DIRECTIVE WORDS

How to Decode the Question & Structure Your Mains Answer

A practical guide for UPSC • APPSC • TGPSC Mains

Core principle: The directive word tells you what the examiner expects. First identify the task, then decide the depth, balance, evidence and structure of the answer.

#	Directive / Question Tag	What NOT to focus on	What you SHOULD focus on
1	**Define / What** నిర్వచించండి / ఏమిటి	**Avoid:** Not the causes, reasons or process; mention these only if the question specifically requires them.	**Focus on:** Definition What the term/theme means Only what is asked
2	**Why** ఎందుకు	**Avoid:** Writing more about the theme than required or drifting into unrelated description.	**Focus on:** Reasons for why it is so Causes Factors responsible
3	**How** ఎలా	**Avoid:** Giving excessive factual detail instead of explaining the mechanism/process.	**Focus on:** Process Mechanism How the phenomenon unfolds or works
4	**Comment** వ్యాఖ్యానించండి	**Avoid:** Giving a generic answer without substantiation or refusing to take a reasoned position.	**Focus on:** Take a reasoned position Support it with arguments Use examples/evidence in favour of the position
5	**Demonstrate / Justify / Substantiate your views / reasons / arguments** నిరూపించండి / సమర్థించండి / మీ అభిప్రాయాలు, కారణాలు, వాదనలను బలపరచండి	**Avoid:** Making unsupported general statements or presenting only positives/negatives without evidence.	**Focus on:** Give evidence supporting the claim Use reports, facts, data and relevant events Connect evidence directly to the argument

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6	**Do you agree / think** మీరు అంగీకరిస్తారా? / అనుకుంటున్నారా?	**Avoid:** Listing too many negative points without answering the actual proposition.	**Focus on:** Clearly state your position Give reasons for your view Substantiate the position with evidence If appropriate, add suggestions or a qualification
7	**List out / Enumerate / Enlist** జాబితా చేయండి	**Avoid:** Writing an elaborate essay or explaining every point extensively.	**Focus on:** List exactly what is asked Use a clear point-wise format Keep each point concise
8	**Describe** వివరించండి	**Avoid:** Focusing on only one aspect or giving a monotonous, one-dimensional answer.	**Focus on:** Explain what it is / what exists Cover the relevant features Add examples where useful
9	**Explain / Elucidate** వివరించండి / స్పష్టీకరించండి	**Avoid:** Writing a vague answer, using unclear statements, or omitting examples/evidence where they are needed.	**Focus on:** Clearly show what / why / how Establish the relationship between ideas Use examples, facts or evidence to make the explanation clear
10	**Elaborate** విపులీకరించండి	**Avoid:** Focusing only on issues/challenges or giving a few short points.	**Focus on:** Address the full scope of what is asked Explain each major dimension in adequate detail Use examples/evidence where relevant
11	**Illustrate** ఉదాహరణలతో వివరించండి	**Avoid:** Giving only a theoretical explanation without concrete examples or visual support where appropriate.	**Focus on:** Explain the idea clearly Use suitable examples Diagrams/flowcharts may be used when they add clarity

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12	**Discuss** చర్చించండి	**Avoid:** Treating the topic as a one-sided argument.	**Focus on:** Cover what, why and how Discuss causes and consequences Include positives and negatives where relevant Add solutions/suggestions and conclude holistically
13	**Classify** వర్గీకరించండి	**Avoid:** Mixing all points together without a logical basis of categorisation.	**Focus on:** Categorise information under clear heads State the basis of classification when useful Keep categories mutually clear
14	**Differentiate / Distinguish** తేడాలను వివరించండి	**Avoid:** Explaining the two concepts independently without directly showing their differences.	**Focus on:** Identify the exact points of difference Prefer a table for clarity Compare on common parameters
15	**Compare and Contrast** పోల్చి తేడాలను చూపండి	**Avoid:** Listing only differences or discussing one side at much greater length.	**Focus on:** Mention similarities as well as differences Use common parameters Prefer a table when it improves clarity
16	**Analyze** విశ్లేషించండి	**Avoid:** Merely describing the topic or listing facts without breaking down the issue.	**Focus on:** Break the main idea into constituent parts Examine each part and its interconnections Draw a reasoned conclusion from the analysis
17	**Examine** పరిశీలించండి	**Avoid:** Giving a vague answer, making unsupported assertions, or focusing excessively on one side.	**Focus on:** Explore the topic in depth Support observations with causes, implications and evidence Consider other dimensions/alternative views Conclude with a reasoned assessment

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18	**Evaluate** మూల్యాంకనం చేయండి	**Avoid:** Simply praising or criticising the issue without establishing criteria or evidence.	**Focus on:** Assess both sides where relevant Discuss strengths and limitations Use evidence to judge significance/effectiveness Arrive at a reasoned conclusion
19	**Assess** అంచనా వేయండి	**Avoid:** Giving an unsupported judgement or discussing facts without assessing their significance.	**Focus on:** Break the issue into relevant positive/negative aspects Assess likely impact/effect Give a reasoned overall assessment
20	**Estimate** మొత్తాన్ని / పరిమాణాన్ని అంచనా వేయండి	**Avoid:** Making an arbitrary guess without a basis.	**Focus on:** State what could happen / what the likely magnitude may be Support the estimate with data, trends or logical reasoning Clearly indicate assumptions where necessary
21	**Briefly / Give a brief account of / A note of** సంక్షిప్తంగా వివరించండి / సంక్షిప్తంగా రాయండి	**Avoid:** Going too deep or spending excessive words on one dimension.	**Focus on:** Cover the key dimensions Explain each briefly Be concise without becoming superficial
22	**Critically** విమర్శనాత్మకంగా / సమీక్షాత్మకంగా	**Avoid:** Writing only one side, merely criticising, or listing negatives without suggesting a way forward.	**Focus on:** Present both strengths and weaknesses Identify limitations and concerns Discuss solutions/way forward where relevant Maintain a balanced, evidence-based approach
23	**To What Extent** ఎంతవరకు	**Avoid:** Simply stating facts without judging the degree to which the statement holds true.	**Focus on:** Define the extent using evidence Discuss supporting and limiting factors Show how far the proposition works/holds Give a qualified conclusion

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24	**Throw light on** వెలుగులోకి తేవండి	**Avoid:** Limiting the answer to a single dimension or repeating only the definition.	**Focus on:** Bring out the important dimensions Explain the relevant facts and context Use examples/data to illuminate the issue
25	**Outline** సంక్షిప్త రూపరేఖ ఇవ్వండి	**Avoid:** Giving excessive detail or focusing on only one aspect, especially only the negative side.	**Focus on:** Broadly cover all major aspects Use clear headings/subheadings Prioritise breadth over excessive depth

Remember: A strong mains answer does not merely know the topic—it answers the exact task set by the directive word.