

Organizational Words in Writing Prompts

Following are organizational words in writing prompts for both in-class writing (“essay examinations”) and out-of-class assignments. This page will help you to interpret them.

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| Analyze | Examine carefully to determine why. Separate or distinguish the elements of anything complex. Break the idea into parts, and explain the various parts. |
| Assess | Examine critically, and estimate the merit, significance, or value. |
| Challenge | Ask for justification, question the statements provided. |
| Compare/ Contrast | Point out how things are similar and how they are different. (Sometimes, “compare” means both “compare and contrast.”) |
| Criticize/ Critique | Discuss the good and bad elements in a text, a film, or something else. Give evidence to justify your claims. |
| Defend | Maintain an argument with evidence; prove the validity of an argument with supporting evidence. |
| Define | Give the meaning of a term with enough detail to show that you really understand it. |
| Describe | Explain or write about; put into words a picture or an account. Tell how something looks, how something happened. Include how, where, who, and why. |
| Diagram | Make a drawing or outline of something and label its parts. |
| Discuss | Give reasons with details. Explore from different perspectives. Look at the pros and cons. |
| Effect | Whatever is produced by a cause; something made to happen by a person or thing; result. |
| Enumerate | Count off or list examples, reasons, causes, or effects—one by one. |
| Evaluate | Using evidence, discuss the strengths and weaknesses. |
| Explain | Make clear or interpret the reasons why something exists or is happening. |
| Identify | List and explain. |
| Illustrate | Make the point or idea clear by giving examples. |
| Interpret | Give the meaning of; use examples and personal comments to make clear. |
| Justify | Give reasons for your claim (in an academic argument). |
| List | List without details. |
| Outline | Make an organized listing of the important points of a subject. (This outline does not always have to look like the formal outline you may write for your English papers.) |
| Relate | Show the connections between things or how one thing causes another. |
| Respond | State your overall reaction (response) to the content, and then support your response with specific reasons and examples, often referring back to the reading. |
| Solve | Come up with a solution based on given information and your knowledge. |
| State | Give the main points in brief, clear form. |
| Summarize | Organize and bring together the main points, keeping out personal opinions. |
| Support | Back up the statements with evidence. |
| Synthesize | Pull together parts to make a whole—this requires looking for common attributes among the parts in order to link them together. |

Source: Johns, A. (2007). *AVID College Readiness: Working With Sources*. San Diego, CA: Avid Press.