

## 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.

**Discuss** some of the problems **involved**<sup>1</sup> 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 **conduct**<sup>2</sup>. **Consider** the advantages and disadvantages of different methods.

Starting from rest, an aircraft accelerates to its take-off speed of 60 m s<sup>-1</sup> in a distance of 900 metres. **Illustrate**<sup>3</sup> this with a velocity-time graph. **Assuming**<sup>4</sup> constant acceleration, **find**<sup>5</sup> how long the take-off run lasts. Hence **calculate**<sup>6</sup> the acceleration.

'The fact that nations agree to follow international law **demonstrates**<sup>7</sup> that we can **identify**<sup>8</sup> ideals that are trans-national and trans-cultural.' How far is this statement true? Critically **analyse** any recent event which **supports** or **challenges**<sup>9</sup> the statement.

**Examine**<sup>10</sup> how industrial growth has **affected** any two developing countries. **Provide**<sup>11</sup> statistical evidence where necessary and **include** a discussion of likely future trends.

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

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

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

Political theory **attempts**<sup>7</sup> to build bridges between different schools of political thought.

<sup>1</sup> divide things into groups according to their type <sup>2</sup> discover or get proof of <sup>3</sup> explain <sup>4</sup> see is often used in the passive in academic style <sup>5</sup> given <sup>6</sup> proved <sup>7</sup> (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 <b>provides an explanation</b> for the differences between the two sets of data.
explore	carry out an exploration (of)	Kumar <b>carried out an exploration</b> of music genius.
emphasise	place/put emphasis (on)	The hospital <b>puts a lot of emphasis</b> on training nurses.
describe	give/provide a description (of)	The book <b>gives a description</b> 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  
identify include investigate provide

compute distinguish give influence  
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.

- 1 As can ..... from Table II, participation figures have been steadily falling since 1970.
- 2 Different authors have ..... for the President's actions in different ways.
- 3 Mendel attempted to devise a system for ..... the many different types of pea plant that he grew.
- 4 It is often most effective ..... your data in a chart or table.
- 5 The data we have collected ..... that there has been a downward trend with regard to job satisfaction over the last 50 years.
- 6 The aim of the research is ..... a new software application which will help aviation engineers design more sophisticated aircraft.
- 7 The archaeologists should be able to use carbon dating techniques ..... exactly how old the bones are.
- 8 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.

- 1 Erikson's theory explains the fluctuations in the figures for this period. (PROVIDES)
- 2 Bevan explored the relationship between family background and political ambition. (EXPLORATION)
- 3 The book describes the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. (DESCRIPTION)
- 4 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 |

**FOLLOW UP**

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