

# Common Assignment Terminology

To determine what you are being asked to do, it is helpful to start with the terminology used in the assignment description.

## Analyze (or outline, or explain)

- 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)

- 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)

- 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

- take a position on a topic and support your position with evidence and interpretation
- give reasons for or against something.

## Debate

- present opposing viewpoints on a topic
- give reasons for **and** against something.

## Evaluate (or judge, criticize, or assess)

- determine the value or significance of something; offer evidence to support your evaluation.

## Describe

- depict or delineate in words
- place more emphasis on *what* something is and *how* it occurs, than on *why* it occurs.

## Define

- give the meaning of something
- describe its essential qualities.

## Trace

- follow the course, development, or history of something.

## Review

- summarize and perhaps evaluate the key aspects of the material.

## Document

- 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

- comment on, talk over, write about the topic using whatever approach seems appropriate (i.e., any of the approaches listed in this chart).