

Assignment direction words

Below is an explanation of the key words commonly used in assignment questions.

These explanations are intended as a guide only. There are not always hard distinctions between the words, and different academics may use them to mean slightly different things.

ANALYSE: Identify the elements of an argument, text, issue, process or event and show how they are related.

ARGUE: Present the case for and/or against a particular proposition.

COMMENT ON: Point out the important features, criticise.

COMPARE: Identify and explain similarities and differences.

CONTRAST: Stress the differences between two or more things.

CRITICISE: Judge the merit or truth of the factors or views mentioned, including both strengths and weaknesses.

CRITICALLY...: Used to add direction to another direction word (e.g. “critically analyse”), this means approaching the task in a **questioning** way: “How does this work?” “Why is it like this?” “What are its strengths and weaknesses?”

DEFINE: Provide concise, clear, and authoritative meanings. Give the limits of the definition, but omit detailed explanations. Show how the item defined differs from items in other classes.

DESCRIBE: Recount, characterise, outline, and relate in sequence.

DIAGRAM: A drawing, chart, plan, or graph. Diagrams should be labelled and there should be an accompanying explanation.

DISCUSS: Examine, analyse carefully, and give reasons for and against. Be complete and give details, usually with a view to assessing how satisfactory something is.

EVALUATE: Appraise in relation to some standard, referring to advantages, limitations, and costs and benefits as appropriate.

EXAMINE: Investigate critically, appraise a subject in detail.

EXPLAIN: Clarify, interpret, and elaborate on the material presented. Give reasons for differences of opinion or results, and try to analyse causes.

ILLUSTRATE: Use a concrete example, diagram, or figure to explain or clarify a problem.

INDICATE: Identify, then focus attention so as to clarify.

JUSTIFY: Prove or give reasons for conclusions or decisions.

OUTLINE: Present the essential features, showing main points and subordinate points. Omit minor details.

REVIEW: Examine a subject critically, analysing and commenting on the important or controversial statements.

STATE: Present the main points in a brief and clear sequence, usually omitting details or examples.

SUMMARISE: Give the main points or facts in condensed form.