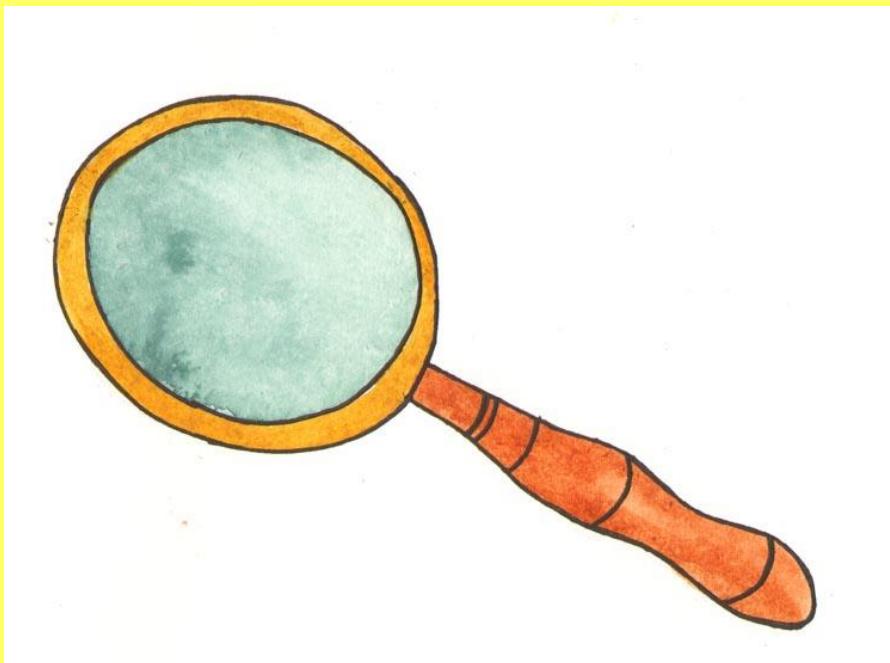


Analyzing the question



Analyzing the Question

When you read the essay question, it is vital to pay attention to the **verb** (the action word) in the question. This tells you what the essay marker wants you to do with the information that the rest of the question is concerned with.

There are many different verbs used in essay questions, each asking for a different slant of argument.

Here are listed some of the more common verbs used in essay questions, and what each verb asks you to do when answering the question:

Verbs and their meanings

Analyse	Break an issue down into its component parts, discuss them
Argue	Make a case using a debate style and structure, with arguments for and against a given point of view.
Assess	Estimate the value or importance of something, paying attention to positive and negative aspects.
Comment	Write explanatory or critical notes on.
Compare	Look for similarities between.
Contrast	Set in opposition in order to bring out differences.
Criticise	Pass judgment upon something with respect to its merits or faults.
Define	Set down the precise meaning of the word or phrase, giving sufficient detail so as to distinguish it. The

	dictionary provides definitions of all words in alphabetical order, with a description.
Describe	Give a detailed or graphic account.
Diagram	Use pictures, graphs, charts, mind maps and flow charts to show relationships of details to main ideas.
Discuss	Investigate or examine by argument, sift and debate giving reasons for and against.
Distinguish	List the ideas, and then say how they differ.
Differentiate	Like distinguish.
Enumerate	List all possible items.
Evaluate	To work out the 'value' of and to express that value in terms of something already known, or in comparison to something known.
Explain	To assign a meaning to information and state the importance of that information. In other words, give a simplified interpretation of information for your reader.
Identify	Pick out what you regard as the key features of a subject or given information, perhaps making clear the criteria you use in doing so.
Illustrate	Use a figure or diagram to explain or clarify, or make given information clearer by the use of concrete examples. This does not necessarily mean that you have to draw anything.
Interpret	Clarify or explain information, usually giving your own judgement.
Justify	Express valid reasons for accepting a particular interpretation or conclusion.
Outline	Indicate the main features of a topic or sequence of events, possibly setting them within a clear structure or framework to show how they relate to each other.

Paraphrase	Put in your own words.
Predict	Present solutions that could happen if certain variables were present.
Prove	Demonstrate or establish the truth or accuracy of a conclusion, giving a logical sequence of statements that lead from evidence to that conclusion.
Relate	Explain how things are connected to each other and to what extent they are alike or affect each other.
Review	Make a survey of information, examining the subject critically.
State	Set out a question, a statement or information in clear concise language.
Summarise	Give a concise account of the chief points or substance of the matter, omitting the details and examples.
Trace	Follow the development or history of a topic from some point of origin.
Verify	Confirm or establish the truth or accuracy of point of view with supporting examples, evidence and facts.