

**Understanding Prompt Vocabulary
or “Do” Words- Prewriting Handout**

This handout provides a list and definitions of verbs that are often used in essay prompts. In order to successfully complete a writing assignment, students must thoroughly understand each of the following prompt terms and the type of writing that each term calls for. These words are also referred to as “Do” words because they refer to what type of essay is being prompted.

ANALYZE	To separate something into parts and discuss, examine, or interpret each part.
CLASSIFY	To put something into a category with things of a similar type. You might need to defend or explain how you arrived at a category and how one category differs from another.
COMPARE	To examine two or more things and to show their similarities.
CONTRAST	To examine two or more things and show their differences.
CRITICIZE	To analyze and make reasoned judgments about something. Please note that your judgments may be positive, negative, or both.
DEFINE	To give the meaning of a term or concept. A definition may be simple or complex. The available techniques for definition include examples, synonyms, antonyms, etymology (word’s history), or dictionary definitions.
DESCRIBE	To give the physical or non-physical qualities or characteristics of something.
DISCUSS	To offer the pros and cons of an issue. Sometimes “discuss” is used more broadly to include any of the other terms on this list. For example, it may be intended to mean “Write something interesting or significant about a topic.”
ENUMERATE	To make a list of something’s component ideas, aspects, or parts.
EVALUATE	To give a reasoned opinion about something, usually in terms of the merit of a particular work, idea, or person.
EXPLAIN	To describe how something functions. To give a definition for something.
IDENTIFY	To indicate what a thing is, what it is composed of, or when and where it occurred (very similar to describe).
ILLUSTRATE	To give examples or to describe something.
INTERPRET	To comment upon something or explain its meaning.
OUTLINE	To give a historical overview of something, or to describe its main ideas or parts.
PERSUADE	To urge or influence the audience to embrace your point of view. To argue specific points supported by evidence and relevant details.
PROVE	To argue a position by supporting your claims with factual evidence.
STATE	To explain something clearly and concisely.
SUMMARIZE	To give the main points or highlights of a longer work. To give a condensed account of an article, story, or event.
TRACE	To give a historical overview or outline of some change. To summarize a chronological or sequential order of events.