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.

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| 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 *and* 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 |

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| 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 ‘*How far …*‘. 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 |