

# CUE WORDS IN EXAMS AND ASSIGNMENTS

*Understanding what to do is half the task. - Anonymous.*

The following terms are used to cue students to specific tasks in exam questions and assignment instructions. As you read through them, find and underline the cue words. This will help you focus on the required task.

## CATEGORY 1: KNOWLEDGE-BASED QUESTIONS

- These require objective responses based on your knowledge of course material.
- When asked to classify, enumerate, list, outline, or trace, you might choose to respond in point form unless other instructions are given.

<b>CLASSIFY:</b>	arrange different items into specific categories
<b>DEFINE:</b>	state, clearly and directly, the meaning of a word (usually, without details)
<b>DESCRIBE:</b>	provide details about your subject—an objective account of such things as its appearance, features, functions, qualities, etc.
<b>ENUMERATE:</b>	list items, numbering them in order according to chronology, importance, etc.
<b>ILLUSTRATE:</b>	provide one or more specific examples to demonstrate an idea
<b>LIST:</b>	simply name the relevant items, one after the other, in order
<b>OUTLINE:</b>	in a logical order, present the main ideas of your subject without details
<b>RELATE:</b>	explain the connection between two or more things
<b>STATE:</b>	in a clear and direct way, express specific facts or opinions
<b>SUMMARIZE:</b>	give a very concise, objective account of your subject, or a highly condensed version of a given text; include all main points, but without details, analysis, or criticism
<b>TRACE:</b>	in an orderly way, show the development or history of your subject, or how a certain system functions (making use of a diagram or timeline if appropriate)



# CUE WORDS

Continued

## CATEGORY 2: ANALYTICAL QUESTIONS

- These require you to explain or interpret material.
- Most of the terms below refer to very specific tasks.
- When more general terms such as "comment on" or "discuss" are used, you must decide how much detail or explanation is expected.

<b>ANALYZE:</b>	provide a thorough explanation of your topic, focusing on how its different elements contribute to an overall result
<b>COMMENT ON:</b>	similar to "discuss," but usually requires brief remarks or responses to your subject; interpretation and/or critical judgment are usually expected
<b>COMPARE:</b>	discuss both similarities and differences—and what they indicate
<b>CONTRAST:</b>	discuss differences—their extent and their significance
<b>DISCUSS:</b>	write about your subject; it is usually understood that your discussion will include some explanation, analysis, opinions, criticism, etc.
<b>EXPLAIN:</b>	clarify a situation or idea by revealing more information about it, especially its causes and effects; provide reasons that clarify why an action was taken
<b>INTERPRET:</b>	examine the meaning or implications of your subject, explaining the main idea(s) that it raises or lessons that it teaches
<b>PROVE:</b>	give a logical, thorough, systematic argument to support a position, refuting any possible doubts or counterarguments

## CATEGORY 3: CRITICAL QUESTIONS

- These require you to make judgments about the quality or significance of your subject. Present and justify your position.

<b>ASSESS/ EVALUATE:</b>	make a judgment about the value or significance of your subject (usually with an explanation of what your position is based on)
<b>CRITIQUE/ CRITICIZE:</b>	give your opinion about the strengths and weaknesses of your subject; state which aspects are effective or successful and which are not—and why

For more help, contact the Academic Skills Centre.