

Academic task words



University of
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Academic task words, or instruction words, help you to understand what is being asked of you in an assessment task. It will help you to navigate the assessment- and give you something to focus on.

Task/Instruction word	Meaning/What it is asking you to do.
Analyse	Break down the components of the topic and show how they relate to each other.
assess	Consider the value or something or make a judgement about its worth- using evidence to back up your position. Look at both the positive and negative aspects.
argue	Put forward a position, and justify why you have chosen that position. Use evidence to back up what you are saying.
Compare	Look at the similarities between different ideas/concepts/factors of the topic.
Contrast	Look at the differences between different ideas/concepts/factors of the topic.
Criticise	Place a value or judgement on an idea/theory/concept and use a criteria to base your criticism on.
Define	Give a definition or the meaning of something, especially in the context you are working in.
Describe	Give a general idea or overview of the idea/concept/topic and highlight the main aspects.
Discuss	Looking at a particular idea and outlining the key aspects to consider- both for and against, and give reasons for both for and against as well as drawing a conclusion.
Examine	Looking at something in detail and investigate the causes/efforts/ reasons/ consequences.
Explain	To clarify or interpret and idea/value/theory/concept. It requires giving more detailed information about something- going deeper than just describing.
Identify	Highlight what the ideas/concepts/theories and their purpose in the context you are working in.
Outline	Look at the main ideas or points that will be talked about in the assignment.
summarise	Give an overall summary of what has been looked at in the assignment- but don't go into too much detail.