

Common Writing Prompt Terms

This list of writing terms and definitions can help you understand your writing assignment.



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Analyze	Break an issue into smaller parts. Look in depth at each part using supporting arguments and evidence for and against as well as how these relate to one another.
Assess	Explain to what extent something is true. Persuade the reader of your argument by citing relevant research but also remember to point out any flaws and counter-arguments as well. Conclude by stating clearly how much you agree with the original proposition.
Clarify	Make something clearer and, where appropriate, simplify it. This could involve, for example, explaining in simpler terms a complex process or theory, or the relationship between two variables.
Comment upon	Pick out the main ideas on a subject and give your opinion, reinforcing your point of view using logic and reference to relevant evidence, including any wider reading you have done.
Compare	Identify the similarities and differences between two or more phenomena. Say if any of the share similarities or differences are more important than others. "Compare" and "contrast" are often used together in writing prompts.
Consider	Explain what you think and have observed about something. Use appropriate evidence from external sources and your own experience to support your comments. Include views contrary to your own and how they relate to what you originally thought.
Contrast	Similar to "compare" but concentrate on the differences between two or more phenomena, or what sets them apart. Explain differences that are particularly significant.
Critically evaluate	Give your verdict as to what extent a statement or findings within a piece of research are true, or to what extent you agree with them. Provide evidence from a wide range of sources which both agree with and contradict an argument. Come to a final conclusion, basing your decision on what you think are the most important factors and justify how you have made your choice.
Define	Give the meaning of something in precise terms. Bring to attention any problems posed with the definition and different interpretations that may exist.
Demonstrate	Show how, with examples to illustrate.
Describe	Provide a detailed explanation as to how and why something happens.
Discuss	This is a written debate where you use your skills at reasoning, supported with carefully selected evidence to make a case for or against an argument, or point out the

	advantages and disadvantages of a given context. Remember to arrive at a conclusion.
Elaborate	To give in more details, provide more information on.
Examine	Look in close detail and establish the key facts and important issues surrounding a topic. This should be a critical evaluation and you should try to offer reasons why the facts and issues you have identified are the most important, as well as explain the different ways they could be construed.
Explain	Clarify a topic by giving a detailed account as to how and why it occurs, or what is meant by the use of this term in a particular context. You should make complex procedures or sequences of events clearly understandable, define key terms where appropriate, and support your ideas with relevant research.
Explore	Adopt a questioning approach and consider a variety of different viewpoints. Where possible reconcile opposing views by presenting a final line or argument.
Give an account of	Give a detailed description of something. (This is not the same as "account for," which asks you not only what, but WHY something happened.)
Identify	Determine the key points to be addressed and their implications.
Illustrate	Similar to "explain," show the workings of something, using definite examples and statistics if appropriate to support your explanation.
Interpret	Demonstrate your understanding of an issue or topic. This can be the use of particular terminology by an author, or what the findings from research suggest to you. If interpreting research findings, comment on significant patterns or causal relationships.
Justify	Make a case by providing a body of evidence to support your ideas and points of view. To present a balanced argument, consider opinions which may go against your own before stating your conclusion.
Outline	Explain the main points, emphasizing global structures and interrelationships (the big picture) rather than minute detail.
Review	Look thoroughly into a subject. This should be a critical assessment (for example, the advantages and disadvantages); don't just describe the subject.
Show how	Present, in a logical order the stages and combination of factors that lead to something. Reference relevant evidence to support your ideas.
State	Specify in clear terms the key aspects of a topic without being overly descriptive. Refer to evidence and examples where appropriate.
Summarize	Give a condensed version, focusing on main facts and not extra details. Brief or general examples are normally sufficient for this kind of writing.
To what extent	Similar to questions containing "How far..." This type of questions ask for a thorough assessment of the evidence in presenting your argument. Explore alternative explanations where they exist.

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