Glossary of 'key words' for essay questions

**Account for** Explain the reason for or cause for something

**Analyse** Examine critically so as to bring out the essential elements; describe in detail; describe the various parts of something and explain how they work together, or whether they work together

**Assess** Decide to what extent something is true – using relevant research that considers different sides of the argument. State how far you are in agreement with the proposition in your conclusion

**Argue** Make a case, based on appropriate evidence for and/or against some given point of view.

**Compare** Describe the main points of similarity and difference between two or more things

**Consider** View or contemplate attentively; examine, inspect, scrutinize, estimate, judge

**Contrast** Describe the main points of difference between two or more things

**Critically Evaluate** Pass judgement on (in terms of quality/value/truth/validity), looking at sources that agree with and contradict an argument. Your judgement should be backed up with a discussion of the evidence or your reasoning

**Define** Give the precise meaning or determine the essence of, possibly noting other relevant and/or contrary definitions

**Demonstrate** Show by giving proof of evidence or reasoning

**Describe** Give a detailed account of something by reference to qualities, recognizable features, or characteristic marks; give a detailed or graphic account of

**Determine** Conclude through examination of evidence

**Discuss** Investigate and debate, giving reasons for and against, possibly noting implications

**Elaborate (on)** Write about a statement or a quotation that is part of the question; explain the statement or quotation in more detail and then state you point of view

**Estimate** Predict through consideration of evidence

**Evaluate** Critically assess the worth or value of, giving your opinion; if it is 'Evaluate the validity of X', X is probably inaccurate in some way; you must explain what is wrong with X before going on to state your opinion

**Examine** Look carefully at, and draw conclusions; divide into parts and describe each part critically

**Explain** Make clear through giving an account of, providing reasons, or cause, or origin

**Explore** Adopt a questioning approach and consider a variety of different viewpoints. Where possible reconcile opposing views by presenting a final line of argument

**Give an account of** Give a statement of facts in sequence; a narrative of an event or thing; a report or description

**Identify** Point out and describe

**Illustrate** Explain through examples or evidence or figures or diagrams

**Infer** Conclude from evidence or reasoning

**Interpret** Critically evaluate and pass judgement on

**Investigate** Enquire into all aspects of a topic through research. A question like this often requires you to collect original research data.

**Justify** Show grounds for decisions/conclusions/opinions, and argue against likely objections

**Outline** Give a short description of, drawing out the main principles or features

**Prove** Show that something is, or can be, true, providing strong evidence

**Relate X to Y** Show what the connections are; discuss the similarities and differences

**Review** Survey through careful examination

**Show** Demonstrate; give reasons and causes

**State** Present in a clear, brief, and concise form

**Suggest** Propose or recommend, and defend by showing how it could work

**Summarise** Give a concise account of the main principles or features of

**To what extent** Give a thorough assessment of the evidence in presenting an argument. Explore alternative explanations if present and come to a judgement on relative significance.

Source: adapted from http://www.essex.ac.uk/myskills/