

Key Essay Question Words

Instruction word	What you are expected to do
Account [give an]	Describe.
Account for	Give the reason for. Not to be confused with 'Give an account of' which is only asking for a description.
Analyse	Give an organised answer looking at all aspects. Describe the main ideas in depth, showing why they are important and how they are connected.
Apply	Put a theory into operation.
Assess	Decide on value/importance. Discuss the strong and weak points of the subject. Make your own conclusion. Discuss the strong and weak points of the subject. Make your own conclusion.
Brief account [give a]	Describe in a concise way.
Comment on	Give your opinion. State your views on the subject clearly. Back up your points with sufficient evidence and examples.
Compare [with]	Discuss similarities; draw conclusions on common areas.
Compile	Make up (a list/plan/outline).
Consider	Describe/give your views on subject.
Contrast	Discuss differences/draw own view.
Criticise	Point out weak/strong points i.e. balanced answer. Express your own balanced judgement of the subject. Give views for and against, backed up with examples and references.
Define	Give the meaning of a term, concisely. Give clear concise meanings. State limitations of the definition (how is it used in your essay).
Demonstrate	Show by example/evidence.
Describe	Narrative on process/appearance/operation/sequence. Give the main features or characteristics of something or write about the main events or stages in a process.
Devise	Make up.
Discuss	Give your own thoughts and support your opinion or conclusion. Write about the subject in detail, giving points for and against, advantages and disadvantages. Give a balanced conclusion.
Evaluate	Decide on merit of situation/argument. Give your analysis of the importance, usefulness, accuracy etc. of the information. Include both sides of the argument, backed up with theories and references.

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Instruction word	What you are expected to do
Examine	Look at the subject in detail.
Exemplify	Show by giving examples.
Expand	Give more information.
Explain	Give reason for – say why. State clearly how and why you think something happens or why it is the way it is.
Explain how	Describe how something works.
HOW FAR/TO WHAT EXTENT?	Give your own opinion as to whether something is completely true or accurate, partly true or perhaps not true at all. Back up your points with references.
Identify	Pinpoint/list.
Illustrate	Give examples.
Indicate	Point out, but not in great detail.
Interpret	Express what something means in simple terms. Use specific examples to make clear points.
Justify	Support the argument for.... Use evidence and reasons to support your judgement. Make your points clearly and forcefully.
List	Make an organised list, e.g. events.
Outline	Describe basic factors. Give the main ideas, but do not go into too much detail.
Plan	Think how to organise something.
Relate	Show how things are connected or similar.
Report	Make an account on process, event.
Review	Write a report – give facts and views on facts. Give an overall view of the subject in a critical way. Pick out and analyse important parts of the subject.
Show	Demonstrate with supporting evidence.
Specify	Give details of something.
State	Give a clear account of...
Summarise	Briefly give an account. Write briefly about the main points or facts, omitting details. Use references to back up your conclusion.
Trace	Provide brief chronology of events/process.
Work out	Find a solution, e.g. as in a maths problem.