

Academic Task Words

Academic Task Words are used in assessment topics and exam questions to tell you how to approach the topic and what sort of answer is required. Knowing the subtle differences between common task words will help you focus your responses effectively. As always, your responses should be based on research and evidence.

Task Word	The approach to take in your answer	Task Word	The approach to take in your answer
analyse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Examine the parts closely to see how <i>and</i> why they are related to each other. ✗ Do not <i>just describe or summarise</i>. 	examine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Put the subject “under the microscope”, looking at it in detail. Investigate the reasons, causes and effects, and implications. ✗ Do not <i>just describe or summarise</i>.
assess/ evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Decide the value of, judge or measure the importance of the topic, using evidence. Discuss both the positive and negative aspects. ✗ Do not <i>rely solely on your own opinion</i>. 	explain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarify, interpret and describe. You may give reasons for differences of opinions or results and try to analyse causes. ✗ Do not <i>just describe or summarise</i>.
compare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Show how two or more concepts are similar. Indicate the relevance or consequences of these similarities. ✗ Do not <i>talk about only one item</i>. 	identify	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Name, or say what the items are <i>and</i> define them. ✗ Do not <i>give a one-word dot point list</i>.
contrast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Set two or more concepts in opposition so as to draw out differences. Indicate whether the differences are significant. If appropriate, give reasons why one item or argument may be preferable. ✗ Do not <i>talk about only one item</i>. 	list	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ List and briefly explain the key issues or features of the topic. ✗ Do not <i>give a one-word dot point list</i>.
critically evaluate/ critique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Weigh arguments for <i>and</i> against something, assessing the strengths of the evidence of both sides and then come to a conclusion. Clarify and interpret the material you present. Where appropriate, give reasons for differences of opinions or results, and try to analyse causes. ✗ Do not <i>just describe or summarise</i>. 	outline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Give only the main points, showing the main structure. Talk about big issues surrounding the topic. ✗ Do not <i>go into minute detail or an extended history of the topic</i>.
define	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Explain, give the full meaning(s), make clear what is meant by, use definition(s) to explore the concept. ✗ Do not <i>give a one-word dot point list</i>. 	(provide an) overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Give a general understanding or description of the topic as a whole. Talk about big issues surrounding the topic. ✗ Do not <i>go into minute detail or an extended history of the topic</i>.
describe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide details of the key characteristics or features, outline the main events. ✗ Do not <i>talk about only one feature</i>. 	reflect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ This involves deep thought, questioning your own and other’s beliefs and values to gain a thorough understanding of a situation or event. ✗ Do not <i>rely solely on your own opinion</i>.
discuss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Consider and offer an interpretation or evaluation in relation to different points of view, consider all angles. Present an informed point of view. ✗ Do not <i>rely solely on your own opinion</i>. 	summarise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Briefly present all the main points of the topic. ✗ Do not <i>go into minute detail or an extended history of the topic</i>.