



Guide to Assessment Action Verbs

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A Guide to understanding the action verbs commonly used in your assessments

Before you start completing an assessment (assignment or examination), you need to make sure you understand **what** the question is asking you **to do** before you start answering it.

Every question has key words (otherwise known as action verbs) and identifying them will help you decide the way in which you need to construct your answer. Action verbs are the words in the question that tell you what you should do with the subject matter. Below is a list of the most common action verbs used.

Action verbs (Based on Bloom's taxonomy)

Apply	Put to practical use or make use of a relevant equation or law. If a case study accompanies the questions, the likelihood is that you may have to use the practical examples from the case study to which you then have to apply the theory or the concept. When no case study exists, use practical examples from your own experience.
Calculate	Determine the value, using formulae or specific calculation methods.
Classify	Group concepts or subjects together based on certain characteristics or commonalities. The use of columns in a matrix could be useful here in ensuring that you have all the associated terms or concepts listed beneath one another in the same column. Make sure that each column has its own heading to label the individual groups clearly as belonging together.
Compare	Point out the similarities and differences between objects or points of view. The word <i>contrast</i> can also be used. The type of question containing this action verb would often expect of you to describe the similarities and the differences and then decide in favour of the one or the other. A table or matrix with columns is often useful in classifying the concepts being compared while you could, if you are required to in the question, think of adding another column (the 3 rd column) for comments and additional insight gained from having made the contrast.
Contrast	Focus on the differences, although you may also note that there are similarities. The main focus of your answer should however be on the differences.

Convert	Transform a quantity expressed in one unit to a quantity expressed in another unit. You could be asked to convert, at the most basic level, a set of numbers for metric quantities into volumes in the imperial system. A language paper may ask you to convert text into a simpler and conventional version. It would be important to check that you do not change the fundamental meaning in the conversation but remain true to the original text and the message in it.
Criticise / Evaluate	Make a judgment (but do not give a personal opinion) about the merit of theories, or opinions, or about the truth of information backed by a discussion of the reasoning involved and by evidence from the course materials.
Define	Give a short and clear description of a term or concept using your own words and making sure that you confirm your understanding of the concept by providing a complete description or definition.
Demonstrate	Show clearly/prove/make clear by reasoning or evidence/illustrate and explain, especially with some examples from your own experience or from the case study.
Derive	Deduce or infer something from the given information. You could be given a definition or description of an academic concept and asked to derive from that a practical conclusion or an operating procedure.
Describe	Tell in detail how a process works or how a subject appears. You need not comment on the process or the subject or give your own point of view. The use of diagrams could earn you extra marks here and could also make the process of explaining somewhat easier.

Differentiate	<p>Find differences between objects or statements and then contrast. Here you are looking at describing something along the lines of: 'In Germany the technical training process is highly formalised with clear outcome descriptors and the results to be obtained quantified in manuals while the British system for training technicians is more informal with'. Here the use of columns with clearly labeled headings could be used as well to good effect.</p>
Discuss	<p>Explain terms or concepts in your own words. Give comments or give your own point of view. This type of question may seem to give a pretty wide range of options in which you may choose to go about compiling the answer, but in reality there are some essentials which your answer must contain to qualify as an academic discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extract the different themes in the subject or concept • Describe and evaluate them • What are the arguments in favour or against each concept? • What is the evidence against or in support of the various arguments? • What is the significance of each aspect and what causes it to be significant?
Distinguish	<p>Write down the differences between subjects or concepts.</p>
Draw	<p>Create a drawing, diagram or representation of a subject or concept. Keep in mind that a drawing on its own is almost never enough to earn you all the available marks. Use a descriptive caption to tell us what the drawing is about, label parts of the drawing where appropriate and it is almost always useful to write a short paragraph on what the picture means to you and what the main idea embedded in it is all about.</p>

Explain	Write about the subject in your own words. Clarify or give reasons – use examples or illustrations. You must prove that you understand the content. Breaking it up into sections and using sub-headings to organise your explanation is always a good idea as it provides structure and form to your explanation.
Formulate	Express in a concise, systematic way.
Identify	Establish the identity or recognise a process. This often means that you have to be able to decide what the important factors are and then describe these briefly.
Illustrate	Explain by means of detailed descriptions and drawings. Providing a clear and descriptive heading often helps with this and the labeling of parts of the illustration could help you earn extra marks.
Interpret	Explain or clarify the meaning of a concept/value. You are required <i>to make sense of</i> the concept or object that you are asked to interpret. You may need to use your own judgment and give this in a way which will help the reader understand why you think it is significant. You may also be asked to interpret a graph or a picture - describing in words the significant features, or 'messages' contained in them.
Justify	Give reasons for a point of view, decisions or conclusions. Also mention any main objections or arguments against.
List/Name	Briefly write down the facts or main points. A question containing this particular action verb may need some caution in its treatment. The strict meaning is to give single words or phrases. There are times though when the examiner uses this action word in a question but expects a brief description as well – allow yourself to be guided by the mark allocation.
Motivate	Give reason(s) for your answer.

Name	Nominate or specify a site or process.
Organise	Arrange data according to certain criteria.
Predict	Use the facts available to derive an outcome. If the case study accompanying this question does not contain enough information for you to make a reasonable prediction from available information, it is acceptable to make assumptions which are reasonable and to alert the examiner to the fact that you are doing so.
Relate	Show the relation/connection of entities, how the concepts can be linked.
Solve	Find an answer by using critical thinking and/or calculations. Draw on your knowledge to break down, define and identify the aspects of the problem. Then compare, contrast, evaluate and finally select the best alternatives to generate a solution
Summarise	Briefly state/list/write down only the most important details/facts.

It is important that you spend some time to read the question carefully before answering your assessment as your answer may completely change if you misunderstand the action verb used within the question.

This document was compiled with reference to Cameron,S. (2008) *The MBA Handbook* (6th edition), Prentice Hall.