

# Task Analysis (Understanding Titles)

## Study Skills – Essay Planning

### AIMS

- To review the process of academic writing from assignment titles
- To practise analysing and responding to essay titles

Essays are usually set by your department. Later in your programme you may have an essay assignment where you are required to develop your own question. Set questions are usually written in order to judge your ability to **understand** a topic or theme, and to **relate** general ideas to specific applications (or vice versa). What is essential is that you answer **the set question**.

### 'UNPACKING' OR 'UNLOCKING' ESSAY QUESTIONS

If we hope to give a FULL, IN-DEPTH and CRITICAL answer to essay questions, we have to 'get inside' the essay question.

**Task 1 - Briefly discuss in small groups (or with your ASK Tutor) what to 'get inside' the question means.**

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When you first look at a title, it is helpful to break it down into the following component parts:

<b>Subject</b>	<b>What</b> is the questions asking about?
<b>Problem</b>	<b>Why</b> are we talking about it? <b>Why</b> is it important?
<b>Response</b>	<b>How</b> are we expected to respond?
<b>Evaluation</b>	<b>What</b> is our angle of criticality?

**Task 2** – Look at the example question:

**Analyse the extent to which smoking affects university students in Britain today**

In pairs, using the example question above, identify:

1. Situation /Topic
2. Problem/Question
3. Response / Focus
4. Evaluation /Direction

**Task 3** – Do the same 4 parts for the following essay questions.

1. ‘*Stealing is always wrong*’. Discuss with reference to unpaid downloading of music from the internet.
2. Examine why nationalism is still so prevalent in this present age of globalisation.
3. Critically discuss whether the spread of nuclear weapons promotes, or undermines international security.



**INSTRUCTION WORDS**

One of the most important parts of the question is the **Action/Response/Direction**

It is possible to clarify what **Action, Response or Direction** is required by focussing on the **INSTRUCTION** words in the question.

**Task 4** – Underline the **INSTRUCTION** words in the questions below.

*Account for the factors which lead university students in Britain today to smoke.*

*Analyse the extent to which smoking affects university students in Britain today.*

*Compare and contrast the smoking habits of university students in Britain and your country.*

*Critically assess the view that smoking should be banned among university students in Britain today.*

*Describe the effect of the ban on smoking in public places on educational institutions in the U.K.*

*Discuss the effect of the ban on smoking in public places on educational institutions in the U.K.*

*Examine the events leading up to the ban on smoking in public places in Britain.*

It is essential to be clear on the meaning of direction words in order that you answer the question in the way the examiner expects.

**Task 5** - Match the instruction words with the definitions provided below. You may need to look up these common direction words in your dictionary.

<p><b>1. Account for...</b></p>	<p>a) Look at, for example, the events that led to a particular set of circumstances, or the validity of the reasoning that underlies a particular point of view. Stress the relative importance of the different arguments and their relevance to the basic issue under consideration.</p>
<p><b>2. Analyse the extent to which...</b></p>	<p>b) Describe two or more situations and show the difference and similarities between them.</p>
<p><b>3. Compare and Contrast...</b></p>	<p>c) Present a view of a particular argument, point of view or theory based on the evidence available and careful analysis.</p>
<p><b>4. Critically</b> (discuss / evaluate / analyse...)</p>	<p>d) Give an objective factual account. However, more than just description is usually expected, instead a critical review of some particular set of circumstances, or events is usually expected.</p>
<p><b>5. Describe...</b></p>	<p>e) Break down an argument into parts and show judgement about the importance of the different arguments.</p>

<b>6. Discuss / Evaluate /Assess</b>	f) Explain how a particular event or situation came about.
<b>7. Examine...</b>	g) Consider the arguments for and against the issue raised in the question.

**Reformulating the question – what is the question asking me?**

Another useful technique that can help you ensure you have focussed on ALL aspects of the question is to reformulate or reword the question. This can also help you see the question from different angles which may help you discover new ideas or perspectives.

**Task 6** - Look at the essay question below. How many ways can the essay question be reformulated?

**‘Stealing is always wrong’. Discuss with reference to unpaid downloading of music from the internet**

**Task 7** - Try to reformulate the questions we looked at earlier.

1. To what extent do environmental problems constitute threats to international security?
2. Examine why nationalism is still so prevalent in this present age of globalisation.
3. Critically discuss whether the spread of nuclear weapons promotes, or undermines international security.

**Stance**

The next step would be to begin making statements related to the question that reflect your **INITIAL REACTION**. This is the first point where we begin to consider our **STANCE**.



For the question: **‘To what extent do environmental problems constitute threats to international security?’** We might write the following statements.

**Task 8** - Discuss the following **thesis statements** with a partner (or your ASK Tutor), and whether the writer believes that environmental problems are a threat to international security, or not.

1. Environmental problems can create cross border tensions and, as a result, pose a serious risk to international security.
2. With natural resources becoming increasingly scarce, conflict over the control of these resources is likely to increase.
3. The threat of environmental problems to international security is limited.
4. Environmental problems are shared concerns and consequently offer an opportunity to increase international cooperation not degrade it.

**Task 9** – Choose **ONE** of the questions from Task 7 and write some statements that reflect an **INITIAL STANCE**.

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