

Instruction Words

What are
instruction
words?



Instruction words are the words in an assignment or exam task or questions that indicate how you are to address the topic.

Below is a list of some instruction words you may encounter, with their meanings. The meanings are intended as a guide only and further clarification should be sought from your class tutor if you are unsure what is expected.

Instruction Word	Meaning
Account for	Give reasons, explain why it happened.
Analyse	Break the subject up into its main ideas, and describe the relationships between them. Focus on 'how' and 'why'. Do not simply describe or summarise.
Argue	Present a convincing, soundly reasoned case for and/or against.
Assess	Critically judge the value of a subject.
Comment on	Discuss, explain, and give your opinion on the ideas expressed. Use analogies or examples to support your response.
Compare	Look for similarities between the things mentioned. Emphasise similarities but mention differences where appropriate.
Contrast	Stress the differences between the things mentioned.
Critically analyse	Break up the subject into its main ideas and identify the underlying assumptions and questions that are NOT being asked.
Criticise	Make a judgement about the merit or truth of the facts or views mentioned, discussing both positive points and limitations. Support with evidence.
Define	Clearly state the exact meaning. Give the limits of the definition.

Instruction Word	Meaning
Describe	Give a detailed account of the characteristics of a subject, or retell the essential features of a story.
Discuss	Analyse a subject from different points of view and come to a well-reasoned conclusion.
Evaluate	Examine the various sides of a subject, citing positive and negative features. Then make a judgment as to its significance, relevance, value, importance, or quality.
Examine	Inspect in detail and investigate the implications.
Explain	Make clear the details; show the reason for, or underlying cause of, or the means by which something occurs. You may provide examples to support the explanation.
Illustrate	Use examples. Or where appropriate, provide a figure, or diagram.
Indicate	Point out, make known, or show.
Integrate	Join together in a logical way.
Interpret	Translate, solve, or comment on a subject, giving and justifying your judgement.
Justify	Provide evidence or give reasons for decisions or conclusions. Should be presented in a way that will convince the reader or listener.
Outline	Give the main features or general principles of a subject. Leave out minor details.
Prove	Show the truth of a statement by logical argument, experiment, or test.
Relate	Show the connection between the things mentioned in the question.
Review	Provide a summary, usually a critical one. A review usually also implies commenting on the important aspects of the questions.
State	Present the main points in a brief and clear sequence, usually omitting details or examples.
Summarise	Give the main points in order of importance or trace the argument briefly.
Trace	Identify and describe the development or history of something from some point, or from its origin.
Relate	Show the connection between the things mentioned in the question.