AP United States Government and Politics

**AP ESSAY** **VOCABULARY**

These are the terms that you will encounter on an AP essay in United States Government and Politics. Each term requires a specific response or task from the essay writer. Become familiar with each of these terms and the task you must perform.

**IDENTIFY**

This term asks that you simply “identify” or state a specific example of the criteria in the question. Your response need be no longer than a sentence.

Example: Identify three institutional barriers to voting.

Reply: There are at least three institutional barriers to voting. They are difficulty with registration, confusion with the voting process and location of polling places.

**DEFINE**

This term asks that you simply supply the definition of the word or phrase given to you.

Example: Define Trial Balloon.

Reply: A trial balloon is a deliberate release of information, usually from the White House, to gage public opinion before an official announcement. It is intended to create deniability.

**DESCRIBE**

This term asks that you detail the functions, parameters, process of other matters that make up what you have been asked to describe. The easiest way to define the word describe is to simply say “describe it.”

Example: Describe one resource or characteristic of a national interest group that seeks to impact national policy.

Reply: the American Association of Retired People is comprised of a very large group of senior citizens. Its most valuable resource is that very membership. Most of them are over 60, receiving social security and Medicare benefits, and are active voters.

**EXPLAIN**

This term requires that you analyze and detail how one thing impacts another. It always requires that you describe some action or situation and give very specific contemporary examples of the situation you have been asked to explain.

Example: Explain two specific methods Congress uses to exercise effective oversight of the federal bureaucracy.

Reply: Step one – Identify a method Congress uses to oversee the bureaucracy.

Step two – Describe **how** it works

Step three – give at least on contemporary example of **how** Congress effectively used the method you identified and described.

Use the words “How” and “Why”

**DISCUSS**

This word requires that you do essentially the same thing you would do in a question that requires that you “explain” something.

Use the words “How and “Why”

**ANALYSE**

This word requires that you do essentially the same thing you would do in a question that requires that you “explain” or “discuss” something. However, when asked to analyze always identify the success or failure of the program or institution by using specific examples (even if they are made up).

Use the words “How and “Why”

IMPORTANT NOTE

Most frequently these words will appear together, in some combination, in an AP essay. That should not confuse you. Simply perform each task as it is asked.

The most important part of your essay will always be your thesis. Once you have established the thesis use these words as a guide in developing your essay.

It is not necessary to have a thesis statement and then write a formal essay. However, despite the fact that you are teaching them to pass the exam we have some responsibility to teach them good writing also. Students who elaborate in a well written essay can often gain points they might of missed by being too brief.