay exams require more labor from you.

<i>If You Are Asked to...</i>	<i>Then...</i>	<i>By Using Transitional Words Such As...</i>
COMPARE or match	identify similarities	similarly, in addition, also, too, as well as, both, in comparison, comparatively
CONTRAST or distinguish	identify differences	however, but, unless, nevertheless, on one hand, on the other hand, on the contrary, in contrast, although, yet, even though
DISCUSS or describe	provide details or features	to begin with, then, first, second, third
ENUMERATE, name, list, outline	identify major points	next, finally, outline, or, meanwhile, more, another, soon, now, while, later, at last
SEQUENCE, arrange, trace, or rank	list information in order	furthermore, later, before, after, during
DEMONSTRATE, or show	provide examples	for example, for instance, in other words, in addition, too, as an illustration, to illustrate, also
RELATE or associate	show associations	as a result, because, this leads to, if...then, in order that, unless, since, so that, thus, therefore, accordingly, so, yet, consequently
SUMMARIZE, paraphrase, or compile	provide a short synopsis	any of the above transition words
APPLY	show use for	any of the above transition words
CONSTRUCT, develop, or devise	create	any of the above transition words
EXPLAIN, defend, or document	give reasons for support	any of the above transition words
CRITICIZE or analyze	review or evaluate features or components	any of the above transition words

These steps below will aid your efforts in taking essay exams.

1. **Examine the question.** Its wording indicates how you should organize and write your answer. Some questions feature a combination of organizational patterns rather than a single type.
2. **Choose a title.** Even though you won't necessarily title your paper, a title helps you focus your thoughts and narrow your subject.
3. **Outline or map your response before you write.** This listing of main points keeps you from omitting details.
4. **Have a beginning, middle, and end.** Topic and summary sentences make your answer seem organized and complete.
5. **Use transitional words.** The key words in each question help you identify the transitions you need for clarity.
6. **If you run out of time, outline the remaining questions.** This shows your knowledge of the content, if not your writing style. Partial responses often result in partial credit.
7. **Proofread your answers.** Check spelling, grammar, and content.
8. **If a question confuses you, write any thoughts you have about the topic on the back of your paper.** This helps you focus attention and increases recall.

Source: *Study Methods and Reading Techniques*, Rhonda Atkinson and Debbie Longman, West Publishing.