Prompts are words that explain how you should structure your response to an essay exam question.

1. **Explain**
   State your opinion and describe your thought process. Clarify the meaning of these words within the context of your course.

2. **Assess**
   Respond to the question and defend a judgment on the issue, idea, or question involved. The underlying questions to answer include “to what extent?” and “how well?”

3. **Compare**
   Analyze at least two different ideas in terms of their similarities and differences. You may also discuss the connections between these ideas.
**Compare**
Look for qualities that resemble each other, emphasize similarities, but also note differences.

**Contrast**
Stress the differences of ideas, concepts, events, and problems; also note similarities.

**Relate**
Show how ideas or concepts are connected to each other.

**4. Argue**
Take a position and defend your argument against reasonable alternatives.

**Prove**
Establish the truth of a statement by using evidence and logical reasoning.

**Justify**
Show strong reasons for decisions or conclusions; use convincing arguments based on evidence.

**5. Identify**
Give a direct answer. You may not be required to provide further explanation. These questions are not usually seen on essay exams. However, when they do appear, you are still expected to explain and elaborate upon your ideas.

**List**
Write a series of concise statements.

**Enumerate**
Write in a list or outline; make concise points one by one.

**Describe**
Recount, characterize, sketch, relate in a sequence or story.

**Define**
Give clear, concise, authoritative meanings.

**State**
Present main points in brief clear sequence; usually omit the minor details and examples.

**Summarize**
Give the main points or facts in condensed form; omit details and illustrations.

**Diagram**
Give a graphic answer, drawing, chart, plan, or schematic representation.

**More resources for essay exams**

Check out this resource to get more help and information on essay exam strategies:
Test and Exam Preparation – Queen’s University [http://sass.queensu.ca/exam-prep/](http://sass.queensu.ca/exam-prep/)