

## Biology Writing Resources - Assignment Key Words

This handout provides a list of definitions of verbs often used in writing assignments. Use this list when you consider the approaches your writing assignment requires.

- **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 to show their differences.
- **Critically Analyze or Critique** 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 (opposites), etymology (word 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 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, or describe, what a thing is, what it is composed of, or when and where it occurs.
- **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.
- **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.