

## Clues to Writing Better Essay Answers

When taking essay tests, look for clues given in test questions or statements that direct how to select and compose a correct answer. These clues are called direction words.

### 4 Types of Direction Words in Essay Questions

1. **Subject Words** tell you which subject(s) you are to write about (circle or put SW above them). Examples of **Subject Words** are psychosis, Krebs cycle, reaction, percent composition, mitosis.

*Sample test item:* List the 5 phases in **mitosis** and describe what happens in each phase?

2. **Aspect words** narrow down what aspect of the subject(s) you are to write about or they indicate what you are to find in solving problems (underline or put NW above them). Aspect Words also tell you the quantity or quality your answer should be in for math, physics and chemistry problems. Examples of Aspect Words are techniques, traits, phases, grams, moles.

*Sample test item:* List the five phases in **mitosis** and describe what happens in each phase?

3. **Presentation words** tell you how to present the subject(s) you are writing about (box or put PW above them). Examples of **Presentation Words** are describe, list, define, analyze, examples.

*Sample test item:* List the five phases in **mitosis** and *describe* what happens in each phase?

4. **Qualifying words** limit the scope of your answer (star or put QW above them). Examples of **Qualifying Words** are all, six, only, 3, each.

*Sample test item:* List the five phases in **mitosis** and *describe* what happens in each phase?

## Follow Directions

Of equal importance to using **Directions Words** in taking essay tests is to *follow the directions*. One reason many learners lose points on essay tests is that they do not read test directions or choose not to follow them. After all the hard work a learner does, it is a shame when points are lost not because directions were not followed.

## Use a Simple Format to Organize an Essay Answer

One clear and easy to present an essay answer involves following these 2 easy steps:

- Step 1. In the first sentence, tell the reader what you are going to write about with a repeat of a portion of the question or statement. For example:

**Test item:** What are 5 reasons for not disbanding the United Nations?

**1st Sentence:** *The United Nations should not be disbanded for five reasons.*

**Step 2.** Identify *each point* you are presenting. For example: *One reason the U. N. should not be disbanded is...*

### Example

**1. What are 5 reasons for not disbanding the United Nations?**

*The United Nations should not be disbanded for five reasons. One reason the U. N. should not be disbanded is...*

*A second reason the United Nations should not be disbanded is...*

*A third reason is...*

*Moreover, the U. N. should be kept together because...*

*Finally, we should avoid disbanding the U. N. because...*

Writing essay answers in this format may be somewhat monotonous but it's clear, precise, and uncreative. Many instructors prefer this style because they can see quickly if the facts they seek are included and presented clearly. It is unwise to make the grader painstakingly wade through a thick syrup of verbiage in search of important facts.

Smart writers of essay answers clearly and crisply presents exactly what questions ask or what statements require and avoids blurring answers with unnecessary information commonly referred to as "BS."