

Essay term	Definition	Example
Analyse	Break an issue into the parts that make it up. Look in depth at each part. Support your argument by using quotes drawn from the text you are analysing as evidence.	Analyse the following extract from William Shakespeare's <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , paying close attention to schemes and tropes.
Assess	Decide whether or not a statement is true. Persuade the reader of your argument by citing relevant research or offering quotes, but also remember to point out any flaws and counter-arguments as well. Conclude by stating clearly how far you are in agreement with the original statement.	Assess whether or not the play <i>The Winter's Tale</i> by William Shakespeare is a tragedy.
Clarify	Literally make something clearer and, where appropriate, simplify it. This could involve, for example, explaining in simpler terms a complex process or theory.	Clarify why <i>The Winter's Tale</i> by William Shakespeare is seen as a tragedy by some critics and as a comedy by others.
Comment upon	Pick out the main points of a subject and give your opinion, reinforcing your point of view using logic and reference to relevant evidence. Include any wider reading you have done.	Comment on Shakespeare's portrayal of deception and its dangers in <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> .
Compare	Identify the similarities and differences between two or more phenomena. Say if	Compare and contrast the responses to

	any of the shared similarities or differences are more important than others. ‘Compare’ and ‘contrast’ will often feature together in an essay question.	poverty, hardship and degradation shown by the characters Boesman and Lena in Athol Fugard’s play <i>Boesman and Lena</i> .
Consider	Say what you think and have observed about something. Back up your comments using appropriate evidence from external sources, or your own experience. Include any views which are contrary to your own and how they relate to what you originally thought.	Consider whether or not Shakespeare portrays Romeo and Juliet’s love as real and lasting, or as impulsive and fleeting in <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> .
Contrast	Similar to compare but concentrate on the dissimilarities between two or more phenomena, or what sets them apart. Point out any differences which are particularly significant.	Compare and contrast the portrayal of Jewish people in <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> by William Shakespeare and <i>The Jew of Malta</i> by Christopher Marlow.
Critically evaluate	Give your opinion as to what extent a statement or findings within a piece of research are true, or to what extent you agree with them. Provide evidence taken from a wide range of sources which both agree with and contradict an argument. Come to a final conclusion, basing your	Critically evaluate whether or not Shakespeare portrays women as equal to men in <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> .

	decision on what you judge to be the most important factors and justify how you have made your choice.	
Demonstrate	Show how, with examples to illustrate.	Demonstrate how John Donne uses absurd logic to persuade and amuse the reader in three of his poems.
Describe	Provide a detailed explanation as to how and why something happens.	Describe the way in which Satan's appeal is established in Milton's epic poem <i>Paradise Lost</i> .
Discuss	Essentially this is a written debate where you are using your skill at reasoning, backed up by carefully selected evidence to make a case for and against an argument, or point out the advantages and disadvantages of a given context. Remember to arrive at a conclusion.	Discuss how the possible advantages and possible pitfalls of marriage are shown in George Eliot's novel <i>Middlemarch</i> .
Elaborate	To give in more detail, provide more information on.	Elaborate on Benvolio's characterisation in <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> .
Examine	Look in close detail and establish the key facts and important issues surrounding a topic. This should be a critical evaluation and you should try and offer reasons as	Examine the repercussions of the fall of the American South on the

	to why the facts and issues you have identified are the most important, as well as explain the different ways they could be understood.	psychologies of various characters in <i>The Sound and the Fury</i> by William Faulkner.
Explain	Clarify a topic by giving a detailed account as to how and why it occurs, or what is meant by the use of this term in a particular context. Your writing should have clarity so that complex procedures or sequences of events can be understood, defining key terms where appropriate, and be substantiated with relevant research.	Explain how the repercussions of apartheid on the identities of Black South Africans is portrayed in <i>Boesman and Lena</i> .
Explore	Adopt a questioning approach and consider a variety of different viewpoints. Where possible reconcile opposing views by presenting a final line of argument.	Explore what motivates the adults in <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> by William Shakespeare to keep the two main characters apart or encourage their union.
Give an account of	Means give a detailed description of something. Not to be confused with 'account for' which asks you not only what, but why something happened.	Give a brief account of the events of <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> by William Shakespeare.
Identify	Determine what the key points to be addressed are, and the implications thereof.	Identify three concerns within the soliloquy 'To be or not to be'

		spoken by Hamlet in the eponymous play by William Shakespeare.
Interpret	Demonstrate your understanding of an issue or topic. This can be the use of particular terminology by an author, or what the findings from a piece of research suggest to you. In the latter instance, comment on any significant patterns and causal relationships.	Interpret the central concerns of the poem 'If You Don't Stay Bitter for Too Long' by Charles Mungoshi.
Justify	Make a case by providing a body of evidence to support your ideas and points of view. In order to present a balanced argument, consider opinions which may run contrary to your own before stating your conclusion.	Explain whether or not <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf</i> ends on a positive or negative note. Justify your point of view.
Outline	Convey the main points placing emphasis on global structures and interrelationships rather than minute detail.	Outline the historical background of the film <i>Titanic</i> , directed by James Cameron.
Summarise	Give a condensed version drawing out the main facts and omit superfluous information. Brief or general examples will normally suffice for this kind of answer.	Summarise the argument of the poem 'The Flea' by John Donne.
To what extent	Evokes a similar response to questions containing 'How far...'. This type of question calls for a thorough assessment	To what extent is <i>Death of a Salesman</i> a tragedy?

	of the evidence in presenting your argument. Explore alternative explanations where they exist.	
Verify	Explain whether or not a statement is true using relevant evidence.	Verify the statement that <i>The Crucible</i> by Arthur Miller is a warning against mass hysteria.

Please note that this table was adapted from <http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/writing/writing-resources/essay-terms>