

Skills for Learning

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.

Account for	Explain, clarify or give reasons for. Quite different from 'Give an account of' which is more like 'describe in detail'.
Analyse	Break an issue down into its component parts, discuss them and show how they interrelate.
Assess	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.
Argue	Make a case, based on appropriate evidence for and/or against some given point of view.
Compare	Identify the characteristics or qualities two or more things have in common, but probably pointing out their differences as well.
Contrast	Point out the differences between two things, but probably point out their similarities as well.
Critically Analyse	Questioning and testing the strength of your and others' analyses from different perspectives.
Critically Evaluate	Weigh arguments for and against something, assessing all evidence. Decide which opinions, theories, models or items are preferable.
Criticise	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.
Define	Present a precise meaning, but giving sufficient detail to distinguish from similar ideas.

Describe	Pick out what you regard as the key features of something, perhaps making clear the criteria you use.
Discuss	Provide details and evidence for and against particular views or ideas. Investigate or examine by argument. Draw a conclusion.
Evaluate	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'.
Examine	Look closely at, thinking and writing about the detail, and questioning it where appropriate.
Explain	Show how things work or why they came to be the way they are, including some description and analysis.
Explore	Consider an idea or topic broadly, looking for related and particularly relevant, interesting or debatable points.
To what extent....?	Explore the case for a stated idea or explanation, probably arguing for a less than total acceptance of the proposition.
How Far	Similar to 'to what extent . . .?'
Identify	Highlight the main aspects of an idea, topic or a sequence of events.
Illustrate	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.
Interpret	Clarify or explain an idea or topic, perhaps indicating how it relates to other ideas or perspective.
Issue	An important topic for discussion; something worth thinking and raising questions about.
Justify	Explain the reasons for accepting a particular interpretation or conclusion, considering different possible views and ideas when giving these reasons.
Methodology	A system of methods and principles for carrying out a piece of work. Often used to explain methods for carrying out research.
Objective	What you want to achieve by a particular activity.
Outline	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.
Prove	Demonstrate the truth of something by offering evidence and/or logical sequence of statements leading from evidence to conclusion.

Reconcile	Show how two apparently opposed or mutually exclusive ideas can be seen to be similar in important respects.
Relate	Can mean describe how something happened or explain how two or more topics or ideas are connected.
Review	Consider a topic, with the emphasis on assessment rather than on description.
State	Express briefly and clearly the main points or an idea or topic.
Summarise	State (or re-state) the most important features of an argument so that it is represented 'in miniature'.
Synthesis / Synthesise	The process of combining different ideas, opinions and information from multiple sources. It involves critical analysis, evaluation and interpretation of information to demonstrate an understanding of a particular topic and present a clear argument to a reader.

Adapted From:

University of New South Wales (UNSW) (2023) *Glossary of task words*. Available at: <https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/glossary-task-words> (Accessed: 12 July 2023)

University of Portsmouth (2023) *Essays: task words*. Available at: <https://www.port.ac.uk/student-life/help-and-advice/study-skills/written-assignments/essays-task-words#:~:text=Task%20words%20%20are%20the%20words,you've%20answered%20the%20question> (Accessed: 12 July 2023)

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>.



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