

## Key instruction words and questions

Below are some common key instruction words and questions you may encounter in coursework assignments and examinations. Familiarise yourself with what markers mean and expect when they use these instruction words or questions, so that you can develop an appropriate response in terms of content, argument, structure and style.

Table A.1. Common key instruction words

| Word(s)                     | Meaning or expectation  |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>account for</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explain or provide the reason(s) for something</li> </ul>  |
| <b>agree/disagree</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide a positive or negative judgment or opinion on a topic</li> <li>support your opinion with appropriate evidence and examples</li> </ul>  |
| <b>analyse</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>break a subject or topic down into its main parts or ideas and consider it carefully and in detail to understand or explain it</li> <li>identify the main parts or ideas of a subject and examine, explain or interpret the connections or relationships among each part or idea and to the whole topic</li> <li>present the analysis in a methodical and logical way</li> </ul>   |
| <b>apply</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>use the specified concepts, theories or methods to consider a particular case, data set, problem or issue</li> </ul>   |
| <b>argue</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>present a case for and/or against something</li> <li>present a logical order of claims and counterclaims related to the various perspectives on a given topic together with suitable reasons, evidence or examples to support each claim</li> </ul>  |
| <b>assess</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establish the degree, extent, importance, strengths/weaknesses, success, applicability, usefulness or value of something</li> </ul>  |
| <b>comment on</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>give your opinion about, or an explanation for, a subject or the ideas within a subject</li> </ul>   |
| <b>compare</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>point out the differences and/or similarities between two or more things</li> <li>examine the qualities or characteristics of a subject and emphasise the similarities and differences among them</li> <li>provide a balanced, objective answer</li> </ul>   |
| <b>compare and contrast</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>examine the similarities and differences of two or more subjects</li> <li>show how two or more things are both alike and different</li> </ul>  |
| <b>contrast</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>show how two or more things differ or diverge when compared with each other</li> <li>emphasise striking differences between two or more elements and account for these as may be appropriate (considering word and time restrictions)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>criticise/ critique</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>make judgments about a subject after thinking about it carefully and deeply</li> <li>express your judgment with respect to the correctness or merit of the factors under consideration</li> <li>give the results of your own analysis and discuss the limitations and contributions of the factors in question</li> <li>support your judgment with evidence</li> <li>provide a fair balance of both limitations or weaknesses and strengths</li> </ul> |
| <b>debate</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>present the two opposing viewpoints on an argument or issue</li> </ul>   |

| Verb                           | Meaning or expectation   |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>define</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>describe, or state clearly, exactly or precisely what something is or means and what it is like</li> <li>say what its limits are</li> <li>do not include details but do include what distinguishes it from other related things, perhaps by giving examples</li> </ul>  |
| <b>demonstrate</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>show that something is so by using examples or evidence</li> </ul>  |
| <b>describe</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>give a detailed account of characteristics, properties or qualities of a subject</li> <li>tell what happened or what the topic is</li> <li>concentrate on primary or important features</li> </ul>  |
| <b>determine</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establish or work out something through a logical process</li> </ul>  |
| <b>discuss</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consider your subject from different points of view</li> <li>examine, analyse and present considerations for and against the problem or statement</li> </ul>  |
| <b>distinguish</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>make, show or recognise difference(s), discrepancies or points of divergence between or among two or more things</li> </ul>   |
| <b>enumerate</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide an item-by-item account of something</li> </ul>   |
| <b>evaluate</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>decide on your subject's significance, value, merit or quality after carefully considering its good and bad features</li> <li>use authoritative (e.g., from established authors or theorists in the field) and, to some extent, personal appraisal of both contributions and limitations of the subject</li> <li>give your opinion about a topic</li> <li>make both positive and negative points, coming to some conclusion about the relative weight of good and bad points</li> </ul> |
| <b>examine</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>critically investigate something</li> <li>look closely or in great detail at, or question, something</li> </ul>   |
| <b>explain</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>give precise details about your subject and describe it so that it can be understood</li> <li>give reasons for a particular event or situation</li> <li>state the 'how' and 'why'</li> <li>account for causes, results and implications</li> <li>use examples to support your explanation</li> </ul>  |
| <b>explore</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>look for or discover patterns or relationships between various aspects or elements of something</li> </ul>  |
| <b>focus on</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>select a particular aspect or strand of a problem or issue to consider</li> </ul>   |
| <b>give a brief account of</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>describe in a concise way without providing too much detail</li> </ul>  |
| <b>identify</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establish the key features of something</li> </ul>  |
| <b>illustrate</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explain the points you are making clearly by using one or more concrete examples, diagrams, figures, statistics, etc.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>interpret</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>translate, solve, give examples or facts, or comment upon the subject and evaluate it in terms of your judgment, point of view or reaction</li> <li>basically, give an explanation of what your subject means</li> </ul>  |
| <b>justify</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide the reasons and grounds to support assertion, statement or topic</li> <li>present the evidence and examples that you use to support your argument in a form that will convince your reader</li> </ul>   |

