

Assignment Instruction Words

Most assignments, reports, and essays contain a crucial keyword, a signal of emphasis or just a plain, straight forward instruction.

Here are some of the most common keywords which may help you to interpret your assignment briefs and help you to focus your research.

Account for	Make clear and explain by giving reasons – might appear in the form of 'give an account of'
Analyse	Divide into parts and methodically interpret
Appraise	Assess; evaluate; find the value of
Assess	Estimate the importance or value of, taking care to consider all aspects of the argument
Clarify	Make simple and clear
Comment on	Give your views on a topic, supported by evidence
Compare	Look for similarities and differences between two things
Consider	Take into account and express thoughts
Contrast	Set in opposition in order to bring differences
Compare <i>and</i> contrast	Identify two or more views about the same topic and examine both the similarities and differences
Criticise	Give your judgement/views about the merit of theories, opinions or the truth of facts, and support your judgement/views by a discussion of the evidence
Define	Give the exact meaning of a word, expression or concept
Demonstrate	Using examples, show how
Describe	Give a detailed account of something without analytical comment
Discuss	Essentially this is a written debate where you are using your skill at reasoning, backed up by carefully selected evidence to make a case for and against an argument, or point out the advantages and disadvantages of a given context. Remember to arrive at a conclusion.
Distinguish between/differentiate	Detail the main ideas, showing how they differ
Evaluate	Make an appraisal of the worth of something, in light of its truth or utility; include to a lesser degree your personal opinion, supported by relevant evidence
Examine	Investigate, scrutinise and question all the evidence
Explain	Make clear or plain – usually the steps involved in a process, or the causes/effects of an event or phenomenon

Identify	List and describe relevant points
Illustrate	Use examples, comparisons, diagrams or graphs to explain or demonstrate a point
Interpret	Demonstrate your understanding of an issue or topic. This can be the use of particular terminology by an author, or what the findings from a piece of research suggest to you. In the latter instance, comment on any significant patterns and causal relationships.
Justify	Make a case by providing a body of evidence to support your ideas and points of view. In order to present a balanced argument, consider opinions which may run contrary to your own before stating your conclusion.
Outline	Briefly review the most important aspects of a topic or the main points of a procedure or argument
Relate	Show how things are connected to each other and to what extent they are alike or affect each other
Review	Look thoroughly into a subject. This should be a critical assessment and not merely descriptive.
State	Present briefly but clearly
Summarise	Give the main points of an idea or argument, leaving out details and examples.
Synthesize	To combine parts or elements – as opposed to 'analyse': to synthesize a statement
To what extent...?	Similar to questions which begin ' <i>How far ...</i> '. This term is used in questions asking you to show your own judgement. It's unlikely that there will be a black or white answer. You are expected to argue your case, offering evidence to support your view(s). It also gives you the opportunity to discuss both weaknesses and strengths for a case
Trace	Follow the development or history of a concept from its inception to its conclusion