

**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.*

<b>ANALYZE</b>	To separate something into parts and discuss, examine, or interpret each part.
<b>CLASSIFY</b>	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.
<b>COMPARE</b>	To examine two or more things and to show their similarities.
<b>CONTRAST</b>	To examine two or more things and show their differences.
<b>CRITICIZE</b>	To analyze and make reasoned judgments about something. Please note that your judgments may be positive, negative, or both.
<b>DEFINE</b>	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.
<b>DESCRIBE</b>	To give the physical or non-physical qualities or characteristics of something.
<b>DISCUSS</b>	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.”
<b>ENUMERATE</b>	To make a list of something’s component ideas, aspects, or parts.
<b>EVALUATE</b>	To give a reasoned opinion about something, usually in terms of the merit of a particular work, idea, or person.
<b>EXPLAIN</b>	To describe how something functions. To give a definition for something.
<b>IDENTIFY</b>	To indicate what a thing is, what it is composed of, or when and where it occurred (very similar to describe).
<b>ILLUSTRATE</b>	To give examples or to describe something.
<b>INTERPRET</b>	To comment upon something or explain its meaning.
<b>OUTLINE</b>	To give a historical overview of something, or to describe its main ideas or parts.
<b>PERSUADE</b>	To urge or influence the audience to embrace your point of view. To argue specific points supported by evidence and relevant details.
<b>PROVE</b>	To argue a position by supporting your claims with factual evidence.
<b>STATE</b>	To explain something clearly and concisely.
<b>SUMMARIZE</b>	To give the main points or highlights of a longer work. To give a condensed account of an article, story, or event.
<b>TRACE</b>	To give a historical overview or outline of some change. To summarize a chronological or sequential order of events.