

Instruction words This table explains the meaning of some of the most common instruction words found in assignment tasks.

Instruction word	Meaning
Account for	Give reasons for; explain (note: give an account of; describe).
Analyse	Break the information into constituent parts; examine the relationship between the parts; question the information.
Argue	Put the case for or against a view or idea giving evidence for your claims/reasons for or against; attempt to influence the reader to accept your view.
Balance	Look at two or more viewpoints or pieces of information; give each equal attention; look at good and bad points; consider many aspects and give an appropriate weighting to those aspects.
Be critical	Identify what is good and bad about the information and why; probe, question, identify inaccuracies in the information; estimate the value of the material.
Clarify	Identify the components of an issue/topic/problem/; make the meaning plain; remove misunderstandings.
Compare	Look for similarities and differences between; perhaps conclude which is preferable; implies evaluation.
Contrast	Bring out the differences.
Criticise	Give your judgement on theories or opinions or facts and back this by discussing evidence or reasoning involved.
Define	Give the precise meaning. Examine the different possible or often used definitions.
Demonstrate	Show clearly by giving proof or evidence.
Describe	Give a detailed, full account of the topic.
Determine	Find out something; calculate.
Discuss	Investigate or examine by argument; debate; give reason for and against; examine the implications of the topic.
Estimate	Calculate, judge, predict.
Evaluate	Appraise the worth of something in the light of its truth or usefulness; assess and explain.
Examine	Look at carefully; consider.
Explain	Make plain and clear; give reasons for.
Give evidence	Provide evidence from your own work or that of others which could be checked by a third party to prove/ justify what you say.
Identify	Point out and describe.
Identify trends	Identify patterns/changes/ movements in certain directions (e.g. over time or across topics/ subjects).
Illustrate	Explain, clarify, make clear using concrete examples.
Interpret	Expound the meaning; make clear and explicit, giving your own judgement.
Justify	Show adequate grounds for decisions, a particular view or conclusions and answer main objections likely to be made to them.
Outline	Give a short description of the main points; give the main features or general principles; emphasise the structure, leaving out minor details.
Prove	Show that something is true or certain; provide strong evidence (and examples) for.
Review	Make a survey examining the subject carefully; like summarise and evaluate.
State	Present in a brief, clear form.
Summarise	Give a concise account of the chief points of a matter, removing unnecessary detail.
Synthesise	Bring elements together to make a complex whole, draw together or integrate issues (e.g. theories or models can be created by synthesising a number of elements).
Trace	Follow the development of topic from its origin.