| Word(s)               | Meaning or expectation   |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>list</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide an itemised series or a tabulation of points</li> <li>provide bulleted or numbered points of some or all of the items making up a topic or process</li> </ul>   |
| <b>note</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>similar to outline, but may be focused on particular aspects of the matter under consideration</li> </ul>   |
| <b>outline</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explain ideas, plans, or theories in a general way, without giving all the details</li> <li>organise and systematically describe the main points or general principles</li> <li>use essential supplementary material, but omit minor details</li> </ul> |
| <b>present</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrate, display or show something</li> </ul>   |
| <b>prove/disprove</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>confirm or verify a statement, experiment or theory</li> <li>disprove opposing statements, experiments or theories</li> <li>evaluate the material and present logical arguments, experimental evidence and/or logical reasoning</li> </ul>              |
| <b>recommend</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide feasible, realistic and practical solutions or suggestions to an issue or problem</li> </ul>  |
| <b>reconcile</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>show how two propositions or ideas are similar in important respects</li> </ul>   |
| <b>refute</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide evidence for why something is not the case</li> </ul>   |
| <b>relate</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>state or claim the connection(s) or link(s) between two things</li> <li>show the relationship by emphasising these connections and associations</li> <li>show how the topic has an effect on something else</li> </ul>                                  |
| <b>report on</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide a detailed account of an occurrence or situation</li> </ul>   |
| <b>review</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>critically examine, analyse and comment on the major points of a subject in an organised manner</li> </ul>  |
| <b>state</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>give the main or relevant points briefly</li> <li>no lengthy discussion or minor details are required</li> </ul>  |
| <b>suggest</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>give possible reasons, solutions, or other attributes indicated</li> <li>analyse, interpret and evaluate</li> </ul>   |
| <b>summarise</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide the main points of a topic</li> <li>condense or reduce information without altering the original author's meaning</li> <li>do not give details</li> </ul>   |
| <b>trace</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>give a description of the logical, chronological or methodological steps involved in the development of something</li> </ul>  |

information that may be of interest or use to them but that is superfluous to the present argument.

#### At the section or paragraph level ...

- incorporation of clear topic sentences for each paragraph, preferably at the start of each paragraph, to make key ideas easily accessible to the reader;
- integration of clear explanations and examples to better illustrate your points;
- repetition of key ideas and points (although not to the point where such repetition is redundant and monotonous);
- use of summary or conclusion sentences;
- integration of appropriate signposting and transitional words and phrases to link paragraphs, sentences and sentence fragments so that the writing has an overall flow. Conjunctions (such as 'and', 'but', 'although' and 'if') can also be used to link sentences and sentence fragments together. For examples of such signposting and transitional words and phrases see below.

#### At the sentence level ...

- use of pronouns (such as 'he', 'she', 'them', 'they', 'it') and proper nouns (such as the names of people or organisations) to make it clear to the reader to whom you are referring; to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, you might use pseudonyms such as 'Mrs X' or 'Company Y'.

