

Addressing the Prompt

The first step to effective academic writing is ensuring that you fully understand what you are being asked to write about and who your audience will be.

Verbs

First, look carefully at the verb used in the prompt. This is a signal to you on how you write your essay. If you think carefully about the meaning of the verb, it will help you decide on your organization, and you can use it to check that you included all of the necessary information.

Example Prompt Verbs

- Describe an important place in your home country.
 - This topic is more general. You will need to create a picture in the reader's mind of that place, but there are many different ways you could do this. It does not narrow down what to describe like a more specific variation (ex *Describe a specific place in your country and its religious importance.*)
- Compare and contrast a vacation at the beach or a vacation in the mountains.
 - You need to explain similarities and differences. You must include both in order to completely respond to the prompt. This requires you to do a little more than describe the characteristics of the two places, you need to also make some judgements about them.
- Summarize the speaker's thoughts about TikTok.
 - In this response, your supporting ideas should be limited to the content in the original source. You should not have any of your own ideas mixed into this answer.
- Many cities in the United States do not have reliable, widespread public transportation. Do you think college towns, such as Provo, UT, should be required to provide public transportation for the students? Support your position on this issue with reasons and examples.
 - The question is about more than your opinion. The idea of supporting your ideas implies that you need to bring in additional sources to add strength to your argument. If the prompt is timed, you would need to focus your support on general knowledge or personal experience to give reasons and examples.

Content

Next, think about what supporting ideas you would need to include. The prompt may be very narrow because the topic is very specific.

- Ex. Do you think the ELC classes should begin at 9am instead of 8:30am? Why or why not?

In other cases, the prompt may be very general and allow you space to make personal decisions about what supporting ideas to include.

- Ex. What quality do you think is most important for being a good friend?

Always remember to review the prompt throughout the writing process. Rereading the prompt often will help you check that you have included all the necessary information. It will also help your brain generate new ideas when you are stuck.

Example Content Breakdowns

- Describe an important place in your home country.
 - This topic is more general. You could approach it by describing the physical attributes, the history, or the cultural significance. If you had the opportunity, it would be wise to clarify with the teacher if there is a more specific explanation of what aspect of your that place should be described.
- Compare and contrast a vacation at the beach or a vacation in the mountains.
 - Again, this topic is fairly broad. You know you need to talk about what is the same or different, but it could again be about many different attributes of the two cities. You could focus on what activities are related to those vacations, the cost, the type of people that enjoy each vacation, or what the environment is like.
- Summarize the speaker's thoughts about TikTok.
 - In this response, your supporting ideas should be limited to the content in the original source. You should not have any of your own ideas mixed into this answer. It should also be limited to the opinion about the TikTok, not about any other type of social media. You should not be describing or defining TikTok, only restating the speaker's point of view on this platform.
- Many cities in the United States do not have reliable, widespread public transportation. Do you think college towns, such as Provo, UT, should be required to provide public transportation for the students? Support your position on this issue with reasons and examples.
 - The content of this essay is restricted to public transportation accessibility for college students specifically. Your focus should only be on this population and the unique environment of college towns. Additionally, you need both reasons and examples as support, excluding one of those types of support would result in an incomplete response.

Constraints

Finally, you should also look at any limitations included in the prompt. Constraints could include

- limits of time
- characters (letters, punctuation, and spaces)
- words
- revision tools (dictionaries, thesaurus, spell check)
- sources (required or no access)
- teacher, tutor, or peer review (required or no access)

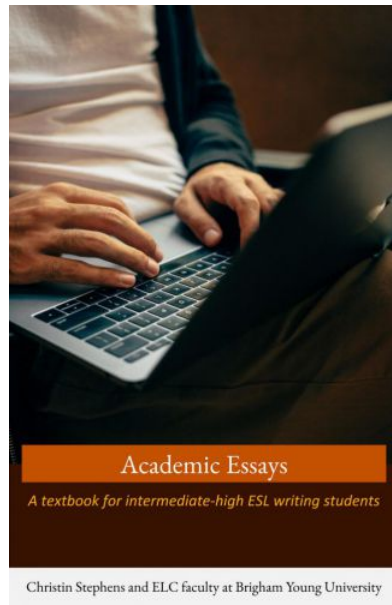
Exercises

Exercise 1: Prompt Analysis

1. Take a look at these [TOEFL Writing practice items from ETS](#).
2. Identify the prompt for each writing task.
3. Discuss what the prompt verb would require the writer to do? How would a successful response be organized?

Exercise 2: Writing Prompts

Choose a topic (content) for your partner to write about. Choose a verb that identifies a specific task. You can use this resource ([UARK Verb chart](#)) to help select an appropriate verb for your prompt. Write a prompt and exchange it with a partner. Analyze your partner's prompt for the task and content that the writer should target.



Stephens, C. (n.d.). *Academic B Writing*. BYU Open Textbook Network.
https://open.byu.edu/academic_b_writing_p