

INSTRUCTING WORDS

Pay careful attention to the instructions in a question and keep them in mind constantly when you write an assignment or answer an exam question.

- **Commonly used instructing words:**

account for, analyse, assess, classify, comment on, compare, contrast, critique,

define, describe, discuss, distinguish between, evaluate, examine, explain, give reasons for,

indicate, identify, illustrate, justify, outline, show why, show the difference between, suggest, summarise, review

- These instructing words can be divided into three groups: descriptive, analytical, evaluative.

Instructing words Group A

Descriptive

These words require you to look at facts and answer the question "What?"

classify, compare, contrast, define, describe, indicate, identify, illustrate, outline, summarise

In a **descriptive academic essay** your purpose is to give information and details about a topic. With this kind of writing you are being tested on your ability to research information, select the appropriate detail and organise the facts coherently.

This is considered to be the easiest kind of writing to do because the focus is on information and you are not expected to bring in any analysis or evaluation.

Example of a descriptive essay title:

Describe the work of solicitors.

Instructing words Group B and Group C

Analytical

These words require you to explore a topic by breaking it down into parts. You then need to examine the relationship of these parts.

account for, analyse, compare, contrast, discuss, distinguish between, examine, explain, give reasons for, justify, show why, show the difference between

Evaluative

These words require you to explore and evaluate aspects of a topic from different points of view. They are also asking you to give your own comments and judgments on various aspects of the topic

assess, comment on, critique, evaluate, suggest, review

These instructing words are used for a **discussion essay**. They indicate that your essay needs to contain your own ideas and opinions on a topic. While parts of your essay will be descriptive, it is important to reflect on the topic yourself and consider, for example, whether you agree or disagree with the writer.

Students often say that it is difficult to write this kind of essay because they are being asked to write about a topic which has already been investigated and researched by experts, and about which they know nothing. However, it is important to realise that this kind of essay represents a key feature of higher education, namely that it aims to encourage you to formulate and explain your own opinion.

Examples of discussion essays:

- 1) *Discuss the differences between solicitors and barristers.*
- 2) *Critically evaluate the work of solicitors and barristers.*

QUALIFYING WORDS in essay titles

Besides instructing words, you may find qualifying words and phrases in assignment titles. These also act as an important guide with regard to detail or certain aspects of the question.

E.g. briefly, fully, critically, in detail, in the light of, in relation to

Example of an essay title:

- *Briefly describe the changes in the role of solicitors in the light of the new Legal Services Act.*

QUESTION WORDS in essay titles

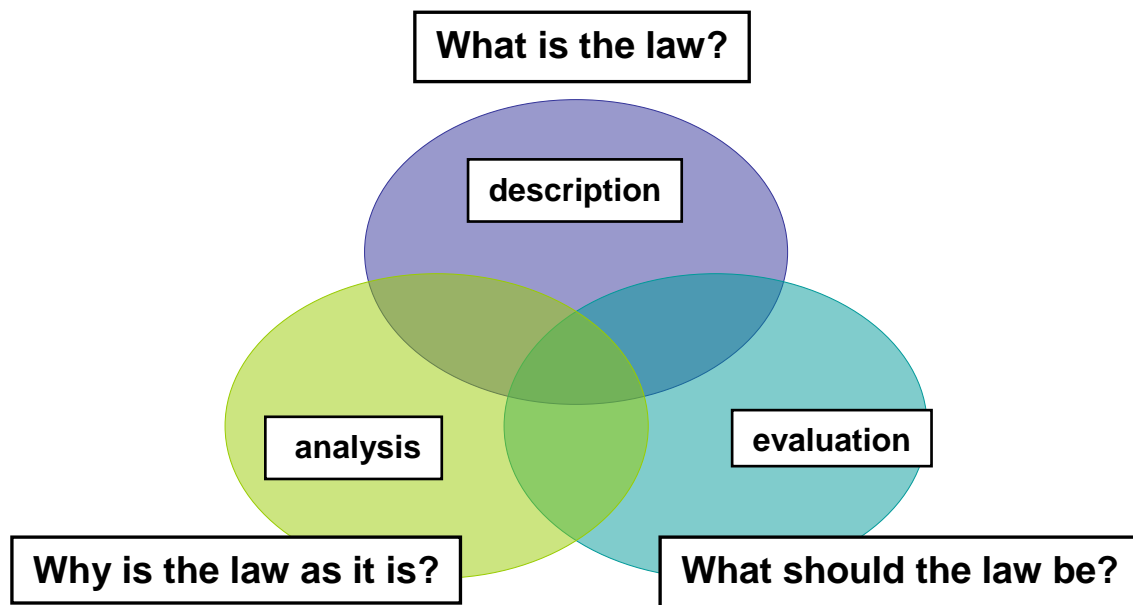
Some essay titles may be in the form of questions. These question words carry meaning like the instructing words, and can ask you to describe, analyse or evaluate.

- **How far** – *to what extent*
- **What are the implications of** – *the suggested / long-term results*
- **Which factors** – *what conditions / circumstances*
- **What is the significance of** – *the meaning / importance*

Examples of essay titles:

- *In what ways are solicitors and barristers different?*
- *What are the implications of the increased powers in court for solicitors?*

As you can see, a law assignment may not be just a descriptive essay. In fact, more than likely, it will be a discussion essay which is made up of different elements: description + analysis + evaluation. See below the diagram which shows how you need to balance the information and ideas in your writing:



Key points to remember

- + plan plan plan
- + keep the purpose in mind
- + be aware of any constraints
- + write and re-write
- + read and re-read

Think of the reader – are your ideas clear, logically organised and easy to understand?