

Assignment Directives

At university, assignment tasks are designed with very specific instructions. Students must 'answer' the question or fulfil the task and not merely write 'around' the topic. While this sounds simple, it is not always easy. Once you have started to research the topic, your mind may be filled with ideas, some of which may lead you in the wrong direction.

What are directives?

There are a number of directives, otherwise known as 'task' words, which have recognised meanings when applied to university assignments. Directive words tell you what you are required to do. It is important to understand the meaning of these words, so that your assignment will answer the question or fulfil the task.

Assignment directives include:

Account	Argue	Arrange	Assess
Compare	Complete	Consider	Contrast
Criticise	Decide	Define	Circle
Clarify	Describe	Discuss	Distinguish
Draw	Enumerate	Evaluate	Examine
Explain	Express	Highlight	Identify
Illustrate	Interpret	Justify	List
Match	Name	Outline	Prepare
Prove	Provide	Relate	Review
Select	Show	Simplify	Sketch
Suggest	Summarise	Translate	Use

You may be given a list of task words by a lecturer. This helps both you and the lecturer to know the exact requirements of an assignment.

In some cases one directive word may be used, while on other occasions there may be more than one. The instructions will then need to be broken down into parts so that you can better understand what is being asked. Consider the examples of assignments given below.

Examples of single directives

- **Account** for the economic success of the 'tiger' economy of Singapore during the 1960s.
- **Analyse** the major social and technological changes that took place in European warfare between 1789 and 1871.
- **Assess** the arguments for and against Australia signing the Kyoto Protocol.
- **Compare** 'Traditional File Processing' with the 'Database Management Approach'.
- **Complete** the following MO diagram for the molecule He₂.
- **Contrast** the ways European skilled artisans of the mid-eighteenth century and European factory workers of the late nineteenth century differed in their attitudes toward work.
- **Define** 'antheridium'.
- **Describe** the process of 'phytochrome interconversion'.
- **Discuss** the effects of the 2000 Sydney Olympics on Australia's international sporting reputation.
- **Draw** a diagram of a fern lifecycle.
- **Evaluate** the benefits associated with exercise for elderly persons aged 70+ years.
- **Examine** one Australian model of English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching.
- **Explain** how the collapse of the Tokugawa regime in feudal Japan was inevitable.
- **Indicate** three ways members of the Class Turbellaria have adapted to a parasitic lifestyle.
- **List** two characteristics that distinguish fungi from plants.
- **Name** two phyla whose members display radial and bilateral symmetry.
- **Outline** Piaget's theory of development.
- **Sketch** the molecular geometries of BH₃ and BCl₃.
- **Summarise** the properties of transition metals that make them useful.

Examples of double directives

- **Arrange** the chlorine oxyacids HClO₂, HClO₄, HClO₃ and HClO in order of increasing oxidising strength and acidity. **Account** for this trend.
- **Choose** one civil liberty and **compare** the levels of protection between Australia and one Asian country.
- How would you **distinguish** between a young monocot stem and a young dicot stem? Next to your explanation, **draw** a diagram of both stems.
- **Identify** the social and economic factors in pre-industrial England that **explain** why England was the first country to industrialise.
- **Explain** the difference between the Access database field properties 'Default Value' and 'Validation Rule' and **provide** an example of each.
- **List** the three subphyla of the Phylum Chordata and **explain** what features permit biologists to place them all within the same phylum?

Directives explained

<i>Analyse</i>	Break an issue into its parts. Look in depth at each part using evidence for and against, and show how these parts interrelate to one another.
<i>Argue</i>	Present the case for/or against a particular proposition and demonstrate weaknesses in the opposing argument.
<i>Assess</i>	Weigh up the extent to which something is true. Persuade the reader of your argument by citing relevant research, but also remember to point out any flaws and counter arguments. Conclude by stating how far you agree with the original proposition.
<i>Clarify</i>	Make something clearer and, where appropriate, simplify it. For example, this could involve explaining a complex process, theory or the relationship between two variables in simpler terms.
<i>Compare</i>	Identify the similarities and, possibly, the differences between two or more phenomena. Say if any of the shared similarities or differences are more important than others. 'Compare' and 'contrast' will often feature together in an essay question.
<i>Consider</i>	Say what you think and have observed about something. Support your comments by using appropriate evidence from external sources. That means including any views which are contrary to your own and how they relate to what you originally thought.
<i>Contrast</i>	Explain differences.
<i>Criticise</i>	Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a text in terms of its methodology, theory or argumentation.
<i>Critique</i>	See 'Criticise'
<i>Define</i>	Give the meaning of a word or phrase.
<i>Describe</i>	Give details about something so that someone understands it.
<i>Differentiate</i>	Show the difference between two things.
<i>Discuss</i>	Present various points and consider the different sides. This is usually longer than an explanation, as you need to present evidence and state which argument is more persuasive.
<i>Enumerate</i>	List or specify and then describe.
<i>Evaluate</i>	Critique an argument or proposition by identifying its strengths and weaknesses. You should refer to evidence and use logic and reason to argue your case.
<i>Examine</i>	Look in close detail and establish the key facts and important issues surrounding a topic. This should be a critical evaluation and you should try to offer reasons as to why the facts and issues you have identified are the most important.
<i>Explain</i>	Clarify a topic by giving a detailed account as to how and why it occurs, or what is meant by the use of a term in a particular context. Your writing should have clarity so that complex procedures or sequences of events can be understood. Define key terms where appropriate and substantiate your research with support from the relevant literature.

<i>Explore</i>	Adopt a questioning approach and consider a variety of different viewpoints. Where possible reconcile opposing views by presenting a final line of argument.
<i>Illustrate</i>	A similar instruction to 'explain' whereby you are asked to show the workings of something, by making use of definite examples (charts, graphs, tables, statistics) to add weight to your explanation.
<i>Interpret</i>	Demonstrate your understanding of an issue or topic by referring to details within it and making it clear to the reader.
<i>Investigate</i>	Search, study and carefully survey all areas of the subject.
<i>Justify</i>	Show adequate grounds for decisions or conclusions.
<i>Narrate</i>	Tell the story or give an account of an event or experience.
<i>Outline</i>	Give the main features or general principles of a subject and omit minor details.
<i>Prove</i>	Demonstrate whether a statement is truth or false by presenting evidence.
<i>Relate</i>	Show the connection between two things or ideas and the extent to which they are alike or affect each other.
<i>Review</i>	Look thoroughly into a subject. This should be a critical assessment and not merely a descriptive piece of text.
<i>Sketch</i>	Give a brief outline of the main points.
<i>State</i>	Specify, in clear terms, the key aspects pertaining to a topic without being overly descriptive. Refer to evidence and examples where appropriate.
<i>Summarise</i>	Give a condensed version of a topic, drawing out the main facts. Brief or general examples will normally suffice for this kind of answer.
<i>Trace</i>	Show how and when something started or developed, in chronological or progressive terms.

Adapted from Study Help – General Study Skills,

http://help-online.murdoch.edu.au/students/studyhelp/es_write.html#directive, Accessed [16 March 2010]

Academic assistance

Academic Learning and Language (ALL)

The ALL Writing Centre is free to students currently enrolled at the University of Adelaide. During each semester, you can drop in to see an ALL lecturer. They are available for individual consultations to help you develop your writing skills and ensure that you have fulfilled the requirements of your assignments. For session times refer to the CLPD website: <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/clpd/all/writingctr/>

If you require more assistance with Assignment Directives, please contact the Writing Centre on 8313 5771.

Visit the Writing Centre website for additional resources: www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/

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