



Interpreting an exam question

Introduction

When writing an exam answer it is very important that you address what the question has asked. The following are definitions of words that are commonly used in assignment questions.

(Please use this as a guide – always follow assignment guidelines).

Analyse	Identify and examine closely the component parts of a situation, model or explanation
Argue	Present a case for and/or against ...
Assess	Attempt to form a judgment about ...
Compare	Discuss two or more things in terms of their similarities and differences, perhaps reach a conclusion about which is preferable
Contrast	Discuss two or more things, emphasising their differences
Critique	Give a judgment about the value of ... and support that judgement with evidence (this can be positive or negative)
Define	Make clear what is meant by ...; use a definition or definitions to explore the concept of ...
Describe	Give a detailed or graphic account of ...
Discuss	Investigate or examine by argument give reasons for or against and consider implications.
Enumerate	Give an item by item account
Evaluate	Decide the value of ...
Examine	Inspect ... in detail and investigate the implications
Explain	Make clear the details of ...; show the reason for, or underlying cause of, or the means by which ... occurs

Illustrate	Offer an example or examples to show how or that, or make concrete the concept of...
Interpret	Make clear the meaning of ... and its implications
Justify	Give reasons why certain decisions should be made, or certain conclusions reached
Outline	Go through and identify briefly the main features of ...
Prove	Show by logical argument
Review	Report the chief facts about ...; offer a criticism of ...
Summarise	Describe concisely the main points without details or examples
Trace	Follow the development or history of a topic from some point of origin

Further information

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