



Understanding the Assignment Question

When you write an assignment, it is important that you don't overlook the key features of the question. These include:

- The “**direction**” or “**task**” word/s. This is the VERB in the question that tells you exactly what you need to do. The table overleaf provides some examples of different direction words and their meanings.
- The “**scoping**” word. Scoping words specify the limits of your discussion. They are designed to focus your research and indicate the depth of response required. You shouldn't focus on things outside of the “scope” of the question.
- The “**content**” words. These are the words that identify the subject of the assignment and tell you exactly what you need to write about.

These components are the most crucial aspect of any assignment question, as they determine **what** you should be saying, and **how** you should be saying it! Before you start planning your assignment, you should always highlight these words and ensure you understand what they mean. If in doubt, ask questions!

Here is an example:

High school education in New South Wales has changed dramatically over the last ten years, and these changes have affected a range of identity groups. Discuss this statement with specific reference to TWO identity groups.



Once you have identified the **direction** word and the **scoping** words, and defined the **content** words, it is a good idea to put the question into your own colloquial words. Simplifying will enable you to better understand what it is asking you to do.

Simplified:

Talk about how specific changes to schooling in NSW have impacted two types of students (for example low socio-economic and non-English-speaking background)

Direction Word	
Compare	Show the similarities and differences between two or more items.
Contrast	Present only the differences between two or more items.
Define	Give the definition and expand it with more examples and greater details.
Summarise	Identify and discuss the main points or the highlights of subject. Omit in-depth details.
Evaluate/Critique	Offer your opinion or judgment then back it up with specific facts, details, or reasons.
Analyse	Identify the different parts of something. Discuss each part individually, [and highlight different points of view].
Describe	Give a detailed description of different aspects, qualities, characteristics, parts, or points of view.
Discuss/Tell	Tell about the parts of main points. Expand with specific details.
Explain why	Give reasons. Tell why. Show logical relationships or cause and effect.
Explain how	Give the process, steps, stages, or procedures involved. Explain each.
Illustrate	Give examples. Explain each example with details.
Identify	Identify specific points. Discuss each point individually. Include sufficient detail.

Table 1: Wong, L. 2014. *Essential study skills*. (8th ed.). Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning, p.439.

N.B: This tip sheet is an extract from our resource, 7 Steps to a Killer Essay. Refer to that resource for more information on essay/assignment writing.