



USING THE RIGHT INSTRUCTIONAL VERBS

Analyse

Examine in very close detail and break an issue into its constituent parts. Look in depth at each part using supporting arguments and evidence for and against as well as how these interrelate to each other.

Compare

Look for similarities and differences between two or more things, problems or arguments. Perhaps, although not always, reach a conclusion about which you think is preferable.

Contrast

Set in opposition to each other two or more things, problems or arguments in order to identify clearly their differences and their individual characteristics.

Criticise

Identify the weaknesses of certain theories, opinions or claims, and give your judgement about their merit. Support your judgements with a discussion of the evidence and the reasoning involved.

Define

Outline the precise meaning of a word or phrase. In some cases it may be necessary or desirable to examine different possible, or often used, definitions.

Describe

Give a detailed or graphic account, keeping to the facts or to the impressions that an event had upon you. In history this entails giving a narrative account of the events in the time sequence they occurred.

Discuss

Investigate or examine by argument; sift through the arguments and the evidence used to support them, giving reasons for and against both sides; examine the implications. It means playing devil's advocate by arguing not just for the side of the argument that you support, but for the side with which you may have little sympathy.



| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Evaluate | Make an appraisal of the worth of something, an argument or a set of beliefs, in the light of their truth or usefulness. This does involve making your own value judgements, but not just naked opinion: they must be backed up by argument and justification. |
| Explain | Make plain; interpret an account for the occurrence of a particular event by giving the causes. Unlike the verb 'to describe', this does not mean that it is sufficient to describe what happened by giving a narrative of the events. To explain an event is to give reasons why it occurred, usually involving an analysis of the causes. |
| Illustrate | Explain or clarify something by the use of diagrams, figures or concrete examples. |
| Interpret | Reveal what you believe to be the meaning or significance of something; to make sense of something that might otherwise be unclear, or about which there may be more than one opinion. So usually this involves giving your own judgement. |
| Justify | Show adequate grounds for a decision or a conclusion by supporting it with sufficient evidence and argument; answer the main objections that are likely to be made to it. |
| Outline | Give the main features or the general principles of a subject, omitting minor details and emphasising its structure and arrangement. |
| Relate | This usually means two things. In some questions it means narrate a sequence of events – outline the story of a particular incident. Alternatively, it can mean show how certain things are connected or affect each other, or show to what extent they are alike. |
| Review | Examine closely a subject or a case that has been put forward for a certain proposal or argument. Usually, although not always, this means concluding with your own judgement as to the strength of the case. However, if it involves examining just a subject or a topic, and not just an argument or a proposal, it will mean just examining in some detail all the aspects of the topic. |
| State | Outline briefly and clearly the facts of the situation or a side of an argument. This doesn't call for argument or discussion, just the presentation of the facts or the arguments. Equally it doesn't call for a judgment from you, just reportage. |
| Summarise | Give a clear and concise account of the principle points of a problem or an argument, omitting the details, evidence and examples that may have been given to support the argument or illustrate the problem. |
| Trace | Outline the stages in the development of a particular issue or the history of a topic. |