

Understanding the Question

Assignment questions can be broken down into parts so that you can better understand what you are being asked to do. It is important to identify **key words** in the question.

What are Key Words?

Key words are the words in an assignment question that tell you how to answer a question. Key words usually fall into three categories—task words, content words and limiting words.

Task Words

Task words tell you what to do in order to answer the question. Task words are usually verbs such as *compare*, *discuss*, and *evaluate*. Being able to identify and interpret a task word is important because it will determine the approach you will adopt in your assignment.

Table of Common Task Words (University of New England, 2020).

TASK WORD	WHAT YOU ARE BEING ASKED TO DO
Account for	Give reasons for something.
Analyse	Focus on the 'how' and 'why' of a topic. Do not simply describe or summarise.
Compare	Find similarities and differences between two or more objects, ideas, events or theories.
Contrast	Similar to compare, but differences should be emphasised
Criticise	Assess the merit of something. Consider both good points and bad points and give the results of your analysis.
Define	Give precise meanings with key details.
Describe	Recall specific details about size, cost, texture, appearance etc.
Discuss	Present a point of view after considering both sides of an issue or question. Your opinion should be supported by arguments and evidence.
Evaluate	Consider both strengths and weaknesses and make a judgement.
Explain	Relate how something happens in the order in which it occurs, or, clarify reasons, causes and effects.
Interpret	Express in your own words.
List	Write your answer as an itemised series which may be in point form.
Outline	Provide main points and leave out minor details
Relate	Tell the story in a clear sequence, or, show how things are connected/similar to each other.
Review	Examine a subject critically, analysing and commenting on the main points.
State	Present the main points in a brief, clear sequence.
Summarise	Give the main points or facts in condensed form.
To What Extent	Consider both sides, make a judgment and defend it. Similar to Evaluate or Discuss. Relate the progress, development or history of a subject.

Content Words

Content words tell you what the topic areas are, and help you focus your research on the correct areas. Being able to identify and interpret a content word is important because it will determine the topic of your research.

For example, the following assignment question requires you to:

Define health determinants, and identify and discuss four key health determinants for Indigenous Australian children in the Northern Territory.

Here, the assignment question is asking you to focus your research on the topic area of **health determinants**.

Limiting Words

Limiting Words confine the topic area by placing limits or subject-qualifiers. Limiting words help you identify the scope of the topic area you should focus on. A topic could be limited by era, location, sub-topic, or theory. Being able to identify and interpret a limiting word is important because it can help you narrow down your research and help you identify relevant and irrelevant information for your assignment.

For example, the following assignment question requires you to:

Define health determinants, and identify and discuss four key health determinants for Indigenous Australian children in the Northern Territory.

Here, the assignment question is asking you to limit or confine your research to a number of issues: **four key health determinants; Indigenous Australian children** (the group); **and the Northern Territory** (the location).

Resource References

University of New England. 2020. *Analysing the Question*.

https://www.une.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/14109/WE_Analysing-the-question.pdf