These are listed according to how specifically they indicate what you should do, from most to least specific. If you compose your own question, it may be useful to consider incorporating one of these to provide you with a way of approaching your chosen topic.

**Compare**  
Show the similarities between two subjects. If this is the only instruction, it probably also implies “contrast”  

**Justify**  
Provide arguments and evidence to support a proposition, while refuting arguments against it.

**Contrast**  
Show the differences between two subjects. This may also be phrased as “outline key differences”. Usually this is coupled with compare: “compare and contrast”.

**Critique**  
Systematically evaluate by analysing different aspects of something. This means identifying strong and weak characteristics, and may entail suggestions as to how something could be improved.

**Define**  
Provide a clear meaning or explanation of a key term or concept. Go beyond the dictionary definition.

**Evaluate**  
Judge the value, worth or significance of something by discussing its strengths, weaknesses, achievements, etc.

**Debate**  
Explain different opinions or attitudes to a subject, evaluating the validity of different perspectives in order to reach a conclusion.

**Assess**  
This is much the same as “evaluate”.

**Explain**  
Clarify and interpret a problem or issue, answering the questions “how?” and “why?”

**Analyse**  
Break up the subject into its major parts, evaluate them and show how the main ideas are related.

**Explain and apply**  
Explain a theory or model and show how it works when applied to a concrete example.

**Comment**  
Provide an opinion or an evaluation.

**To what extent?**  
Judge and explain the degree to which the statement is true.

**Review**  
Provide a structured overview of a subject or body of literature, commenting on noteworthy or debatable points. A “critical review” must include some evaluation.

**How?**  
Explain the processes or patterns.

**Discuss**  
This instruction has a range of possible meanings. Sometimes a clear explanation of a concept is all that is required, but more frequently this term implies that you are expected to identify and analyse key issues, or evaluate different approaches, interpretations or perspectives in a reasoned argument.

**Why?**  
Describe the reasons or causes.

**Outline**  
Present the main points systematically, omitting minor details.

**Summarise**  
*Concisely* present the main points systematically, omitting minor details.