## Examples of signposting and transitional words and phrases

Words and phrases that may be used to guide the reader **backward in time** include:

- |                          |                    |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| • In the past ...        | • Originally...    |
| • Historically ...       | • Beforehand ...   |
| • Traditionally ...      | • Previously ...   |
| • Customarily ...        | • Formerly ...     |
| • Conventionally ...     | • Through time ... |
| • Prior to this time ... | • Over time ...    |
| • Earlier...             |                    |

Words and phrases that may be used to guide the reader **forward in time** include:

- |                           |                              |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Later ...               | • Lastly...                  |
| • Eventually ...          | • It is anticipated that ... |
| • Finally ...             | • In future ...              |
| • Immediately ...         | • The outlook is ...         |
| • Thereafter ...          | • It is projected that ...   |
| • Afterwards ...          | • In the short run ...       |
| • Next ...                | • In the long term ...       |
| • The next step is to ... | • Through time ...           |
| • Subsequently ...        | • Over time ...              |
| • In the end ...          |                              |

Words and phrases that may be used to guide the reader to what is happening **at this time** include:

- At the same time ...
- Alongside ...
- Meanwhile ...
- In the meantime ...
- Simultaneously ...
- Concurrently ...
- Presently ...
- At this time ...
- At the time of writing this ...
- Currently ...
- At the moment ...
- Now ...
- Right now ...
- At present ...
- During this time ...

Words and phrases that may be used to demonstrate **addition** or **expansion of ideas** to the reader include:

- In addition ...
- Additionally ...
- As well ...
- Also ...
- Further ...
- Furthermore ...
- Besides ...
- Equally important ...
- Next ...
- More explicitly ...
- Similarly ...
- In the same way ...
- Extra ...
- Other ...
- More ...
- And ...
- Another ...
- Nor ...
- Then ...
- First ... Second ... Third ... Last ...
- Firstly ... Secondly ... Finally ...
- Moreover ...
- More importantly ...
- What's more ...

Words and phrases that demonstrate a **comparison of ideas** to the reader include:

- However ...
- Although ...
- But ...
- Yet ...
- Then again ...
- While this is the case ...
- Although this is true ...
- For all of that ...
- After all of that ...
- Notwithstanding ...
- That aside...
- Or...
- ...disputes...
- ...is diverse...
- Nonetheless ...
- Nevertheless ...
- In opposition ...
- In contrast ...
- Despite this ...
- In spite of this ...
- On the contrary ...
- In comparison ...
- Conversely ...
- On one hand ... On the other hand ...

Words and phrases that may be used to **provide examples** for the reader include:

- For instance ...
- For example ...
- To demonstrate ...
- In practice ...
- ... is exemplary of ...
- ... exemplifies ...
- ... is observed ...
- ... can be seen ...
- ... is shown ...
- ... supports ...
- To illustrate ...
- As an illustration ...
- As an example ...

Words and phrases that may be used to **emphasise important points** for the reader include:

- Obviously ...
- Undoubtedly ...
- Clearly ...
- It is evident that ...
- In fact ...
- As a matter of fact ...
- Indeed ...
- In any case ...
- In any event ...
- Thus ...
- Therefore ...
- That is ...
- In brief ...
- In short ...
- In other words ...
- As previously stated ...
- As already noted ...

Words and phrases that may be used to inform the reader that **an idea is limited or uncommon** include:

- Seldom ...
- Few ...
- Limited ...
- A few ...
- A limited number ...
- Less than ...
- Not many ...
- ... is uncommon
- ... is restricted
- ... is scarce
- ... is unusual
- ... is rare

Words and phrases that may be used to inform the reader that **an idea is common or widespread** include:

- Numerous ...
- Many ...
- More than ...
- Several ...
- Almost all ...
- The majority ...
- Most ...
- A high proportion ...
- A large percentage ...
- A substantial number ...
- Significant ...
- Typically ...
- Usually ...
- Generally ...
- Often ...
- Commonly ...
- ... is prevalent
- ... is widespread

