Understanding an Assignment Question

Assignment questions require careful reading and analysis. They generally contain two types of key words:

1. **Content words** – these words refer to the content or topic
2. **Instructional words** – these refer to the task itself

How to analyse an assignment question

- Highlight key content words (use colour)
- Highlight instructional words (different colour)
- How many parts are there to the question?
- How important is each of the parts? Are any of the parts more important than others?
- What is the word limit? How many words are needed for each section?

**Content words**

To answer an assignment question appropriately it is necessary to carefully address the question that is asked. The question is generally very specific and will refer to part only of the course content. To properly understand the content words it is often necessary to research the topic first.

Think about the following:

- Which part of the course content does the question refer to?
- Which aspects of this topic are required?
- What broader context is this question part of?

**Instructional words**

A clear understanding of instructional words is vital for answering the question the way the lecturer expects. In an assignment the lecturer is not only assessing what students know, but also their ability to respond to the content in a particular way.

Assignments may require students to:

- Describe or give information about a topic or idea
- Show or explain the relationship between topics or ideas
- Describe or explain a process
- Argue a point of view
- Compare different ideas
Meanings of instructional words

A good understanding of the meaning of instructional words is vital. Below is a list of definitions of instructional words.

account for  give reasons for; explain
give an account of  describe; state what something is like
analyse  breakdown into parts; examine; explain
argue  present a point of view
assess  evaluate; show the value of
classify  put into groups or categories
comment on  evaluate; show the value of
compare  show similarities
contrast  show differences
criticise  evaluate; show the value and show weaknesses of
define  state what something is
demonstrate  show with evidence
describe  state what something is like
determine  find out; investigate
differentiate  show the difference
discuss  present different points of view
elaborate  give details about
elucidate  make clear
establish  show with evidence
estimate  work out
evaluate  demonstrate the value of
examine  look at carefully
explain  give reasons for
identify  show and describe
indicate  show and explain
infer  make a conclusion about
interpret  analyse and explain
illustrate  give evidence or examples
justify  give reasons and evidence
list  present in a sequence
outline  briefly describe
prove  provide evidence for
quantify  measure
relate  describe
speculate  give an opinion
suggest  present possibilities
summarise  present the main points
survey  give an overview
verify  provide evidence for