

INTERPRETING ASSIGNMENTS WITH BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

When working on assignments for a course, it is important to understand the expectations of your professor and the course as a whole. Be sure to read the assignment sheets and the course syllabus thoroughly!

Some of the assignment expectations will be explicit, like:

- Word count
- Formatting
- Showing your work
- Where you might gain or lose marks

Others might be more implicit, such as:

- That you will use evidence to back up your reasoning, or
- That you will apply the course's methodology to new fields of inquiry.

If you are in doubt about an assignment's evaluation, it is best to ask your course instructors directly. The course syllabus should outline the best way to get in touch with your instructors, listing office hours, tutorials, email addresses and so on.

Bloom's Taxonomy

While many concepts and terms are discipline-specific, most instructors use instructional verbs in their assignments that are based on Bloom's Taxonomy. This classification of learning objectives was first developed by a committee chaired by Benjamin Bloom in the 1940s and '50s, and was designed to help students do increasingly difficult tasks that build upon one another. The following explanations, study methods and types of questions are adapted from the Learning Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/higher-order-thinking. You can also find explanations of Bloom's Taxonomy from the University of Toronto's Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation at teaching.utoronto.ca/resources/active-verbs-for-blooms-revised-taxonomy.

Level 1: Remember

This level helps us recall foundational or factual information: names, dates, formulas, definitions, components or methods.

Study methods	Types of questions to ask yourself
Make and use flashcards for key terms.	How would you define ____?
Make a list or timeline of the main events.	What happened before ____?
List the main parts of something.	Who were ____?

Level 2: Understand

Understanding means that we can explain ideas and concepts, and make meaning by interpreting, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing and explaining.

Study methods	Types of questions to ask yourself
Discuss content with or explain to a partner.	How would you differentiate between ____ and ____?
Explain the main idea of the section.	What is the main idea of ____?
Write a summary of the chapter in your own words.	Why did ____?

Level 3: Apply

Application allows us to recognize or use concepts in new situations and to address when, where or how to employ methods and ideas.

Study methods	Types of questions to ask yourself
Seek concrete examples of abstract ideas.	Why does ____ work?
Work practice problems and exercises.	How would you change ____?
Write an instructional manual or study guide on the chapter that others could use.	How would you develop a set of instructions about ____?

Level 4: Analyze

Analysis means breaking a topic or idea into components, or examining a subject from different perspectives. It helps us see how the “whole” is created from the “parts.” It is easy to miss the big picture by getting stuck at a lower level of thinking and simply remembering individual facts without seeing how they are connected. Analysis helps reveal the connections between facts. “Compare and contrast” instructions often fall within this category, where the focus of your analysis is to find similarities and differences.

Study methods	Types of questions to ask yourself
Generate a list of contributing factors.	How does this element contribute to the whole?
Determine the importance of different elements or sections.	What is the significance of this section?
Compare and contrast.	What makes _____ similar and different from _____?

Level 5: Evaluate

Evaluating means making judgments about something based on criteria and standards. This requires checking and critiquing an argument or concept to form an opinion about its value. Often there is not a clear or correct answer to this type of question. Rather, it's about making a judgment and supporting it with reasons and evidence. When instructors ask you to "argue" or to "agree or disagree," they are asking you to emphasize your opinion. When doing so, you will likely want to address other potential opinions to defend your own.

Study methods	Types of questions to ask yourself
List the points at which you agree or disagree with an author.	What is your opinion about ____ and why?
Consider what you would do if asked to make a choice.	How would you improve this?
Determine which approach or argument is most effective.	What evidence and reasons support your opinion?

Level 6: Create

Creating involves putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole. Creating includes reorganizing elements into a new pattern or structure through planning. This is the most complex and advanced level of Bloom's Taxonomy.

Study methods	Types of questions to ask yourself
Build a model and use it to teach the information to others.	How can you design a ____ to ____?
Design an experiment.	What experiment can you make to demonstrate or test this information?
Write a short story about the concept.	How can this information be told in the form of a story?



It is important to remember that the elements of Bloom's Taxonomy are not always discrete taxons (ideas): they can often blend together. It is also worth keeping in mind that not all instructors will use Bloom's Taxonomy or use it in a completely consistent way. When in doubt, be in touch with the course's instructors to clarify their expectations.