Words and phrases that may be used to inform the reader of a **degree of uncertainty or inconclusiveness about an idea** include:

- Perhaps ...
- ... may be ...
- ... might be ...
- ... is possibly ...
- ... is probably ...
- ... could ...
- Much uncertainty still surrounds ...
- Much debate exists ...
- There is limited evidence for ...
- Examples of ... are limited

Words and phrases that may be used to inform the reader of a **relationship between ideas** include:

- The relationship ...
- The link ...
- The connection ...
- The convergence ...
- The overlap ...
- The correlation ...
- ... is a subset of ...
- ... interacts with...
- ... leads to ...
- ... predicts ...
- ... causes ...
- ... influences ...
- ... informs ...
- ... affects ...
- The effect is ...
- The outcome is ...
- The result is ...
- Consequently ...
- Both ...
- Neither ...

Words and phrases that may be used to inform the reader of **other authors' works** include:

- According to ...
- ... pointed out that ...
- ... found that ...
- ... concluded that ...
- A report by ...
- ... wrote that ...
- ... expressed the opinion that ...
- ... hypothesised that ...
- ... speculated that ...
- In the words of...
- Many authors (such as ...) report ...
- Several studies (for example ...) have shown ...
- Both ... and ...
- ... reported that ...
- ... argued that ...
- ... found supporting evidence that ...
- ... confirmed that ...
- ... maintained that ...
- ... acknowledged that ...
- ... agreed that ...
- ... disputed that ...

Appendix C provides further examples of verbs that can be used for reporting considered opinion on others' ideas.

Words and phrases that may be used to inform the reader of a **summary or concluding statement** include:

- In summary ...
- In brief ...
- In short ...
- Summing up ...
- To sum up ...
- As a result ...
- On the whole ...
- Overall ...
- In general ...
- To conclude ...
- In conclusion ...
- To review ...
- Therefore ...
- Thus ...
- Hence ...
- Consequently ...
- Subsequently ...

**✓ CHECKLIST**

Questions to ask yourself when revising your work

- \* Have I clearly answered all parts of the question?
- \* Have I covered all of the necessary main ideas?
- \* Have all of the necessary definitions been provided, and focuses and/or assumptions clearly explained?
- \* Are all of the ideas included relevant to answering the question?
- \* Are my ideas presented in a logical order so that they flow, or do I need to reorder the points?
- \* Does each paragraph contain only one main idea?
- \* Is each idea supported by sufficient and relevant explanations, evidence and examples?
- \* Do all of the facts and examples I have provided clearly support the main points I am trying to make?
- \* Have I used the best examples?

**✓ CHECKLIST**

When editing and proofreading, consider:

- \* Are all of my sentence structures correct and complete?
- \* Are all of my sentences concise and easy to follow?
- \* Is everything spelt correctly and consistently?
- \* Is my writing grammatically correct?
- \* Is my use of tense correct and consistent?
- \* Is my punctuation correct?
- \* Is my tone professional?
- \* Is the language that I use formal (with no contractions, conversational language, slang, colloquialisms)?
- \* Is my writing consistent in terms of jargon/terminology, capitalisation, heading styles, margins, fonts, page numbers, etc...?
- \* Have I remembered to add the page numbers, and have they shown up correctly on each page?
- \* Have I checked that the word count is within the word limit?
- \* Have I included the word count on my assignment if I have been requested to do so?
- \* Have I correctly referenced every idea that is not my own to its original source?
- \* Are my quotes and references all correct?
- \* Are all of my in-text references included in my reference list, and vice versa?
- \* If I have used pronouns (they, them, it, he/she, ...), is it clear to the reader to what or whom each pronoun refers?
- \* Is my writing concise? Are there any unnecessary words, phrases or repetitions of ideas I can remove?
- \* Have I used the most appropriate words or phrases?
- \* Have I followed all of the instructions and guidelines given?

