

Instruction words/Task words

Task words or instruction words are the words used in an assignment that give direction on what you need to do. This document acts as guide to what these words mean generally within an assignment as they do not have a fixed defined meaning accepted by all.

Task word	Description
Analyse	To break something down into its different parts and then looking at detail into these parts. You may be asked how these components relate to each other and to discuss the relationship. For example: 'Analyse two negative consequences of political jokes',
Apply	Using a theory or something you have learnt and putting it into practice.
Assess	To consider or measure the value or importance of something including the positive and negative aspects of it. For example, how effective it might be in a specific context. For example: 'Assess the extent to which adaptation can be robust to uncertainties about future climate change.'
Compare	Identify specific features or characteristics between two or more things and how they may be similar. For example: 'Provide a comparison of all three organisational models.'
Contrast	Normally used when two or more things are very different from each other and set in opposition. You should identify these differences and you may need to discuss the significance of these difference and whether one is more preferable within the context.
Compare and contrast	Identify specific features or characteristics between two or more things and how they may be similar or different. You should identify these differences and you may need to discuss the significance of these difference You may be asked to judge which is the most appropriate within a given context. For example: 'Compare and contrast the different types of bonds found in solids.'
Criticise/Critically	To identify and discuss the strengths and weakness of a topic, solution, or theory.
Define	To give the precise meaning of something giving sufficient detail for your reader to understand. Where necessary you may also be required to explain any problems with the definition or limitations within the context of the task. For example: 'Define the terms: phreatic surface, artesian conditions, flow line, equipotential and hydraulic gradient'.
Demonstrate	To show something clearly which normally needs supporting evidence or proof. For example: 'Demonstrate how the media might frame a recent extreme weather event in different ways.'
Describe	To give detail about something including how or why. You may include key components and explain what they are like. For example: 'Briefly describe the behaviour of ferromagnetic materials under an applied magnetic field.'

Discuss	To explain and examine something with different views, opinions or ideas. Give reasons for and against and consider all sides. You should draw a conclusion based on the evidence and discussion of these different views. For example: 'Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of being a member of regional economic blocs for governments, firms and individuals.'
Evaluate	This has more of an emphasis on judging something and can be similar to 'assess'. You look at the information and evidence and place a value on it. For example, in terms of usefulness, effectiveness or appropriateness for a situation or task. For example: 'Evaluate the impact that political factors have had on the development of transport policy in recent years.'
Examine	To explain in detail or depth about something and may require you to evaluate as well.
Explain	To make clear why something has happened or why something is the way it is. You need to do more than just describe but to also give reasons or analyse it. For example: 'Explain how the strength of a rock mass differs from that of soil and how this affects the stability of the rock mass.'
Explore	To pinpoint key aspects of a topic and identify and discuss different viewpoints, implications or perspectives. For example: 'Explore the implications of Billig's claim by giving an example of two such ideological habits.'
Identify	To point out a key issue, concept, evidence or aspect of something. This may be to demonstrate you have been able to recognise it. For example: 'Identify the way in which nations engage in international trade to gain an advantage.'
Illustrate	To give examples or evidence to make something clear or to help explain something. You may be asked to include visual aids.
Justify	To give reasons for your answer, claim, point or idea.
Outline	To provide the main points, ideas or principles of something. You would not normally provide much detail. For example: 'Outline the key drawbacks/limitations of the existing approaches used in sunlight planning at the early design stage.'
Review	To summarise or recap on key points or themes. You may need to critically discuss or give your opinion.. For example: 'critically review the process where organisations develop their safety systems and approach to improve their performance over time.'
Summarise	To concisely include the main points or key features of a specific topic or concept. Similar to 'outline' in that you should produce a condensed version of something.
State	To provide the key points or aspects briefly and clearly. Would not normally include opinion. For example: 'State the formula for ROCE in terms of asset turnover and operating profit margin.'
To what extent...	You would need to consider how true or false something is and how convincing it is. You may want to consider how it contributes to a situation or topic and what makes it false or true. For example: 'To what extent do you think the Hybrid airline business model will become more common in the future.'

Trace	To explain a process or sequence of events or elements and outline the stages.
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