

Responding to Questions in Writing

Whether you are responding to a question for an in-class assignment or an exam question (short answer or longer essay), the focus is the same: the question.

Most questions will include the following components:

- Subject matter or topic
- Aspect or focus of subject matter or topic
- Instruction or directive word that tells the writer what to do

The instruction or directive word (or verb) will tell the writer what to do. It is important that you understand what this word (or words) is/are asking you to do. We do have provided some of the most common directive words and their definitions here:

- **Analyze:** Examine in very close detail; identify important elements or components
- **Argue:** Present a case for or against a proposition and support with evidence
- **Compare/Contrast:** Show how two or more things are similar and consider relevance or consequences of similarities; draw out differences and consider significance
- **Define (or Identify):** Present in detail the distinguishing traits of a term, subject, or event without interpretation or judgement
- **Interpret:** Explain in detail what something means to you and how you came to that understanding
- **Prove:** Provide evidence to establish that something is true; may also be required to demonstrate applications of what you've proven

Steps for Responding to Questions in Writing

1. Read the question closely. Underline and/or circle important information in the question.
 - a. Does it have multiple parts? If so, number them.
 - b. Locate the directive word (verb) in the question.
 - c. Locate the key term(s) in the question.
2. What is the question asking you? Make sure you know what the question is asking you to do before you start writing your response.
3. Create a plan for responding.
 - a. How much space do you have? Two to five sentences? Multiple paragraphs?
 - b. What type of answer does the question want? Academic? Personal? A mix of both?
 - c. What information do you need to provide in your response? Brainstorm ideas.
 - d. How will you organize your response?
4. Respond in complete sentences. Use keywords from the question in your response.
5. Re-read your response. Check to make sure you are thoroughly responding to the question.
 - a. Check for clarity. Is it clear what you are trying to say?
 - b. Check for mechanics and surface-level errors.

Write your own future!