

GLOSSARY

Keywords:

There are certain key words and phrases that are frequently used in essay and project questions and topics. It is important to understand what they mean in the context of written work so that you can better understand precisely what you are being asked to do, and how they relate to a sense of argument in your assignment.

Account for Give reasons for; explain why something happens.

Analyse Examine in very close detail; identify important points and features.

Comment on Identify and write about the main issues, giving your reactions based upon what you have read or heard in lectures. Avoid purely personal opinions.

Compare Show how two or more things are similar. Indicate why these similarities are relevant.

Contrast Set two or more items or arguments in opposition so as to draw out differences. Indicate whether the differences are significant. If appropriate, give reasons why one item or argument may be preferable.

Critically evaluate Weight arguments for or against something, assessing the strength of the evidence on both sides. Use criteria to guide your assessment of which options, theories, models or items are preferable.

Define Give the exact meaning of. Where relevant, show that you understand why the definition may be problematic.

Describe Give the main characteristics or features of something, or outline the main events.

Discuss Write about the most important aspects of (probably

including criticism); give arguments for and against;
consider the implications of.

<i>Distinguish</i>	Bring out the differences between two (possibly confusable) items.
<i>Evaluate</i>	Assess the worth, importance or usefulness of something, using evidence and making cases both for and against.
<i>Examine</i>	Put the subject “under the microscope”, looking at it in detail. If appropriate, “Critically evaluate” it as well.
<i>Explain</i>	Make clear why something happens or why something is the way it is.
<i>Illustrate</i>	Make something clear and explicit, giving examples or evidence.
<i>Interpret</i>	Give the meaning and relevance of data or other material.
<i>Justify</i>	Give evidence that supports an argument or idea; show why a decision was made or a conclusion reached, considering possible objections.
<i>Narrate</i>	Concentrate on saying what happened, telling it as a story.
<i>Outline</i>	Give only the main points, showing the main structure.
<i>Relate</i>	Show similarities and connections between two or more things.
<i>State</i>	Give the main features, in very clear English (list in ences).
<i>Summarise</i>	Draw out the main points only, leaving out details and examples.
<i>To what extent</i>	Consider how far something is true, or contributes to a final outcome. Consider also ways in which the proposition is not true (The answer is usually somewhere between

“completely” and “not at all”).

Trace

Follow the order of different stages in an event or process.

(Adapted from Stella Cottrell, “Writing for University”, in *The Study Skills handbook*, (London:Macmillan Press), 1999)