

## SKILLS FOR LEARNING

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# GUIDE TO ASSIGNMENT TASK WORDS

The first stage in producing a good assignment is to have a clear understanding of the assignment question. This tip sheet is intended to be a quick guide to the most common assignment tasks you are asked to do. Please make sure you also read carefully your assignment briefing documents and check with your lecturer if you are in any doubt.

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| <b>Account for</b>         | Explain, clarify or give reasons for. Quite different from 'Give an account of' which is more like 'describe in detail'.   |
| <b>Analyse</b>             | Break an issue down into its component parts, discuss them and show how they interrelate.  |
| <b>Assess</b>              | Consider the value or importance of something, paying attention to positive and negative aspects, and citing the judgements of any known authorities as well as your own.  |
| <b>Argue</b>               | Make a case, based on appropriate evidence for and/or against some given point of view.  |
| <b>Compare</b>             | Identify the characteristics or qualities two or more things have in common, but probably pointing out their differences as well.  |
| <b>Contrast</b>            | Point out the differences between two things, but probably point out their similarities as well.   |
| <b>Critically Analyse</b>  | Questioning and testing the strength of your and others' analyses from different perspectives.   |
| <b>Critically Evaluate</b> | Weigh arguments for and against something, assessing all evidence. Decide which opinions, theories, models or items are preferable.  |
| <b>Criticise</b>           | Spell out your judgement as to the value or truth of something, indicating the criteria on which you base your judgement and citing specific instances of how the criteria apply in this case.                     |
| <b>Define</b>              | Present a precise meaning, but giving sufficient detail to distinguish from similar ideas.   |
| <b>Describe</b>            | Pick out what you regard as the key features of something, perhaps making clear the criteria you use.  |
| <b>Discuss</b>             | Provide details and evidence for and against particular views or ideas. Investigate or examine by argument. Draw a conclusion.   |
| <b>Evaluate</b>            | Make an appraisal of the worth of something i.e. explaining the extent to which it is effective / useful / true etc. Evaluation is sometimes more subjective and contestable than some kinds of pure 'assessment'. |
| <b>Examine</b>             | Look closely at, thinking and writing about the detail, and questioning it where appropriate.  |
| <b>Explain</b>             | Show how things work or why they came to be the way they are, including some description and analysis.   |
| <b>Explore</b>             | Consider an idea or topic broadly, looking for related and particularly relevant, interesting or debatable points.   |
| <b>To what extent....?</b> | Explore the case for a stated idea or explanation, probably arguing for a less than total acceptance of the proposition.   |

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| <b>How Far</b>     | Similar to 'to what extent . . .?'   |
| <b>Identify</b>    | Highlight the main aspects of an idea, topic or a sequence of events.  |
| <b>Illustrate</b>  | Give selected examples to help describe or explain ideas and topics. Diagrams, maps, graphs or other visuals aids to help describe or explain can be used. |
| <b>Interpret</b>   | Clarify or explain an idea or topic, perhaps indicating how it relates to other ideas or perspective.  |
| <b>Issue</b>       | An important topic for discussion; something worth thinking and raising questions about.   |
| <b>Justify</b>     | Explain the reasons for accepting a particular interpretation or conclusion, considering different possible views and ideas when giving these reasons.     |
| <b>Methodology</b> | A system of methods and principles for carrying out a piece of work. Often used to explain methods for carrying out research.                              |
| <b>Objective</b>   | What you want to achieve by a particular activity.   |
| <b>Outline</b>     | Provide the main points or ideas of a topic or sequence of events, possibly showing how they interrelate but without going into too much detail.           |
| <b>Prove</b>       | Demonstrate the truth of something by offering evidence and/or logical sequence of statements leading from evidence to conclusion.                         |
| <b>Reconcile</b>   | Show how two apparently opposed or mutually exclusive ideas can be seen to be similar in important respects.   |
| <b>Relate</b>      | Can mean describe how something happened or explain how two or more topics or ideas are connected.   |
| <b>Review</b>      | Consider a topic, with the emphasis on assessment rather than on description.  |
| <b>State</b>       | Express briefly and clearly the main points or an idea or topic.   |
| <b>Summarise</b>   | State (or re-state) the most important features of an argument so that it is represented 'in miniature'.   |

**ADAPTED FROM:**

University of New South Wales (UNSW) (2010) *Answering assignment questions: glossary of task words* [online]. Sydney: UNSW [Accessed 19 January 2012]. Available at: <<http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/taskanal2.html>>.

Hampton, M. (2011) *Essays: task words* [online] Portsmouth: University of Portsmouth [Accessed 19 January 2012]. Available at: <<http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/studentssupport/ask/resources/handouts/writtenassignments>>.

**HELP AND ADVICE**

For help and advice on any aspect of assignment writing, including details of workshops please see the Skills for Learning website at <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/skills>.



**Cite this work:**

Skills for Learning (2018) *Guide to assignment task words* [online]. Wolverhampton: University of Wolverhampton. [Accessed give date accessed]. Available at: <<http://www.wlv.ac.uk/skills>>.

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