Instructional Words

Instructional words tell you what you need to do.

There are three main types:

- **information words**, **relation words** and **interpretation words**.

i) **Information Words** ask you to show what you know about a subject:

- **define** - give the exact meaning clearly and concisely - sometimes more than one meaning.
- **describe** - write the main points in detail. No interpretation is required.
- **examine** - Break down and describe the main points in detail.
- **explain** - Clarify something: Look at the reasons why something happened and account for the causes and results or implications.
- **illustrate** - Explain the ideas with the help of examples. (Your answers will have phrases such as ‘For example’ and ‘This is shown by ...’).
- **list** - Briefly give series of ideas. Sometimes numbered.
- **outline** - Explain the main ideas or points. Use general terms without minor detail.
- **research** - gather material from many outside sources, and analyze what you have found.
- **summarize** - briefly list the important ideas you learned. Leave out details and examples.
- **trace** - Give a step-by-step account. (Your answer might have phrases such as ‘There are five stages by which .... The first stage is when ...’).

ii) **Relation Words** ask you to show how things are connected.

- **apply** - use details that you've been given to demonstrate how an idea, theory, or concept works in a set situation.
- **compare** - show how two or more things are similar/different.
- **contrast** - show how two or more things are different.
- **discuss** – ‘Discuss’ means to come to a conclusion about an issue, giving reasons for and sometimes against your view.
- **relate** - show or describe the connections between things.
iii) **Interpretation Words** ask you to give an opinion that is supported by evidence: use examples, definitions, and concepts from class/research.

- **analyse** - Break down into main ideas and show the relationships between them. Many relationships are causes and effects, and therefore many sentences will have phrases such as ‘because’, ‘as a result’ and ‘A leads to B because of C’.
- **argue** — take a side and defend it with evidence against the other side
- **assess** - summarize your opinion and measure it against something else.
- **critically analyse** - Break down into main ideas and look at these ideas in terms of strengths and weaknesses.
- **evaluate, respond** - state your opinion of the subject as good, bad, or some combination of the two. Use examples and reasons to support this.
- **interpret** - Clearly explain the meaning. May use examples or provide comment on it.
- **prove, justify** - give reasons or examples to demonstrate how or why the statement is the truth
- **support** - give reasons or evidence for something you believe (be sure to state clearly what it is that you believe).
- **synthesize** - bring two or more ideas together, not only saying how they are the same or different - but provide a reason for them.

Further Learning Centre Handouts relating to this topic:
- *Understanding the Assessment Question*
- *Essay Structure*

For more information visit: [http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/readassign.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/readassign.html)