

Academic Writing Student Worksheet: Approaching the Question

Links to: How to Structure a Paragraph, Planning your Work, Using Evidence to Develop your Argument

Introduction:

In order to achieve the highest grades in your assignments, it is important to understand what the question is asking you to do. By looking specifically at key words and phrases, you will gain a clearer understanding of the focus of the question, which will help you to identify required research and to plan and structure your response appropriately.

Activity:

Use this worksheet to break down your assignment question into the following categories:

1. **Directive words** - words which tell you to do something; Analyse, Discuss, Evaluate
2. **Topic area** - the main topic areas or themes outlined by the question
3. **Limiting words** - words which provide boundaries or constraints for your assignment

Example:

Describe and explain the upsurge of interest in environmental issues since the 1960s and discuss its impact on British Politics

1. Look at the following assignment title and try to identify the **directive words**, **topic area** and **limiting words**:

See Information Sheet for suggested answer.

Critically discuss the effect that entry into the European Union has had on the sovereignty of the UK Parliament

2. Now that you are able to identify the important words within the title take your next assignment question and write it in the box below. Highlight the different categories of words, preferably using a different colour for each category:

3. Now write the **directive words** from your assignment in the table below and using the Table of Directive words provided on the Information Sheet, explain what you are required to do in your own words:

Directive word	What you have to do

4. Outline the **topic area** in the table below and begin to list where you will find further information about this. Remember to bear in mind the **directive words** at this point in order to maintain the correct focus for your response:

Topic area	Sources of Information

5. Make a note of all possible **limitations** which will be outlined on the assignment brief:

Limitations	Details
Limiting words	
Assessment criteria	
Length of assignment	
Assignment deadline date	

6. Once you have done this, you can start to make some notes outlining what you intend to include in your essay or report. Use the following table to outline your points for development:

Question:	
Point 1	
Point 2	
Point 3	

Conclusion:

It is easy to lose marks in an assignment because you have not fully understood the question; analyse the question before you start planning your work to ensure the best possible grade.