



Essay Instructions

Account for: Give reasons for or explain why something happens. You might need to explain the implications or causal relationships too.

Analyse: Look in detail at features, identify main points and be critical.

Argue: Make a case for a viewpoint and explain why this is more relevant than others.

Apply to: Take an argument or theory and use it to explain a given issue. State whether it is useful or not, and give alternatives.

Assess: Judge the value, then make arguments for and against. Judgments should be supported by evidence.

Comment: Identify and provide a discussion of the main issues. Be critical but avoid personal opinion.

Compare: Draw upon similarities between issues, and why these similarities are important, and what they indicate.

Contrast: Set two or more issues in opposition and indicate their differences, and suggest why one might be more valid than the other.

Compare & contrast: Do both, and show the relationship between items. You might also be required to justify a specific viewpoint in conclusion.

Consider: Look at the key findings of an issue and discuss their implications.

Critically evaluate/evaluate: Weigh supporting and refuting arguments and the strengths and weaknesses of both. Use criteria to evaluate all issues, so they are comparable. All evaluation should be critical!

Define: Provide the exact meaning and explain any problems or implications of the meaning.

Describe: Provide the main characteristics of something. Use the other components of the essay questions to assess the level of detail.

Devise: Create or think about your own solution to a given problem.

Differentiate: Discuss the relationships between issues. Provide a stance, backed with evidence.

Discuss: Write about the most important aspects of an issue and be critical, give arguments for and against and consider the implications.

Distinguish: Clarify two or more concepts. May require some evaluation.

Examine: Look at a concept in a lot of detail. Think critically about the individual facets. Usually a 'how' question.

Explain: Give a clear account of why something happens or is a particular way.

Illustrate: Clarify an issue or viewpoint by providing evidence.

Interpret: Give an explanation of why something is meaningful. Might be applied to data or research findings.

Investigate: Provide a deep and concise account of a particular topic, as compared to existing evidence. Typically used for research questions.

Justify: Give reasons for the validity of a particular argument, as backed by evidence, in support or to the contrary. Provide an indication of why viewpoints may differ.

Outline: Provide the main points of an argument, in a structured way. Might be used to encourage some critical analysis of theories!

Refute: Provide evidence to argue against a theory or point of view.

Relate: Demonstrate the similarities and connections between issues or arguments.

Review: Provide an account of an issue, drawing upon strengths, weaknesses and suggestions for improvement.

Report: Used interchangeably with *Review*. Might be used to indicate a need for a structural report.

Specify: Provide the details of a particular argument or issue or make suggestions for improvements or the future.

State: List the main features of an argument clearly and concisely. Often used in conjunction with another essay instruction.

Summarise: Similar to *Outline*. Draw upon the main points of a theory or an argument.

To what extent: Consider how far something is true or provides an outcome to a problem. Also consider the ways in which it is

not true or doesn't solve a problem and explain why. Usually indicates several viewpoints, so look into these and then make your own judgment on the extent.

Trace: Follow a pattern or chronological order of events or a process, from inception to present day.

Work out: Find a solution to a given problem and demonstrate how you arrived at your conclusion.

Content adapted from:

Cottrell, S. (2013). *The Study Skills Handbook (Fourth edition)*. Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.

Reid, T. (2018). Understanding Instruction Words in Academic Essay Titles [Blog]. Retrieved 26 November 2018 from <http://blogs.bath.ac.uk/academic-skills/2018/09/20/understanding-instruction-words-in-academic-essay-titles/>

University of Hull. (2018). Analysing essay titles [Webpage]. Retrieved 26 November 2018 from <https://canvas.hull.ac.uk/courses/778/pages/analysing-essay-titles>