



Task Word List

The definitions provided in the following list should be used as a rough guide only. The meaning of the task words in questions can vary depending on the lecturer or the field of study.

For example, some of the terms below can have a different and very specific meaning in a Mathematical context.

Account for

Explain why something has occurred.

Analyse

Take apart a concept or statement in order to consider its elements. Answers should be very methodical and logically organised.

Argue

An argument means to make clear, prove or accuse. You must have a particular point of view supported by evidence from reliable sources.

Assess

This requires a judgment about an idea or subject. You may need to state whether the idea or subject being discussed is valuable or relevant after acknowledging points for and against it. Your judgment should be influenced by other authors' views as well as your own opinion (similar to Evaluate).

Comment on

State your opinion on a topic or idea. You may explain the topic or idea more fully. Your opinion must be supported by evidence from reliable sources.

Compare/compare and contrast

This requires a balanced answer that sets items side by side and shows their similarities and differences.

Contrast

This requires an answer that points out only the differences between two or more topics.

Critically

Often used in conjunction with other directive words, such as critically discuss, critically examine or critically analyse. It does not mean criticise. It requires a balanced answer that points out mistakes or weaknesses and indicates any favourable aspects of the subject of the question. The decision or overall judgment you make must be supported with evidence from reliable sources.

Define

This requires an answer that explains the precise meaning of a concept. A definition answer will include a discussion of a concept and may also state the limits of a concept.



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Describe

This requires you to identify and outline the attributes or characteristics of a subject.

Differentiate

See Contrast.

Discuss

Explain the item or concept, and then give details about it with supporting information, examples, points for and against, plus explanations for the facts put forward from various points of view. This can be one of the most difficult types of essay question.

Draw

Create a diagram, graph, table, etc.

Enumerate

This requires you to list or specify and describe items or ideas one by one.

Evaluate

See Assess.

Examine

This requires you to investigate a topic thoroughly.

Explain

Offer a detailed and exact rationale behind an idea or principle, or a set of reasons for a situation or attitude. The explanation should increase the reader's understanding of a topic or idea.

Explore

See Examine.

Generate

This often requires you to come up with new ideas or interpretations on a subject.

Hypothesise

A hypothesis is a theory regarding particular occurrences. You confirm hypotheses through testing. Suggest the reasons for and the processes by which something has occurred.

Identify

Highlight the main aspects of an idea, topic or a sequence of events.

Illustrate/demonstrate

This requires an answer that consists mainly of examples to demonstrate or prove the subject of the question. It is often accompanied with further instructions.



Task Word List

Interpret

Very similar to Explain. Describe what your subject means. Examine the key components of a topic or idea and give an evaluation of it.

Investigate

Research, study and carefully survey all areas of the subject.

Justify

Give only the reasons for a position or argument. The proposition to be argued may be a negative one. It should convince the reader of your point of view.

Outline

Summarise information about a subject. Only the main points and not the details should be included. Questions of this type often require short answers.

Prove/disprove

Both of these require answers that demonstrate the logical arguments and evidence connected with a proposition. Prove requires the points 'for, and disprove requires the points 'against'.

Relate (relationship)

Make links or connections between two or more ideas, and show how these ideas are associated, as well as the nature of the relationship.

Review

Analyse, criticise and comment on the main ideas of a topic. Your assignment needs to be structured in logical order.

State

This requires an answer that expresses the relevant points briefly and clearly without lengthy discussion or minor details.

Summarise

See Outline.



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