

# Glossary of Task Words

Understanding the meaning of words, especially task words, helps you to know exactly what is being asked of you. It takes you half way towards narrowing down your material and selecting your answer. Task words direct you and tell you how to go about answering a question. Here is a list of task words that you may come across in your course.

<b>Words</b>	What they (might) mean . . .
<b>Account for</b>	Explain the cause of the given topic.
<b>Analyze</b>	Break an issue down into its component parts, discuss them, and show how they interrelate.
<b>Assess</b>	Consider the value or importance of something, paying due attention to positive, negative, and disputable aspects, and citing the judgements of any known authorities as well as your own.
<b>Argue</b>	Make a case, based on appropriate evidence for and/or against some given point of view.
<b>Comment on</b>	You should give a written criticism or explanation, expressing a personal or professional opinion. (The context of the question will tell you which is required).
<b>Compare</b>	Identify similarities between two items you are asked to compare. You may also mention the differences. You may be asked to 'compare' and 'contrast' in the same question; be sure to do both.
<b>Contrast</b>	Identify similarities between two items you are asked to compare. You may also mention the differences. You may be asked to 'compare' and 'contrast' in the same question; be sure to do both.
<b>Criticize</b>	Spell out your judgement as to the value or truth of something, indicating the criteria on which you base your judgement and citing specific instances of how the criteria apply in this case.
<b>Define</b>	Make a statement as to the meaning or interpretation of something, giving sufficient detail so as to allow it to be distinguished from similar things. Use concise and clear language.
<b>Describe</b>	Spell out the main aspects of an idea or topic, or the sequence in which a series of things happened.
<b>Discuss</b>	Investigate or examine by argument. Examine key points and possible interpretations, sift and debate, giving reasons for and against. Draw a conclusion.
<b>Evaluate</b>	Make a detailed assessment of the problem, including both advantages and limitations. Evaluation involves making a judgement about how effective, useful, or successful something is.
<b>Examine</b>	Present in depth and investigate the implications.
<b>Explain</b>	Tell how things work or how they came to be the way they are, including perhaps some need to 'describe' and to 'analyze'.
<b>Identify</b>	Highlight what you regard as the key features of something, perhaps making clear the criteria you use.

<b>Illustrate</b>	Similar to 'explain', but probably asking for the quoting of specific examples or statistics or possibly the drawing of maps, graphs, sketches, etc.
<b>Interpret</b>	Comment on the subject, and also give your judgment or reaction to the issue.
<b>Justify</b>	Express valid reasons for accepting a particular interpretation or conclusion, probably including the need to 'argue' a case.
<b>Outline</b>	Indicate the main features of a topic or sequence of events, possibly setting them within a clear structure or framework to show how they interrelate.
<b>Prove</b>	Demonstrate the truth of something by offering irrefutable evidence and/or a logical sequence of statements leading from evidence to conclusion.
<b>Reconcile</b>	Show how two apparently opposed or mutually exclusive ideas or propositions can be seen to be similar in important respects, if not identical. Involves the need to 'analyze' and 'justify'.
<b>Relate</b>	Either 'explain' how things happened or are connected in a cause-and-effect sense, or may imply 'compare' and 'contrast'.
<b>Review</b>	Survey a topic, with the emphasis on 'assess' rather than 'describe'.
<b>State</b>	Express the main points of an idea or topic, perhaps in the manner of 'describe', briefly but clearly. Do not involve examples or illustrations.
<b>Summarize</b>	'State' the main features of an argument, omitting all superfluous detail and side-issues.
<b>Trace</b>	Identify the connection between one thing and another either in a developmental sense over a period of time, or else in a cause-and-effect sense. May imply both 'describe' and 'explain'.
<b>To what extent...?</b>	Explore the case for a stated proposition or explanation, much in the manner of 'assess' and 'criticize', probably arguing for a less than total acceptance of the proposition.

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