

Key instruction words in assignment tasks

Analyse

When you analyse something you consider it carefully and in detail in order to understand or explain it. To analyse, identify the main parts or ideas of a subject and examine or interpret the connections between them.

Comment on

When you comment on a subject or the ideas in a subject, you say something that gives your opinion about it or an explanation for it.

Compare

To compare things means to point out the differences or similarities between them. A comparison essay would involve examining qualities/characteristics of a subject and emphasising the similarities and differences.

Contrast

When you contrast two subjects, you show how they differ when compared with each other. A contrast essay should emphasise striking differences between two elements.

Compare and Contrast

To write a compare and contrast essay you would examine the similarities and differences of two subjects.

Criticise

When you criticise you make judgements about a subject after thinking about it carefully and deeply. Express your judgement with respect to the correctness or merit of the factors under consideration. Give the results of your own analysis and discuss the limitations and contributions of the factors in question. Support your judgement with evidence.

Define

When you define something you show, describe, or state clearly what it is and what it is like, you can also say what its limits are. Do not include details but do include what distinguishes it from other related things, sometimes by giving examples.

Describe

To describe in an essay requires you to give a detailed account of characteristics, properties or qualities of a subject.

Discuss

To discuss in an essay, consider your subject from different points of view. Examine, analyse and present considerations for and against the problem or statement.

Evaluate

When you evaluate in an essay, decide on your subject's significance, value, or quality after carefully studying its good and bad features. Use authoritative (eg, from established authors or theorists in the field) and, to some extent, personal appraisal of both contributions and limitations of the subject. Similar to assess.

Explain

When explaining in an essay give details about your subject and describe it so that it can be understood. Give reasons for a particular event or situation. State the 'how' and 'why', account for causes, results and implications. Use examples to support your explanation.

Illustrate

If asked to illustrate in an essay, explain the points that you are making clearly by using examples, diagrams, statistics, etc.

Interpret

In an essay, which requires you to interpret you should translate, solve, give examples, or comment upon the subject and evaluate it in terms of your judgement or reaction. Explain what your subject means.

Justify

When asked to justify a statement in an essay you should provide the reasons and grounds for the conclusions you draw from the statement. Present your evidence in a form that will convince your reader.

Outline

Outlining requires that you explain ideas, plans, or theories in a general way, without giving all the details. Organise and systematically describe the main points or general principles. Use essential supplementary material, but omit minor details.

Prove

When proving a statement, experiment or theory in an essay, you must confirm or verify it. You are expected to evaluate the material and present experimental evidence and/or logical reasoning.

Relate

To relate two things, you should state or claim the connection or link between them. Show the relationship by emphasising these connections and associations.

Review

When you review, critically examine, analyse and comment on the major points of a subject in an organised manner.