

DEFINITIONS OF INSTRUCTORS' TERMS (VERBS) (FOR WRITING ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS)

WHEN INSTRUCTORS
ASK YOU TO DO THIS

THEY MEAN FOR YOU
TO DO THIS

I. THESE VERBS ASK FOR EVERYTHING

- **COMMENT** To explain, illustrate, or criticize the meaning or significance of a subject
- **DESCRIBE** To give either a detailed or a graphic account of a subject
- **DISCUSS** To investigate a subject by argument, going into the pros and cons
- **REVIEW** To survey and critically examine a subject – either summary, analysis, or criticism
- **STATE** To describe a subject in precise terms or to reproduce a definition exactly

II. THESE VERBS ASK FOR MAIN IDEAS

- **ANALYZE** To break the subject into the main ideas that comprise it
- **ENUMERATE** To present a list of the main ideas comprising the whole of the subject
- **LIST** Same as enumerate above
- **TABULATE** To organize the main ideas into a scheme of headings as a table of contents; sometimes to form into a table, e.g., a record of speed reading progress
- **TRACE** To follow the development of history of your subject from the point of its origin
- **SUMMARIZE** To make a brief, concise account of the main ideas of a theme, concept, principle, development, or procedure while omitting details and examples
- **OUTLINE** To summarize in a series of headings and subheadings as Theme, main ideas, supporting subordinate ideas—often a two-stage outline omitting details

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III. THESE VERBS ASK FOR SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OR FACTS

- **COMPARE** To show the similarities and differences of two or more subjects
- **CONTRAST** To show the difference of two or more subjects
- **DEFINE** To give the meaning of a word by fitting it into a general category and then distinguishing it from closely related subjects, sometimes developed by examples and illustrations
- **DEMONSTRATE** To prove or explain by use of examples
- **DIAGRAM** To describe with graphs, sketches, etc.
- **EXPLAIN** To account for by clearly stating and interpreting the details around a thing to make clear its character, causes, results, implications, etc.
- **FORMULATE** To define in the form of a systematic statement
- **ILLUSTRATE** To clarify by giving examples, comparisons, analogies, or by giving figures or diagrams
- **PROVE** To demonstrate validity by test, argument, or evidence
- **RELATE** To establish the connection between one thing and another

IV. THESE VERBS ASK FOR YOUR SUPPORTED OPINION

- **CHOOSE** Generally, make a choice between one of several interpretations, explanations, etc.
- **CRITICIZE** Give your judgment on the merit of a theory or opinion of the truth of facts by discussing their source and background . . . or of the truth, beauty, or goodness of a thing. Criticize doesn't necessarily mean a "negative attack."
- **EVALUATE** To appraise or estimate the worth, value, usefulness, truth, beauty, goodness, etc. , of something—to some extent on the basis of personal opinion
- **INTERPRET** To expound the meaning of something; to make it clear and explicit, and to evaluate it in terms of your own knowledge and belief
- **JUSTIFY** To give good grounds for your decisions or conclusions (sometimes, however, your instructor's decisions or conclusions)
- **SELECT** See choose above