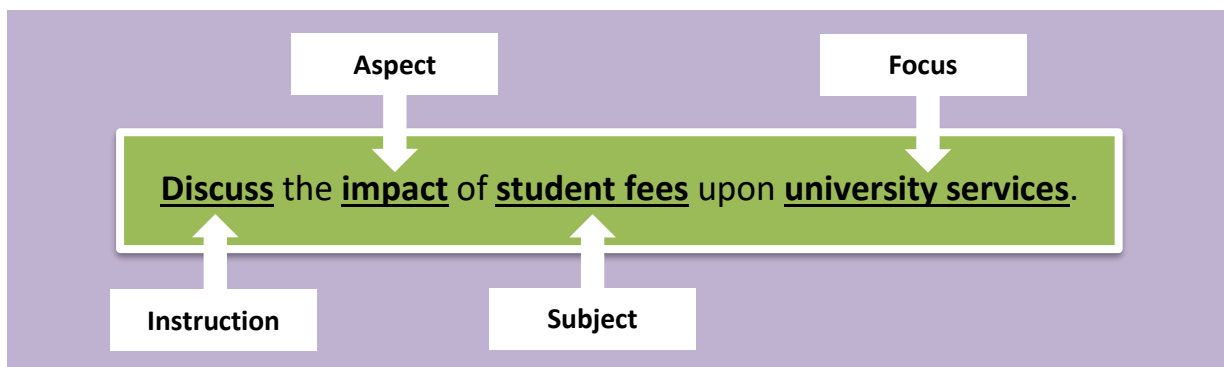


Understand the essay question

Before you consider anything else, it is essential to understand exactly what you are required to do.

An essay question or title can be broken down into:

- ➔ **Instruction:** What you must do
- ➔ **Subject:** The topic of the essay
- ➔ **Aspect:** Defines the facet of the topic you must consider
- ➔ **Focus:** Context in which you must consider the topic.



Instructional verbs frequently used in essay questions:

Analyse:

Examine in very close detail; identify important points and key features.

Compare:

Show how two or more things are similar. Indicate relevance or consequences of these similarities.

Contrast:

Set two or more items of arguments in opposition so as to draw out differences. Indicate significance of differences.

Critically evaluate:

Weigh arguments for and against something, assessing the strength of the evidence on both sides.

Describe:

Give the main characteristics or features of something, or outline the main events.

Discuss:

Give arguments for and against; consider the implications of.

Evaluate:

Assess the worth, importance or usefulness of something, using evidence. Will probably be cases to be made both for and against.

Examine:

Put the subject 'under the microscope', looking at it in detail.

Explain:

Make clear why something happens, or why something is the way it is.

Justify:

Give evidence which supports an argument or idea; show why a decision or conclusions were made, considering objections that others might make.

Focus on the title:

- ➔ As you research and write for your essay, always keep referring back to the title. If you don't, you take the risk of being side tracked and going off at a tangent.
- ➔ In your introduction, refer directly to the title in order to focus your reader. Say how you interpret the title.
- ➔ In your conclusion, refer back to the title to demonstrate to your reader how you have answered the set question.