

Prompt Keywords

Look for and highlight keywords that tell you what you need to do. You most likely will have multiple keywords in your prompt. Make sure you address each in your thesis/essay.

Key word	What it means
Analyze	Break down the argument. Look at the evidence and any claimed causes and effects.
Argue (for/against) Defend Take a stand	Support/argue for an argument or position with facts, reasons, examples. You may have to argue for one position over another, using persuasion to convince the reader your position is the best
Compare and contrast	Show the similarities and differences between 2 topics
Classify	Categorize items into different categories and explain why they fit those categories
Comment on Discuss	Examine or make observations about a subject
Define	State the meaning of a term; describe the basic nature of something
Develop	create something (such as a plan), expand or enlarge something
Evaluate Criticize	Judge the evidence/topic, discussing its strengths and weaknesses, whether it is valuable or not, and
Examine	Observe carefully; study or analyze in detail
Explain	Make an event, problem, or relationship clear and understandable
Explore	Conduct a careful examination of a subject; investigate all possibilities
Identify	Describe something that fits the characteristics indicated in the prompt
Interpret	Explain the meaning or significance of a subject; offer an explanation
Justify	Show that a position is right or reasonable with facts, reasoning, examples
Outline	Provide a general description covering the main points of a subject
Pros and cons	Arguments in favor of (pros) and opposed to (cons) a position or action

Key word	What it means
Reflect	Connect to your own personal experiences
Show or State	Demonstrate or explain by reasoning or step-by-step procedures
Summarize or Describe	Give a condensed description of an issue, event, or sequence of events
Support	Provide evidence for; show to be true with facts, reasons, examples
Tell	Give a detailed account of an event, sequence of events, or situation. This is usually a narrative description.
Trace	Describe a sequence of events; follow the development or progress of a subject. This is usually a methodical look at details.

Resources

- Pearson Prentice Hall, “Key Words in Writing Prompts” worksheet
- George Mason University Writing Center:
<https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides/understanding-your-instructor-s-prompt>