

# Essay verbs

Verb	Description	
Account for	Show the reasons for something. Use evidence to explain it.	
Argue	Use evidence to demonstrate a theory or idea.	
Analyse	To analyse usually means to take a subject and look at the different parts (ideas, theories, factors, influences) that make it up. Think about the logical order you present those parts in. You should talk about how the parts relate to and affect each other. Discuss each part, using evidence and explain how and why that part is important to the whole. If there is evidence against, use this to debate the value of that part to the whole.	
Assess	Use evidence and arguments to determine the importance or value of something. Sometimes there will be a specific value to compare the subject to. Say how much...How important was...	
Balance	Use evidence to compare two viewpoints or ideas against each other. Try to give equal consideration to both and use critique to evaluate the evidence for both.	
Classify	Put things into groups based on a number of their characteristics. Evaluate the influence and importance each and the evidence for each characteristic in the thing(s) you are classifying.	
Clarify	Explain in simple steps. This may involve taking complex evidence from multiple sources and synthesising a clear argument from it.	
Compare	Describe and explain the similarities between two or more things. Use evidence to show where two or more things are similar. Compare is often used with contrast.	
Comment on	Look at the main issues on a topic and use the evidence for and against, to form an opinion.	
Consider	Use evidence to explain how you have formed an opinion on something. Explore the ideas in a logical order, presenting opposing views and debating them.	
Contrast	Describe and explain the differences between two or more things. Use evidence to show where two or more things are different. Compare is often used with contrast.	
Criticise	Examine the positives and negatives of something. Look at the evidence and make a judgement on how convincing it is. This might include looking at methodology, impact, conclusions drawn, logic and strength of argument, counter arguments and contexts such as age and limitations of data or ideas.	

Verb	Description	
Critically evaluate	Work out the value or validity of a subject by analysing the evidence for it. Like <i>criticise</i> it asks you to think about how much you agree with something, based on the evidence and how persuasive, powerful and convincing that evidence is. It asks you to use this critique to then give value to the subject, either to state its importance, or its worth, usually in a specific context or setting.	
Conclude	Bring together the results of your writing. Sum up the different sections of your work. Draw all the arguments together to form an overall picture. Tell the reader the main point they need to understand at the end of all the evidence, arguments and critique you have presented.	
Define	Define can be simple. Say what something is by explaining the precise meaning. These should usually be short, accurate and subject specific. Or define can be more complex, where you are being asked to take lots of elements and to create a definition of something, perhaps a complex idea or theory. You will have to explore the arguments and evidence for what you think should be included and excluded and explain why. Conclude by clearly stating your definition. Use the marks given and the rest of the wording to decide when you should give a simple or complex answer.	
Deduce	Use the evidence to understand something, reach a conclusion.	
Demonstrate	Use methods, examples and a logical progression of steps to explain how something works.	
Describe	Give clear, detailed, factual account of something. Break the subject down into steps, stages, or important factors and present them in a logical order.	
Determine	Work out or calculate something.	
Discuss	Debate, or argue the points that are important to the subject. Use evidence and talk about the pros and cons. Use the evidence to argue for or against the idea proposed. Be analytical and structure your argument.	
Examine	Give detailed accounts of the main topics or ideas in a subject. Discuss the importance and influence of each area and suggest possible interpretations.	
Evaluate	Use evidence and argument to work out the usefulness or importance of something. This is a critical writing style where the arguments for and against something are weighed against each other and then used to determine the value it has. The value might be in terms of its contribution to something (theory, knowledge, efficiency, a system or application), or its usefulness, its ability to tell us or show us something new. Use the evidence available to create your opinion and explain how the evidence has contributed to your opinion.	

Verb	Description	
Explain	Make something understandable, by presenting it in clear and logical steps. Give reasons and examples where necessary, define any specific terms, talk about any opposing arguments.	
Formulate	Use current understanding from evidence and theory to create a new idea, definition or interpretation of the subject.	
Give an account of	Show the important steps, stages or developments in the subject. This is mostly a factual task and requires logical presentation, often time based or through some other system.	
Give evidence for	Use examples from current research or understanding to show something.	
Identify	Select/point out/list, the relevant factors or information. Usually you will be expected (or specifically asked) to expand or justify through discussion and evaluation.	
Illustrate	Use specific examples to show or explain something.	
Interpret	Use your understanding of the issues, theory and information to translate or restate something, giving your opinion as to its value, use, or impact.	
List	Present the important facts in a logical order. These might be classes or states of an object, names, causes, terms or statements. List questions usually require short and accurate answers.	
Outline	Give the main important facts or features. Present them in a logical order.	
Review	Bring together and critique the current evidence and understanding on something. Break this down into key ideas and concepts and weigh the evidence for them. Draw a conclusion by looking at what the balance of evidence suggests.	
State	Use clear, brief and accurate language to present the major points.	
Summarise	Give an overview of the main points. Bring together the information to give a clear understanding.	

The information for this table was created by reviewing definitions from the following resources:

<http://www.csun.edu/~hcpas003/DirectiveVerbs.html>

[https://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/exams/specs/key\\_words.pdf](https://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/exams/specs/key_words.pdf)

<http://lsc.cornell.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Words-to-Watch-for-in-Essay.pdf>

[http://libweb.surrey.ac.uk/library/skills/writing%20Skills%20Leicester/page\\_01.htm](http://libweb.surrey.ac.uk/library/skills/writing%20Skills%20Leicester/page_01.htm)

[https://www.kent.ac.uk/ai/ask/documents/step\\_1\\_Instruction\\_verbs.pdf](https://www.kent.ac.uk/ai/ask/documents/step_1_Instruction_verbs.pdf)

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