

3

Key verbs

In this unit we look at some important verbs in academic English.

A Verbs for structuring academic assignments

Look at these tasks which students have been given. Note the key verbs.

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| <p>Discuss some of the problems involved¹ in investigating attitudes to diet and health. Write a critical review of an investigation you have read about, or describe an investigation you yourself could conduct². Consider the advantages and disadvantages of different methods.</p> |
| <p>Starting from rest, an aircraft accelerates to its take-off speed of 60 m s⁻¹ in a distance of 900 metres. Illustrate³ this with a velocity-time graph. Assuming⁴ constant acceleration, find⁵ how long the take-off run lasts. Hence calculate⁶ the acceleration.</p> |
| <p>'The fact that nations agree to follow international law demonstrates⁷ that we can identify⁸ ideals that are trans-national and trans-cultural.' How far is this statement true? Critically analyse any recent event which supports or challenges⁹ the statement.</p> |
| <p>Examine¹⁰ how industrial growth has affected any two developing countries. Provide¹¹ statistical evidence where necessary and include a discussion of likely future trends.</p> |

¹ which are part of/included in ² organise and do ³ draw something in order to explain something ⁴ accepting something to be true ⁵ discover by calculating (see 6) ⁶ judge the number or amount of something and adding, multiplying, subtracting or dividing numbers ⁷ show, make clear ⁸ recognise someone or something and say or prove who or what they are ⁹ questions whether it is true ¹⁰ look at or consider carefully and in detail ¹¹ give

B More key verbs

These extracts from academic books contain other key verbs.

In **developing** methods to explain the significance of health status measures, one can **classify**¹ ways of **establishing**² quality of life into two main types.

The length of time spent on the tasks may **account for**³ the decrease in motivation which **was seen**⁴ in many of the participants.

The data **presented**⁵ in Chapter 3 **showed**⁶ that the age of the subjects was not the main factor.

Political theory **attempts**⁷ to build bridges between different schools of political thought.

¹ divide things into groups according to their type ² discover or get proof of ³ explain ⁴ see is often used in the passive in academic style ⁵ given ⁶ proved ⁷ (formal) tries

C Verbs which combine with noun forms of key verbs

Often in academic style, a verb + the noun form of the key verb is used.

| verb | verb + noun | example |
|-----------|--|--|
| explain | give/provide/offer an explanation (of/for) | The model provides an explanation for the differences between the two sets of data. |
| explore | carry out an exploration (of) | Kumar carried out an exploration of music genius. |
| emphasise | place/put emphasis (on) | The hospital puts a lot of emphasis on training nurses. |
| describe | give/provide a description (of) | The book gives a description of modern Europe. |



The verbs **affect** and **effect** are different. *To affect* means to influence, *to effect* means to make something happen / to bring about. *The burning of fossil fuels has negatively affected the global climate. The procedure has been successful and has effected a return to normal functioning of the engine.* See Unit 30 for more on *affect* and *effect*.

Exercises

3.1 Match each verb from A in the box on the left with its synonym from the box on the right.

affect attempt calculate challenge demonstrate compute distinguish give influence
identify include investigate provide involve question show study try

3.2 Choose the best verb from B or C to complete these sentences. Put the verb into the correct form.

- As can from Table II, participation figures have been steadily falling since 1970.
- Different authors have for the President's actions in different ways.
- Mendel attempted to devise a system for the many different types of pea plant that he grew.
- It is often most effective your data in a chart or table.
- The data we have collected that there has been a downward trend with regard to job satisfaction over the last 50 years.
- The aim of the research is a new software application which will help aviation engineers design more sophisticated aircraft.
- The archaeologists should be able to use carbon dating techniques exactly how old the bones are.
- Charles Darwin attempted the existence of different species in terms of evolution.

3.3 Explain the difference between the sentences in each pair.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Greig's article supports Park's theory. | Greig's article challenges Park's theory. |
| 2 Describe the new tax regulations. | Discuss the new tax regulations. |
| 3 Lodhi provides new data. | Lodhi considers new data. |
| 4 Titova conducted four sets of experiments. | Titova examined four sets of experiments. |
| 5 Lee established why such changes occur. | Lee investigated why such changes occur. |
| 6 Okaz assumed that the data were reliable. | Okaz proved that the data were reliable. |
| 7 Illustrate the magnitude of the deceleration. | Find the magnitude of the deceleration. |
| 8 The events effected economic development. | The events affected economic development. |

3.4 Rewrite each sentence using the word in brackets and make any necessary changes to other words.

- Erikson's theory explains the fluctuations in the figures for this period. (PROVIDES)
- Bevan explored the relationship between family background and political ambition. (EXPLORATION)
- The book describes the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. (DESCRIPTION)
- Cheng's theory emphasises the importance of extensive reading in language acquisition. (PUTS)

3.5 In academic style, noun phrases can often be used instead of some of the key verbs. Complete each phrase with the appropriate noun. Use a dictionary if necessary.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1 investigate = conduct, carry out an into/of | 4 affect = have an on |
| 2 illustrate = provide an of | 5 attempt = make an to/at |
| 3 analyse = provide, carry out an of | 6 classify = make, provide a of |



Using the tasks in A as a model, prepare some assignment topics for students studying any subject that you are familiar with.