

Academic keywords in essay titles

Account for: Explain why something happens; give reasons for it

Analyse: Examine in very close detail; identify important points and chief features

Comment on: Identify and write about the main issues, giving your reactions based on what you have read or heard in lectures. Avoid purely personal opinion.

Compare: Show how two or more things are similar. Indicate the relevance or consequences of these similarities.

Contrast: Set two or more items or arguments in opposition so as to draw out differences. Indicate whether the differences are significant.

Critically Evaluate: Weigh arguments for and against something, assessing the strength of the evidence on both sides. Use criteria to guide your assessment of which opinions, theories, models or items are preferable.

Define: Give the exact meaning of. Where relevant, show that you understand why the definition may be problematic.

Discuss: Write about the most important aspects of the topic (probably including criticism); give arguments for and against; consider the implications of.

Distinguish: Bring out the differences between two (possibly confusable) items.

Evaluate: Assess the worth, importance or usefulness of something, using evidence. There will probably be cases to be made both for and against.

Examine: Put the subject 'under the microscope', looking at it in detail. You may be asked to 'critically evaluate' as well.

Explain: Make clear why something happens, or why something is the way it is

Illustrate: Make something clear and explicit, giving examples or evidence.

Interpret: Give the meaning and relevance of data or other material presented.

Justify: Give evidence which supports an argument or idea; show why a conclusion or decisions were made, considering objections that others might make.

Narrate: Concentrate on saying what happened, telling it as a story

Outline: Give only the main points, showing the main structure.

Relate: Show similarities and connections between two or more things.

State: Give the main features, in very clear English (almost like a simple list, but in sentences).

Summarise: Draw out the main points only, omitting details or examples.

To what extent: Consider how far something is true, or contributes to a final outcome. Consider also ways in which the proposition is not true.

Trace: Follow the order of different stages in an event or process

Cottrell, S. 2003. *The Study Skills Handbook*. 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan