



The first step in Academic Writing is understanding and responding to your assignment. But before you start, you should think about what kind of writing you need to do. Different types of writing, like essays, case studies, reports, posters, and others, have different purposes, content, and structures. So, it's important to know which type you're dealing with before you analyse the assignment.

To do well in this stage, you need to carefully understand what you're asked to do. If you don't fully understand the task, even if you put a lot of effort into it, your response might be wrong. There are some steps below to help you in this first stage.

1. Identify the Subject/Topic

To analyse a question, you need to first ask yourself: 'What is the subject/topic of this question?'

The subject or topic words in the question indicate the specific area(s) you need to examine in your answer. Often this is the easiest part of analysing a question, for example, look at the following question: **Discuss the social impact of computers in the last decade**

It is relatively easy to identify 'computers' as the subject/topic.

2. Identify the Instruction Word(s)

What is the essay asking you to do: discuss, critically evaluate, describe, analyse? Some of these require more in terms of analysis or synthesis.

In the example, you are asked to 'discuss', i.e. describe and evaluate supporting your arguments with evidence, and interpret the significance.

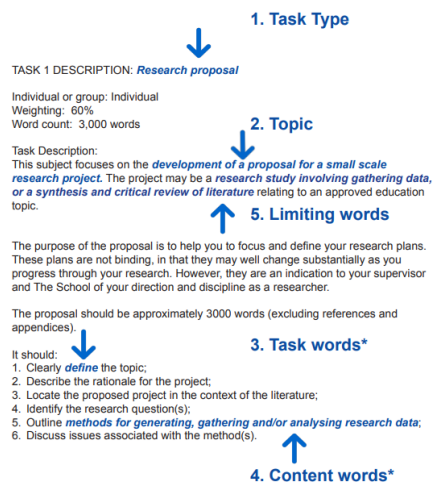
3. Identify the Key Aspects

Questions will also ask you to focus on certain areas, or key aspects. Identifying the key aspects allows you to concentrate your search and your writing on the relevant material needed to answer the question.

In our example question: **Discuss the social impact of computers in the last decade**, you are asked to focus on the key area of the social impact computers have had – so in your research remember that you want to find information connecting social impacts with computers. If you don't do this and talk only about how computers made businesses more profitable, you won't answer the question.

4. Identify any Limiting Words or Phrases

Sometimes, your question might ask you to focus on a specific time period or a certain issue. For instance, if the question is about discussing the social impact of computers in the last decade, you should only search for information from the past ten years. Information from the 1970s or 1980s wouldn't be relevant to your question.



Above: A common style of task descriptor found in the Subject

