



Quick guide to Making Sense of Academic Words and Phrases

Words and phrases to do with finding and using information

Database	Online tool which enables searching for academic information. Find databases relevant to your subject via your subject page: www.surrey.ac.uk/library/subjects
Critically evaluate	Consider the relevancy, authority, currency, reliability etc. of information.
Literature	Academic/scholarly writings e.g. books, journal articles.
Literature search	A systematic and organised search for academic information on a specific topic.
Journal article	An academic article, written by an expert, on a specific topic, and published in a journal.
Journal	An academic 'magazine', published regularly, and containing articles on various topics. These can usually be accessed online.
Monograph	A stand-alone piece of writing e.g. a book, on a specific topic.
Peer-reviewed	Journal articles are peer-reviewed if they have been checked for quality by other experts in the field.
Primary research/ empirical research	Research which measures or investigates something which has not previously been measured or investigated. Primary/empirical research is often written up and published as a journal article or as a stand-alone report.
Paraphrasing	Presenting an idea or information you have read in your own words. Changing more than a few words but not changing the meaning of the original work shows your understanding of the information. You need to reference the original source even when you have paraphrased.



Plagiarism	This can happen when a source of information used as evidence is not referenced. All information used in your work must be acknowledged to avoid plagiarism.
Resources	These can be books, journal articles, webpages or any type of information relevant to your studies.
Referencing	Acknowledging information sources used in your work. There are a variety of referencing styles including Harvard, APA, IEEE and OSCOLA. Your course handbook specifies the style you should use.
Secondary research	Research that was created by someone interpreting and analysing existing primary sources within a subject area or topic. This research is often published in journals or books.

Words and phrases to do with writing an assignment

Bibliography	A list of the sources used in your text. Another term for 'reference list'.
Literature review	A study and interpretation of the literature about a given topic or subject area.
Method	The way in which information is collected.
Reference list	A list of the sources used in your text. Another term for 'bibliography'.

Words and phrases from exam and essay questions

Account for	Explain why and/or how
Analyse	Break down into parts and examine the relationship between those parts
Assess	Judge the importance/value of, give the advantages/disadvantages of
Comment on	Make remarks, give your opinion
Compare/contrast	Highlight the similarities/difference between two or more things
Criticise	Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of theories, or reliability of facts
Demonstrate	Show; provide an example, or evidence
Describe	Write about the details or characteristics of
Discuss	Examine, using arguments and reference to facts; consider implications

Evaluate	Make a judgement using specified criteria e.g. reason or available facts
Examine	Investigate or inquire in detail
Explain	Make clear; give reason for; set out in detail the meaning of
Explore	Examine something carefully with the aim of discovering more about it
Illustrate	Make clear by giving examples
Indicate	Point out
Justify	Present adequate grounds for
Outline	Give the main features of
Prove	Show or demonstrate that something is accurate

Common phrases used in assignment feedback

Be more critical	Take a questioning approach when discussing a text, case-study, theory etc. Examine its strengths and weaknesses. Avoid description.
Be less descriptive	Aim to be more critical (see above) and avoid listing features of a theory, narrating events, or repeating a text in your own words.
Check your referencing	Ensure you accurately follow the referencing style specified in your course handbook. Pay attention to both in-text citations and your reference list.
Use evidence to support your work	'Back-up' every claim you make with evidence. This could be information from a book, journal article, business report, good quality website etc.
Can you find more recent sources?	The sources you have used may support what you have written, but this feedback suggests that there may be subsequent ones you need to find and use.
Improve your flow	Is there a list of points here, without clear connections? think about words you can use to link them logically and clearly.
Present a cohesive argument	You may have found some suitable sources, but not utilised them to make a clear argument.

Improve the clarity of argument	Some assignments may require you to argue one thing over another. If this is the case, be sure to clearly state your argument in your introduction and conclusion, and ensure each paragraph includes an explanation of how your point supports your argument.
It would be good to see more detail here	Is a topic a central part of your piece of work? If so, have you done it justice? Finding and reading some further sources may give you more to work with.
What is your point?	Have you set out what you are trying to achieve in your assignment? Is there a clear conclusion?
You haven't answered the question	Ensure you understand the question, and check the meaning of unfamiliar terms. Plan your work to ensure that all parts of the question are addressed in your answer.
Use more formal/academic language	Avoid colloquial or 'chatty' language. For example, try 'improved' rather than 'got better'. Avoid contractions e.g. 'can't'. Read academic texts to gain familiarity with the academic style in your field.
Poor grammar	Check your work carefully before submitting. Aim to leave your work for a day or two, before doing a final check. Read your work aloud to listen for errors.

FEATS is a tool available via SurreyLearn which will enable you to implement your feedback and take practical steps to improving your work. For more information email: feats@surrey.ac.uk

Library & Learning
Support Services

Further advice and larger text guides can be found online:

www.surrey.ac.uk/splash

Revised 12/09/2017

