Instruction Terms (Essay Writing)

These words will often be used when your tutors set your essay questions - it is a good idea to fully analyse your essay question before attempting to answer it. This means knowing how you should be answering the question as well as what you should be including. You should be describing, evaluating, analysing....


Account for

Give a clear explanation of something and evaluate (possible) causes/reasons.

Analyse

Examine the topic by dividing it into parts and looking at each part in detail; form judgements about each element and the whole.

Argue

Provide reasons for and/or against something, in an appropriate order, citing evidence, which may be other people’s research, or other kinds of facts/information

Assess

Judge the significance of something, referring to the special knowledge of experts wherever possible (i.e. referring to/quoting from other people’s work).

Comment on

Give your own opinion about something, supported by reasons and evidence.

Compare

Examine one thing in relation to something else, to emphasise points of difference or similarity

Criticise

Give your judgements about the good and/or bad qualities of theories/opinions supporting your decisions with reasons and evidence
Define

Explain the exact meaning of a word or phrase.

Describe

Give a full account or detailed representation of something.

Discuss

Consider something by writing about it from different points of view with supporting evidence.

Enumerate

List and mention items separately in number order.

Evaluate

Calculate the value/effectiveness of a theory/decision/object etc., including your own opinion, and supporting each point with evidence.

Examine

Look at or into critically or methodically in order to find out the facts of something; investigate; inspect; scrutinize; inquire into and test by carefully questioning.

Explain

Give reasons for or account for something, so it is clear/easy to understand.

Illustrate

Use examples or diagrams to explain something.

Interpret

Give your own opinion of the significance of something (give reasons/evidence wherever possible).

Justify

Give good reasons for decisions or conclusions, perhaps by referring to other texts.

Outline

Give the main features, facts, or general idea of something, omitting minor details.
Prove

Show something is accurate/true/valid by using facts, documents and/or other information to build your case.

Reconcile

Show how apparently conflicting things can appear similar or compatible.

Relate

Establish how things are connected or associated, how they affect each other or how they are alike.

Review

To examine an area and assess it critically.

Show

Explain something giving evidence or examples to establish a strong case.

State

Put something clearly and concisely.

Summarise

Give a brief, concise account of the main points of something (leaving out details).

Trace

Follow the cause or stages in development of something.