



Language of Essays - Definitions

Account for	Give reasons for...
Analyse	Find the main idea/s of something by breaking it down into parts and discussing the importance of each part in detail and the way they are interrelated. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses.
Argue	Put forward the reasons and evidence for a particular viewpoint.
Comment on	Present your opinion. Discuss, criticise and explain the ideas.
Compare	Look for and discuss qualities and characteristics which are similar and different (focus mostly on similarities).
Contrast	Look for and discuss qualities and characteristics which are different.
Criticise	Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of opinions, give your views and discuss the evidence. How true is it and why?
Define	Give the exact meaning of a word, phrase or idea. Establish the boundaries of a topic. Show that the distinctions implied within the definition are necessary.
Derive	Present a logical sequence of steps to arrive at an expression, equation or result
Describe	Represent, picture or portray; say what something is. Give a vivid, detailed 'word picture' of the characteristics of a subject. Give a detailed account.
Determine	Arrive at an answer, showing necessary steps or strategies.
Diagram	A labelled drawing, chart, graph or plan.
Discuss	Consider a topic from various points of view. Investigate or give a detailed examination of a topic by means of argument, debating the pros and cons and implications.
Distinguish, Differentiate	List the ideas and say how they differ from each other.
Draw	Depict an object, idea or system pictorially in a clearly defined diagram or flowchart.
Enumerate	Give a list of the facts or elements of a topic. Outline, specify and describe.

Evaluate	Establish the value, quality, importance, merit, relevance, or appropriateness of something. Such judgment should be extensively supported by pertinent evidence.
Examine	Present the case in depth and investigate the implications.
Explain	Make clear; make known in detail. Clarify, interpret and spell out your arguments. In explaining the topic in detail, present a detailed account of the causes that appear to be relevant in understanding the present situation.
Expound	Make a clear and convincing argument for a definite and detailed opinion.
Find	Arrive at an answer by your own strategy, unless otherwise specified.
Generalise	Make a general statement on the basis of evidence given.
Identify	Establish or select.
Illustrate Exemplify	Support or disprove a general statement by providing a specific instance or example. Use concrete examples to explain your argument, if possible using appropriate diagrams.
Indicate	Clearly name or state the relevant points, or mark a feature on a diagram.
Interpret	Attempt to bring out the meaning of an issue or a topic and make it clear.
Justify	Provide sound reasons, examples or evidence for point of view or to support conclusions. Prove or demonstrate the truth or falsity of a claim, or why certain decisions or actions were taken.
List	Make a list.
Narrate	Tell the story or give an account of an event or experience.
Outline	Briefly identify and outline systematically the main points or features of a topic. The emphasis should be on structure and relationship; leave out minor details.
Present	Put forward for consideration.
Prove	Provide factual evidence or use logical reasoning to demonstrate the truth or falsity of a claim or issue.

Quote	Repeat words from another person or source.
Relate	Show how facts are connected to each other.
Review	Survey a subject critically, emphasising the key points, analysing it and commenting on it.
Show	Include all intermediate steps in your calculations or argument.
Sketch	Give an overview of the main points without unnecessary detail.
State	Present the issue or view clearly and concisely without providing examples or details.
Suggest	Propose.
Summarise	Give a brief account of the main points in the right order, without details or examples.
Trace	Identify and describe the development of something from its origin.
Transcribe	Write your own accurate copy.
Verify	Validate a particular result.

© M. Kirkland, 2006.

Acknowledgment of Sources:

Assignments: Directive words 2003, Charles Darwin University, viewed 10 June 2006, <http://learnline.cdu.edu.au/studyskills/as/as_es_to_de_di.html>.

Elms, J 1996, *Essay assignments: A user friendly guide*, USQ Student Guild, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba.

Gilmore, C 2005, *QCS success: A student workbook for QCS Test preparation*, Mighty Minds, Gold Coast.