

Instructional Words

Instruction terms are words commonly used in assignment questions. They instruct or direct you in the approach you should take towards answering the question.

It is important you understand assignment and examination instructions before you start work on them. If the instruction requires you to discuss a topic, but you describe it instead, you will lose marks. Also make sure you understand the instructional words in the Learning Outcomes of your courses, as they are a valuable guide to your study. Definitions of instructional words can vary. If you are unsure, check with your tutor.

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| Analyse | - Break down and carefully examine the most important parts showing how they are related, whether they work together and why they are important. |
| Apply | - Connect theory with practical examples. Make use of relevant theories to justify actions. |
| Compare | - Focus on similarities between qualities, subjects and other things. Check with your tutor whether differences are to be considered. |
| Contrast | - Focus on the differences between qualities, subjects and other things. |
| Compare and contrast | - Describe the major similarities, and then the major differences between two or more things. |
| Critically analyse | - Break down the topic or argument and examine the parts in terms of its strengths and weaknesses. |
| Critically evaluate | - Give an in-depth and logical judgment of something. Support your judgment with reliable evidence and/or authoritative views. Examine in detail. Explore alternatives, challenging and questioning. Discuss strengths and weaknesses (for and against). Check with your tutor about the exact requirements and/or faculty guidelines. |
| Define | - Give the exact meaning of a word or phrase. Be clear and concise. Check with your tutor whether you need to show how the things being defined differ from other ideas or things. |
| Demonstrate | - use clear thinking to either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prove by using statistics and reliable evidence etc., or • explain to show you understand, by using examples and/or experience. |
| Describe | - Write in detail the main points or characteristics in a logical sequence without interpreting the information. |

- Discuss - Examine carefully and completely. Give reasons for and against, or examine a range of views. Come to a conclusion.
- Evaluate - Carefully assess advantages and limitations. Emphasize evidence and authoritative views. Check with your tutor about giving personal opinions.
- Examine - Break down into parts and describe each part in a careful way.
- Explain - Clarify and interpret something. Examine the reasons, causes and results. Check with your tutor whether drawings and diagrams can be used to support the answer.
- Illustrate - Use real life examples to explain and clarify the topic. Check with your tutor whether drawings and diagrams can be used to support the answer.
- Interpret - Explain the meaning of something in a clear way. Give examples or comment on a subject. Check with your tutor whether you need to give a reaction, judgement or examples.
- Justify - Give reasons for decisions, conclusions or opinions. The use of reliable evidence is usually expected.
- List - Give a series of brief ideas. Lists may be numbered.
- Outline - Give the main features or general principles of a subject, leaving out minor details, and using logical arrangement.
- Prove - Show clearly that something is true and/or certain, by evaluating and stating factual evidence and/or logical reasoning.
- Relate - Show how things are connected to each other, to what extent they are similar. Show any cause and effect, or how they affect each other.
- Review - Critically evaluate the important statements about a subject, by authoritative sources.
- State - Give main points clearly and briefly. Usually leave out details and examples.
- Suggest - Propose an idea, solution or theory and show how it could work.
- Summarise - Give the main points briefly, leaving out details & examples.

For other useful Learning Services handouts related to this topic, see our website
<http://library.ara.ac.nz/Learning>