

Instruction terms — taken from Study Skills, Clifton Press 1999-2000

account for

Explain the **reasons** for, giving an indication of all relevant circumstances. Not to be confused with 'Give an account of' which asks only for a detailed description.

analyse

Study in depth, identifying and describing in detail the main characteristics.

argue

Put forward a proposition, then illustrate it, discuss its significance, and defend it against possible counter-charges.

assess

Examine closely, with a view to 'weighing up' a particular situation. Consider in a balanced way the strengths and weaknesses or points for and against a proposition. In conclusion, state your judgement clearly.

comment

State clearly and in moderate fashion your opinions on the material in question. Support your views with reference to suitable evidence or explanations.

compare

Look for similarities **and** differences between two or more things.

contrast

Deliberately single out and emphasise the differences and dissimilarities between two or more things.

criticise

Give your judgement about a statement or a body of work; explore its implications, discussing all the evidence which is available. Be specific in your examination.

define

Set down the precise meaning of something. Be prepared to state the limits of the definition. Take note of multiple meanings if they exist.

describe

Give a detailed and comprehensive account of.

discuss

Investigate and examine by careful argument. Explore the implications and the advantages or disadvantages. Debate the case and possibly consider any alternatives. This is probably the most common instruction term. It is inviting you to say something interesting in response to the topic in question. You can choose your own approach.

evaluate

Make an appraisal of the worth of something in the light of its truth or utility. Emphasise the views of authorities as well as your personal estimation.

explain

Make plain. Account for. Clarify, interpret, and spell out the material you present, giving reasons for important features or developments.

how far ...

Similar to questions which begin '**To what extent...**'. You are expected to make your case or present your argument, whilst showing an awareness that alternate or even contradictory explanations may exist. Careful assessment and weighing of evidence are called for.

illustrate

Make clear and explicit by the discussion of concrete examples.

justify

Show adequate grounds for decisions or conclusions. Answer or refute the main objections likely to be made against them.

outline

Give the main features or the general principles of a subject, omitting minor details and emphasising structure or arrangement.

relate

Show how things are connected, and how they possibly affect, cause, or resemble each other.

review

Make a survey of, examining the subject critically.

state

Present the main points in brief, clear form.

summarise

Give a concise account of the main points of a matter, omitting details and examples.

trace

Follow the development or history of a topic from some point of origin.