



### **Step 3: Highlight key words**

When reading the assignment sheet, highlight any key words to help you to identify and understand key elements and requirements. To identify key words and ensure that you understand requirements ask yourself the following questions:

- Are there any recurring verbs or nouns?
- Are there any words you need to define more clearly and in more depth before starting the assignment?

### **Step 4: Identify required sources**

When reading your assignment sheet, pay particular attention to any sources required for the completion of the assignment. Ensure that you can answer the following questions:

- Are you required to use primary sources?
  - Are you familiar with this source?
- Do you need secondary sources?
  - Do you know where and how to look for these sources?
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# Understanding key words

Even if assignment instructions seem clear, it is important to ensure that you understand what instructors mean in their use of key words. The following list comprises common assignment key-words, along with typical meanings. If it seems as though a key word is being used in a different way on a particular assignment sheet, be sure to ask your instructor for clarification.

## Common key words

### Analyze, Discuss, and Explore

These are terms that are typically related to concepts, ideas, and arguments. These terms are asking you to engage with source material to clarify why something is the way it is or how something is done. When being asked to analyze source material, you may want to address both compositional elements and the merits and shortcomings of the authors' arguments.

### Argue

This is a term that typically relates to positions and thesis statements. If an assignment is instructing you to make an argument, it is asking you to present a contestable position (thesis) on a particular issue or topic and to support your thesis using evidence and analysis.

### Consider

This is a term that typically relates to positions, theories, and methodologies. If you are asked to consider a position, theory, or methodology, you should provide explanation of the features of the position/theory/methodology and describe how it operates.

### Synthesize

This is a term that typically refers to sources. When asked to synthesize you should compare sources and discuss how the ideas in the sources relate to one another.

### Compare

This is a term that asks you to look for similarities and differences, with an emphasis on similarities.

### Contrast

This is a term that asks you to look for similarities and differences, with an emphasis on differences.

### Define

This is a term that asks you to explain what something means.

### Evaluate

This is a term that asks you to make a judgement about something by using specific criteria.

## Exercise

The following is a sample assignment. Practice your assignment reading skills by identifying key requirements and key words and phrases in the assignment. Make sure you understand what each word means in the context of the assignment.

### Sample assignment

“Research Paper Proposal”

Sample assignment key