

Essay Question Verbs

Some question verbs can be used interchangeably, while others require specific action. Understanding the verb in the question helps you to answer in an appropriate way.

Verb	Description
Account for	Provide an explanation for why something happened.
Apply	Use prior knowledge to discuss, relate to or explain the topic.
Argue	Propose reasons why a certain view or idea should be either supported or opposed. Use evidence and logical reasoning to attempt to convince the reader to accept your view.
Analyse	Deconstruct the essay topic into its core components. Each component must be investigated, using evidence and critique to form your argument. Explain the relationship between the components.
Assess	Investigate and give a judgement on the value of a topic or claim. An assessment takes a broad look at the argument or topic and provides views both for and against the authors stance. However, your stance on the subject should be clear in the writing.
Clarify	Describe the components of an argument, idea, or process in simpler terms. You may also need to explain any misunderstandings surrounding your topic of discussion.
Compare	Demonstrate and describe the similarities between the topics. Comparisons should not just be descriptive, they should also identify why the similarities are relevant.
Comment	Give an opinion on the subject, supported by evidence.
Contrast	Highlight the differences between topics. Explain why these differences are important.
Critique	Look the topic and any theories or opinions surrounding it. Use this evidence to offer a judgement on the subject.
Define	Outline the meaning of something in a precise manner. If the exact definition of the subject is disputed, draw attention to this.
Demonstrate	Using examples and evidence, show something about the subject.
Describe	Give an account of the key aspects, qualities or features of a given subject, concept or event.
Discuss	Describe both the advantages and disadvantages of a statement or argument. Use evidence to back up your points. Based on this evidence, arrive at some sort of conclusion about the subject.

Distinguish/ Differentiate	Highlight the differences between the topics.
Evaluate/ Critically evaluate	Appraise the value of an argument or subject by measuring its strengths and weaknesses, using evidence to support both sides. Provide a final judgement and ensure that it is clear how you arrived at this judgement.
Examine	Identify the factors or issues associated with the topic and highlight their relevance or importance to the subject.
Explain	Describe something with clarity, providing definitions and reasons where required. Your answer should provide the reader with a clear understanding of the concept.
Explore	Use various viewpoints to question and investigate a topic.
Give an account of	Focus on providing a description of the events or topics, rather than an explanation of them.
Identify	Highlight or draw attention to the key factors of the subject.
Illustrate	Use evidence and examples to show reasons for why something is so.
Justify	Support a stance, statement or argument by drawing on evidence in a logical manner. Address any objections to the viewpoint.
Outline	Provide a brief description of the main components or features of the topic.
Relate	Demonstrate the connection between the subjects.
Review	Summarise and critique the core features of the subject.
State	Clearly and concisely provide details on the topic.
Summarise	Draw together and highlight the essential points of a topic, leaving out unnecessary detail or information.
To what extent/ How far	Determine the truthfulness, value or contribution of the topic to the overall argument. Use evidence to support your answer.
Trace	Describe the events or history of a topic with respect to a particular order.

The following websites were consulted when creating this resource:

- https://www.kent.ac.uk/ai/ask/documents/step_1_Instruction_verbs.pdf
- <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/all-resources/writing/writing-resources/essay-terms>
- <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/undergrad/learning/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Important-words-in-essay-questions.pdf>
- <http://lsc.cornell.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Words-to-Watch-for-in-Essay.pdf>
- <https://www.lexico.com/grammar/how-to-understand-the-essay-question>
- <https://www.itseducation.asia/dictionary/essay.htm#>