

# KEY VERBS FOR STRUCTURING ACADEMIC ASSIGNMENTS

## Academic Vocabulary – AWL (Academic Word List)

Most of your academic assignments require great detail to express what we want in a different language; however, we only write when we have to present it to our teachers and articulate our ideas in a formal way can be challenging. This article will explore most of the common verbs used in academic writing.

Let's look at some tasks students have been given:

- A. Discuss some of the problems **involved** in investigating attitudes to diet and health. Write a critical review of an investigation you have read about, or describe an investigation you yourself could **conduct**. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of different methods.

**Involved:** which are part of/included in

**Conduct:** organise and do

- B. **Examine** how industrial growth has affected any two developing countries. **Provide** statistical evidence where necessary and include a discussion of likely future trends.

**Examine:** look at or consider carefully and in detail

**Provide:** give

### Exercise 1

Match the verbs from A in the box on the left with their synonyms in the box on the right.

affect	attempt	calculate
challenge	demonstrate	identify
include	investigate	provide

involve	question	show	study	try
influence	give	distinguish		
compute				

### Exercise 2

- A. Complete the sentences with the correct form of verbs from B opposite.

- As can from \_\_\_\_\_ Table II, participation figures have been steadily falling \_\_\_\_\_ since \_\_\_\_\_ 1970.
- Different authors have \_\_\_\_\_ for the President's actions in different ways.

3. Mendel attempted to devise a system for \_\_\_\_\_ the many different types of pea plant that he grew.
4. It is often most effective to \_\_\_\_\_ your data in a chart or table.
5. The data we have collected \_\_\_\_\_ that there has been a downward trend with regard to job satisfaction over the last 50 years.
6. The aim of the research is to \_\_\_\_\_ a new software application which will help aviation engineers design more sophisticated aircraft .
7. The archaeologists should be able to use carbon dating techniques to \_\_\_\_\_ exactly how old the bones are.
8. Charles Darwin \_\_\_\_\_ to explain the existence of different species in \_\_\_\_\_ terms of \_\_\_\_\_ evolution.

### Noun forms of key verbs

In academic style, noun forms of key verbs are often used instead of the verbs.

key verb example	verb + noun form of key verb	example
<i>explain</i>	give/provide/offer an explanation (of/for)	The model provides an explanation for the differences between the two sets of data.
<i>explore</i>	undertake / carry out an exploration (of)	Chopin undertook an exploration of music genius
<i>emphasise</i>	place/put emphasis (on)	The hospital puts a lot of emphasis on training.
<i>describe</i>	give/provide a description (of)	The book gives a description of modern Europe.
<i>affect</i>	have an effect on	Climate change has an effect on sea levels
<i>prove</i>	offer/provide proof (that)	This research offers proof that bees are on the decline.

B. Rewrite the underlined verbs using nouns from the box.

<i>description</i>	<i>emphasis</i>	<i>explanation</i>	<i>exploration</i>
--------------------	-----------------	--------------------	--------------------

Erikson's (2005) book **explains** the changing patterns of educational achievement in children of poorer families. She **explores** the relationship between income, family

background and achievement at school and in further education. The book describes a study carried out in 12 inner-city neighbourhoods. Erikson's research emphasises the importance of support within the home.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

C. Complete the phrases with the correct noun forms of the verbs. Use a dictionary if necessary.

1. investigate = conduct, carry out an \_\_\_\_\_ into/of
2. illustrate = provide an \_\_\_\_\_ of
3. analyse = provide, carry out an \_\_\_\_\_ of
4. affect = have an \_\_\_\_\_ on
5. attempt = make an \_\_\_\_\_ to/at
6. classify = make, provide a \_\_\_\_\_ of

### Key verbs found in exam questions

- ANALYSE** Break an issue down into its component parts; discuss them and show how they interrelate.
- ARGUE** Make a case, based on appropriate evidence and logically structured, for and/or against some given point of view.
- ASSESS** Estimate the value or importance of something, paying attention to positive and/or negative aspects.
- COMPARE** Look for similarities and differences between.
- CONTRAST** Set in opposition in order to bring out differences.

CRITICISE	Give your judgement about the merit of theories or opinions or about the truth of facts, and back your judgement by a discussion of the evidence.
DEFINE	Set down the precise meaning of the word or phrase, giving sufficient detail so as to distinguish it.
DESCRIBE	Give a detailed or graphic account.
DISCUSS	Investigate or examine by argument; sift and debate giving reasons for and against.
EVALUATE	Use criteria or standards to make judgments about the strengths and weaknesses of a position on a particular issue.
EXPLAIN	Tell how things work or how they came to be the way they are. Give an account of a topic, process, or concept, providing evidence and reasons.
IDENTIFY	Pick out what you regard as the key features of something, perhaps making clear the criteria you use in doing so.
ILLUSTRATE	Use a figure or diagram to explain or clarify, or make it clear by the use of concrete examples.
JUSTIFY	Express valid reasons for accepting a particular interpretation or conclusion.
OUTLINE	Indicate the main features of a topic or sequence of events, possibly setting them within a clear structure or framework to show how they interrelate.
PROVE	Demonstrate or establish the truth or accuracy, giving evidence or a logical sequence of statements from evidence to conclusion.
RELATE	Explain how things are connected to each other and to what extent they are alike or affect each other.
REVIEW	To make a survey of, examining the subject critically.
SYNTHESIZE	Blend together research or information from several sources into one cohesive discussion.
STATE	Present in brief, clear form the main points.
SUMMARISE	Give a concise account of the chief points or substance of the matter, omitting details and examples.
TO WHAT EXTENT	Advance arguments in favour of a position or point of view and respond to or consider arguments opposed to that position or point of view.
TRACE	Follow the development or history of a topic from some point of origin.

*\*Adapted from Academic Vocabulary in Use, Michael McCarthy, Felicity O'Dell, 2016.*