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Directive Verbs (task words)

Directive verbs are those that give instructions about what you are required to do in the essay. Below is a list of the more common directive verbs used in essay briefs.

Analyse Break something down to identify the main ideas and component parts then show how they are related and why they are important.	Interpret Give the meaning. You give your own opinions, backed by evidence.
Comment on Discuss, criticise or explain the meaning of a situation or statement.	Justify Show why you think it is right. Give reasons for your statement or conclusion.
Compare Show both the similarities and the differences.	Outline Give a general summary of the main ideas, supported by secondary ideas. Omit minor details.
Contrast Compare by showing the differences.	Prove Show by argument or logic that it is true. You must provide adequate evidence.
Define Give the exact meaning.	Relate Show connections.
Discuss Examine, giving the details and the points for and against. You must develop a logical argument backed by sound evidence.	Review Make a survey in which you look critically at the important parts.
Enumerate List, name, and specify and describe the main ideas.	State Specify the main points in precise terms. Omit minor details.
Evaluate Give your judgement, after showing the advantages and disadvantages.	Summarise Give a concise account of the main ideas. Omit details and examples.
Explain Make plain, interpret, and account for in detail.	Trace Follow the progress or history of a topic.
Illustrate Explain or make it clear by concrete examples. Sometimes you may use a figure or a diagram.	



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Transition markers/phrases

An effective essay is a coherent whole, in which sentences within paragraphs and paragraphs themselves are connected, flowing on from one to another, leading the reader through the essay.

One of the ways to create cohesion between sentences is by using transition markers. Transition markers are words or phrases used to link sentences and paragraphs and to help the reader follow the direction of your argument.

Adding: and, also, in addition, moreover, furthermore	Endorsing: clearly, in particular, importantly, naturally, obviously
Contrasting: however, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the contrary, on the other hand, by contrast	Exemplifying: for example, for instance, in particular, to illustrate,
Clarifying: in other words, that is, in effect, to simplify	Sequencing: to begin with, firstly, secondly, lastly, finally
Conceding a point: although true, even though, although, despite this,	Stating a logical conclusion: therefore, thus, hence, as a result, consequently, accordingly, for that reason.
Summing up: to summarise, to conclude, in conclusion, clearly then	

While transition markers are an effective way of emphasising for the reader the relationship between one sentence and the next, there is little value in using them when the logical relationship between the sentences is already clear. In fact, over-using transition markers reduces their effectiveness; save them for the places where you need to guide the reader.