

Common assignment terminology

If the assignment asks you to...	Your essay or project should ...
Analyze (or outline, or explain)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• break the topic down into key elements and details• identify and describe causes, key factors or features, possible results, and relationships among these elements• offer your informed, critical interpretation of the above.
Compare (and/or contrast)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• offer an argument (not a list) based on similarities and differences between two or more things.• see Compare and contrast essays
Examine (or explore, or investigate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• take a diagnostic approach• inquire or look into closely, perhaps to uncover a motive, cause, theme, etc.• seek out core issues, suggest possible interpretations / solutions.
Argue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• take a position on a topic and support your position with evidence and interpretation• give reasons for or against something.
Debate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• present opposing viewpoints on a topic• give reasons for and against something.
Evaluate (or judge, criticize, or assess)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• determine the value or significance of something; offer evidence to support your evaluation.
Describe	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• depict or delineate in words• place more emphasis on <i>what</i> something is and <i>how</i> it occurs, than on <i>why</i> it occurs.
Define	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• give the meaning of something• describe its essential qualities.
Trace	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• follow the course, development, or history of something.
Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• summarize and perhaps evaluate the key aspects of the material.
Document	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• follow the development, course or history of something, but emphasize the use of scholarly sources, references and citations in supporting your approach• prove, using scholarly sources and evidence.
Discuss	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• comment on, talk over, write about the topic using whatever approach seems appropriate (i.e., any of the approaches listed in this chart).