

Terms Used in Academic Assignments

Before you can write a good paper for any class, you need to know what the professor is asking you to do. Here are some of the common verbs that professors use when they compose assignments.

- **Analyze** – take apart and look at something closely
- **Compare** – look for similarities and differences; stress similarities
- **Contrast** – look for differences and similarities; stress differences
- **Critique** – point out both positive and negative aspects
- **Define** – explain exactly what something means
- **Describe** – show what something looks like, including physical features
- **Discuss** – explore an issue from all sides: implies wide latitude
- **Evaluate** – make a value judgement according to some criteria (which it would be wise to make clear)
- **Explain** – clarify or interpret how something works or happens
- **Illustrate** – show by means of example, picture, or diagram
- **Interpret** – translate how or why; implies some subjective judgement
- **Justify** – argue in support of something; to find positive reasons
- **List** – order facts, attributes, or items in sequence
- **Outline** – organize according to hierarchy and/or category
- **Prove** – demonstrate correctness by use of logic, fact, or example
- **Review** – reexamine the main points or highlights of something
- **State** – assert with confidence
- **Summarize** – pull together the main points
- **Synthesize** – combine or pull together pieces or concepts
- **Trace** – present an outline or show a sequence or how or why something occurs or happens