Verbs in Writing Assignments

Here are some verbs commonly used in History essay and paper questions. Be sure you know what you are being asked to do. Also, try to use these verbs in your own writing.

**Analyze**: Take apart and look at each part closely

**Compare**: Look for similarities & differences; stress similarities

**Contrast**: Look for similarities & differences; stress differences

**Critique**: Point out both positive & negative aspects

**Define**: Explain exactly what something means

**Describe**: Show what something looks like, including physical features

**Discuss**: Explore an issue from all sides; implies wide latitude

**Evaluate**: make a value judgment according to some criteria (which you make clear)

**Explain**: Clarify or interpret how something works or happens

**Illustrate**: Show by means of example or educated speculation

**Interpret**: Translate how or why; implies some subjective judgment

**Justify**: Argue in support of something, to find positive reasons

**List**: Order facts, attributes, or items in sequence

**Outline**: Organize according to hierarchy and/or category

**Prove**: Demonstrate correctness by use of logic, fact or example

**Review**: reexamine the main points or highlights of something

**State**: Assert with confidence

**Summarize**: Put together the main points; condense

**Synthesize**: Combine pieces or concepts into new pieces or concept

**Trace**: Present an outline, or show a sequence, of how or why something occurs or happened