

VERBS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

In writing a free response answer, students should not focus on writing an essay, but instead should focus on scoring points. To maximize the number of points scored, the student should tailor the answer to what is called for in the question's verbs.

Here are the verbs that are commonly used on the free response section of the AP exam:

Identify: State, or briefly identify. This can usually be done in a sentence or two.

Example: Identify two ways in which federalism has changed since 1994.

Define: Tell the meaning. This can usually be done in a sentence or two.

Example: Define federalism and . . .

Describe: Give an account, give a word picture. This usually requires about four or five sentences. Always include an example if possible.

Example: Describe two methods by which federalism has changed since 1994.

Explain: Make clear or plain, tell why/how, give reasons or causes. This usually requires about four or five sentences. Always include an example if possible.

Example: Explain two reasons why federalism has changed since 1994.

Compare: Comparisons require you to show the similarities and differences between two terms or concepts. This usually requires about four or five sentences. Always include an example if possible.

Example: Compare dual federalism and cooperative federalism.

Here is a chart that shows how often the above verbs have appeared on the AP exam since 2002:

VERB	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	TOTAL
Identify	6	5	4	0	4	3	0	3	1	1	2	0	2	2	2	35
Define	0	1	1	3	1	1	5	1	0	2	0	2	1	0	0	18
Describe	2	0	3	6	2	6	6	6	3	2	4	8	6	7	6	67
Explain	6	6	7	4	3	6	5	8	8	8	7	6	6	5	8	93
Compare	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2