

ESSAY TERMS EXPLAINED

Before you start an essay, you need to understand the question. To do this, you need to identify the instruction words – the words in

the question telling you what to do. Below is an explanation of some common instruction words you may come across in essay questions.

Instruction words	Meaning
Analyse	Find the main ideas, how they are related and why they are important.
Assess	Weigh up to what extent something is true. Point out any flaws and counter-arguments. Conclude by stating whether you are in agreement with the original position.
Compare	Identify similarities and differences between two objects, concepts or ideas. Include what similarities and differences are more important than others.
Contrast	Identify dissimilarities, differences, unique or distinguishing characteristics.
Critically evaluate or evaluate	Provide an opinion about whether a statement in a piece of research is true and whether you agree with it. Include evidence that agrees and disagrees with the statement. Conclude by listing the most important factors and justify why you agree/disagree.
Define	Clearly state the meaning, and list the qualities, traits and characteristics.
Describe	Provide a detailed explanation about how and why something happens.
Discuss	Make a case for or against an argument and reach a conclusion. Point out the advantages and disadvantages.
Elaborate	Give more detail and provide more information on a topic.
Explore	Adopt a questioning approach and consider a variety of different viewpoints.
Interpret	Demonstrate your understanding of an issue or topic.
Justify	Provide a statement of why you think something is so. Give reasons and provide a balanced argument by considering opinions that are contrary to your own before stating your conclusion.
Review	Summarise important points and criticise if necessary.
Summarise	Give a condensed version that includes the main facts and omits irrelevant information. Brief and general examples normally suffice for this kind of answer.

