

Decoding The Assignment

Understanding the requirements of the assignment

To do well on a research paper, essay, or other type of assignment, it is important to understand what is being asked of you. Please keep in mind, different professors may have different takes on how an assignment should be completed. Always check with your professor to be certain that your understanding of the task is the same as his/hers.

Analyze / Examine	Study a subject in detail by breaking it down into its separate parts and showing how they relate to each other and the work as a whole.
Argue	Take a stand on a given issue and provide evidence to support your position, often against an opposing position. (See BU Handouts: Argumentative Essays for more information).
Comment / Discuss	Consider all perspectives of a topic or debate, including evidence for and against. Make a case for your own position on the subject.
Compare	Identify how various ideas, items or theories are similar and why these similarities are important. (See Bu Handouts: Compare and Contrast Essays for more information).
Contrast	Show the dissimilarities between two or more items, ideas or theories. Why is this important to the work as a whole? (See BU Handouts: Compare and Contrast Essays for more information).
Criticize / Critique	Provide your opinion of the merits and flaws of a theory or written work. Provide evidence to support your conclusion as to the overall value of the work. (See BU Handouts: Reaction, Response Essays for more information).
Define	Clearly state the meaning of a subject. Show varying opinions if appropriate. Defend your opinion.
Describe	Present in detail the main characteristics of a topic. Concentrate more on <i>how</i> than <i>why</i> . (See BU Handouts: Reaction, Response Essays for more information).
Evaluate / Assess	Consider the significance / value of a topic. Include both strengths and weaknesses. (See BU Handouts: Reaction, Response Essays for more information).
Illustrate	Use examples to clarify a topic. Tables, figures, or diagrams can be used.

Outline / Summarize	Present only the main points of a text or article. Avoid presenting details.
Relate	Show how theories or events are related in terms of their similarities and differences. (See BU Handouts: Compare And Contrast Essays for more information.)
Trace	Follow the progression or development of an event, text, or idea.

Material adapted from:

<https://writingcentre.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/understandingassignments/>

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/common_writing_assignments/understanding-writingassignments.html

<https://sass.queens.ca/resources/online/assignments-terminolgy>

