Understanding Direction Words

Discuss: Write as much as you can.
Sample Essay Question: Discuss the concept of “the imperial presidency.”

Describe: Write as much as you can: write about the subject in visual detail.

Explain: Write as much as you can; discuss reasons.
Sample Essay Question: Explain Dialectical Materialism.

Explain why the United States entered World War I.

Compare: Discuss Similarities.
Sample Essay Question: Compare democracy and totalitarianism.

Contrast: Discuss differences
Sample Essay Question: Contrast Freud’s and Jung’s theories of human personality.

Criticize (or evaluate): Discuss the good and bad aspects of advantages or disadvantages of a subject; rate or (literally) place a value on a theory, event, person, etc.
Sample Essay Question: Evaluate the effectiveness of the craftsman design in domestic architecture.

Justify: Give reasons or provide a reasonable defense of your judgment that something is Good, beneficial, or effective.
Sample Essay Question: Defend California expenditures on higher education.