

UNDERSTANDING VERB PROMPTS IN QUESTIONS

Essay prompts differ based on the level of thinking and type of analysis required and/or the nature of the content assessed. Pay close attention to the way a prompt is phrased; by understanding how verbs are used in the prompt, you will understand what you are being asked to do. This activity focuses on some common exam prompts used in AP U.S. Government and Politics, which align with the political science discipline.

As you respond to the practice questions, be sure to write in complete sentences.

EXAM PROMPT: IDENTIFY

This is a fairly simple exam prompt and means you are expected to name or list one or more factors, persons, or concepts.

Example: Identify the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court who expanded the rights of criminal defendants in *Gideon v. Wainwright*, *Mapp v. Ohio*, and *Miranda v. Arizona*.

Response: *Earl Warren was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court that ended school segregation and expanded the rights of criminal defendants in the 1950s and 1960s.*

Practice Prompt: Identify the Latin term that refers to the appellate court's following the precedent set in an earlier case.

Practice Response:

EXAM PROMPT: DEFINE

This means you are expected to state the meaning of a word, phrase, or concept. This does not have to be a dictionary definition, but it should be a clear and concise summary of what the term means.

Example: Define "judicial review."

Response: *Judicial review is the power of the Supreme Court to overturn a law or executive action if it is found to be unconstitutional.*

Practice Prompt: Define "precedent."

Practice Response:

EXAM PROMPT: DESCRIBE

This prompt requires more than identification or definition; to *describe* means to state clearly essential characteristics or, in the case of a process, how something works or operates.

Example: Describe the Supreme Court appointment process.

Response: *Supreme Court justices are nominated by the president and must be confirmed by a majority vote in the Senate.*

Practice Prompt: Describe how a case gets to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Practice Response:

EXAM PROMPT: EXPLAIN

Explanations require you to provide one or more causes or rationales for a particular relationship or idea. One way to make this connection is by including the word *because* in your answer.

Example: Explain two ways in which the Supreme Court is insulated from politics.

Response: *One way in which the Supreme Court is insulated from politics is that it deliberates in secret. This insulates it because the public does not know what the Court is saying during deliberations and therefore it is difficult for the public to comment on what might be happening. Another way the Supreme Court is insulated from politics is that members serve for life. This insulates members of the Court from politics because they can make controversial decisions without fear of losing their jobs.*

Practice Prompt: Explain two reasons why the writers of the U.S. Constitution specified that Supreme Court justices should be appointed for life.

Practice Response:

EXAM PROMPT: COMPARE

Comparisons require you to show the similarities and differences between two terms or concepts.

Example: Compare judicial activism and judicial restraint.

Response: *Activism and restraint are both philosophies justices use in deciding cases. When justices use judicial activism, they may go beyond the exact wording of the Constitution to make bold new policy decisions. When they use judicial restraint, justices base decisions on the strict language of the Constitution and avoid making new policy.*

Practice Prompt: Compare the powers of Congress and the powers of the president in checking the judiciary.

Practice Response: