

# Understand your question

Parts of an assignment question:

## TASK WORDS

How to write eg, discuss, argue etc.

## SUBJECT MATTER

What you should be writing about

## LIMITING WORDS

May narrow or change the focus of your answer. (Important – they stop you from including irrelevant info)

Make sure you are comparing and not just describing the two things in isolation

Subject matter

**Compare acute and chronic pain in terms of pathophysiology and treatment.**

Important limiting phrase – focus ONLY on these things. Use them as a lens to highlight the differences between acute and chronic pain.

## TIP

Assignments that ask you to compare two things can be structured in different ways. You may choose to alternate continually between the two things, making direct comparisons and organising your essay according to themes. Alternatively, you may choose to discuss one thing fully and then the next. If you choose the second approach, you must make the links and comparisons between the two things completely clear.

Important limiting phrase – focus your answer on a specific example. Use this example to help demonstrate your understanding.

Factual description is needed. You must demonstrate your knowledge and understanding.

**With reference to any particular example enzyme, outline the key structural and functional properties of its active site**

Subject matter

## TIP

Assignments that ask you to outline or describe are assessing your understanding of the topic. You must express facts clearly and precisely, using examples to illuminate them.

Task words not so obvious this time. Try turning the title into a question: 'is there any convincing evidence for...?'

Important limiting word – there may be evidence but you need to assess whether or not it is convincing

## There is no convincing evidence for the existence of life outside of our solar system

Subject matter

### TIP

Assignment titles that are not actually a question are often simply asking 'how true is this statement?' You must present reasons it could be true and reasons it might not be, supported by evidence and recognising the complexity of the statement.

Task words – you're being asked to argue

Subject matter

## To what extent can nuclear power provide a solution to environmental issues?

Subject matter. Might be an idea to define/discuss what could be meant by environmental issues? This might be important to your argument.

Limiting phrase: discuss ways it can and ways it can't – and don't be afraid to take a position, based on evidence.

### TIP

If an assignment is asking a direct question, make sure your essay answers it! Address it directly in the introduction, make sure each paragraph contributes something towards your response to it, and reinforce your response in your conclusion.

Explore the topic from different angles, in a critical way (not purely descriptive)

Subject matter

## Discuss the issue of patient autonomy in relation to at least one case study

Important limiting phrase – don't just discuss the issue of patient autonomy in general; discuss it in the context of one or more case studies. You should use the case study to illustrate all of your points about patient autonomy.

### TIP

Assignments that ask you to discuss in relation to a case study, or to a placement or own experience, usually want to see a clear link between theory and practice (reality).