

## Definition of Common Assessment Verbs

The following terms are working definitions of some of the more common verbs used in assessments. They are illustrated with an example of how they can be applied.

The examples are for guidance as some verbs can be used in different, but equally valid, contexts e.g. you can 'establish' (set up) a company or you can 'establish' (verify) the truth of a situation.

Verb	Definition	Example
<p><b>Analyse</b> What makes this work the way it does?</p>	<p>To examine something in detail to discover or determine the meaning or essential features and draw conclusions. To break something down into components or essential features, to identify possible causation and/or draw conclusions.</p> <p>Analysis is not solely confined to data, but will often involve some manipulation of data to identify patterns, etc. The more complex the topic being analysed, the higher the level, but analysis will rarely be a low-level activity.</p>	<p>A review of staff data confirms that 80% of the workforce is male. It is important to analyse the reasons for this gender imbalance and prepare a report for senior management.</p> <p>The analysis could consist of collecting both qualitative and quantitative data and include each stage of the recruitment process.</p> <p>Where and how does the company advertise? What is the gender breakdown of applicants? Is it greater or less than 3:1?</p> <p>What selection methods are used? Are these appropriate and relevant? Is there any unconscious bias? Talk to current employees about their experience as another source for analysis.</p> <p>Data on retention of staff – is there any significant gender difference? Is the M/F retention the same at all levels.</p> <p>Gather the data, identify any patterns e.g. are females applying or not? Are they not getting through the selection process? Analyse both the statistical data and the 'soft' information and draw valid conclusions.</p>
<p><b>Appraise</b> Does this seem to work to the required standard?</p>	<p>Less detailed but broader and more comprehensive than an assessment, looking at the whole and making judgements. Appraisal in its broader sense requires a judgement about the subject, identifying its strengths and weaknesses and/or how well something or someone performs in a particular context. Appraisal is more subjective than an evaluation, although it will refer to appropriate criteria.</p>	<p>In this first example, the word 'appraise' is used as a noun - a formal assessment of employee performance.</p> <p>'In many organisations staff are appraised on an annual basis. This takes a holistic view of an employee and makes a judgement as to their effectiveness in their job role. For example:</p> <p><i>The employee is always here on time, never leaves early and embodies the company's values. They build good relationships, and this is reflected by how highly their team speaks of them. However, they sometimes lack problem-solving skills and often go to other Managers to find solutions.'</i></p> <p>In this second example, 'appraise' is used as a verb e.g. the act of assessing something</p>

		<p>'Appraising the company's staff development policy will illustrate its strengths and weaknesses and overall effectiveness. A strength might be effective internal trainers, but a weakness could be a lack of externally recognised qualifications. However, if the findings meet the needs of the company then the overall judgement may be that it is working well enough.'</p>
<p><b>Assess</b> Is this to the required standard?</p>	<p>Examining a topic and making a judgement, based on standard criteria. An assessment will judge each element individually. An assessment does not consider any causal factors but focuses primarily on impact or outcomes.</p>	<p>At the end of a probationary period new employees may be assessed against a set of criteria that are an essential part of their job role. The assessment can be used as evidence that the employee should become permanent.</p> <p>The employee has proved their competence in providing direction, instructions, and guidance to team members, resulting in projects being achieved on time and budget.</p> <p>The monitoring of resources and has not always followed company procedure. However, with experience, improvements in these areas should be rapid. The overall assessment is that the employee is offered a permanent contract.</p>
<p><b>Compare</b> How does this relate to that?</p>	<p>Used with two or more examples, requires a description of their relative features, effectiveness, or outcomes. Context and variation determine the level of cognition involved.</p>	<p>Compare the roles of a senior and junior manager in an organisation.</p> <p>Senior managers assume a supervisory role over a group of employees in an organisation to meet agreed and defined organisational goals. A junior manager is usually the lowest level of manager in an organisation, typically having supervisory rather than full managerial responsibility. A senior manager may have much of the same supervisory responsibilities but wider and on a more strategic level, for instance responsibilities may include hiring and budgeting.</p>
<p><b>Compare and contrast</b> To what extent are they alike and to what extent are they different?</p>	<p>Provide an account of the characteristics of two or more entities that enable judgements to be made as to how they are similar and how they are different.</p>	<p>Compare and contrast coaching and mentoring.</p> <p>Both can be used as a method of staff development. Both require the effective use of active listening by the coach/mentor.</p> <p>A variety of questioning techniques are used to move the coachee/mentee forward.</p> <p>Rapport is essential for either to be effective.</p> <p>However, coaching is seen as a short-term intervention whilst mentoring can be long term.</p> <p>Coaching is about improving work performance; mentoring is more holistic.</p> <p>Mentoring is usually undertaken by a more experienced and knowledgeable person whilst a coach does not have to be a subject expert.</p> <p>Coaches encourage the coachee to find their own solutions whilst mentors offer advice guidance and support.</p>
<p><b>Contrast</b></p>	<p>Used with two or more examples, makes some</p>	<p>Contrast Maslow's and Herzberg's theories of motivation.</p>

<p>How good is this compared to that?</p>	<p>assessment of their relative features, effectiveness, or outcomes. By definition, this is more demanding than to compare, and the factors which determine the level for compare also apply.</p>	<p>Maslow envisages a 'motivational pyramid' that moves vertically from one stage to another with the need for food, drink, and sleep at the bottom to self- actualisation at the top of the pyramid. Self- actualisation he envisaged as being a challenging job, sense of achievement and the opportunity for creativity.</p> <p>In contrast Herzberg devised a 'Two factor theory.' He described both motivating factors e.g., personal growth, recognition enjoyment of the job but also 'Hygiene factors. These are the factors that, if absent, cause dissatisfaction but if present do not motivate. For example, if the office is cold staff will be unhappy and possibly become less productive, but if it is of an acceptable temperature, they will not see this as a motivator but something that they expect.</p> <p>Whilst Herzberg's 'motivational factors' have similarities to Maslow's their theories contrast in that he places more emphasis on the practical aspect of work and the importance of 'job design' in improving the quality of work life. This theory may be more applicable to current day working practices with the increased emphasis on work/life balance.</p>
<p><b>Conclude</b> Why is this my decision?</p>	<p>Decide by reasoning.</p>	<p>When deciding on a suitable method of staff development, a manager could examine the examples of coaching v mentoring given in the 'Compare and contrast' example above.</p> <p>They might look at overall aim - is it short term or long term, the budget, in-house expertise, number of staff involved.</p> <p>By applying these factors to the work situation, they may reach a conclusion as to the most effective method for the organisation.</p>
<p><b>Critical</b> How valid and relevant are the ideas and information I am using?</p>	<p>To be critical means that you are required to make judgements about the validity or relevance of the ideas and information you are using; to explore their meaning, and to demonstrate understanding of the topic from different perspectives and theoretical frameworks.</p>	<p>Designing an employee incentive scheme for a company from scratch will involve in depth research, validation of the information collected and requires underpinning with relevant management theory.</p> <p>Sources could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General internet research</li> <li>• Academic documents</li> <li>• Competitors</li> <li>• Staff survey/interviews</li> <li>• Motivational theories</li> <li>• Past company history</li> </ul> <p>However not all of these sources will carry the same weight of authenticity and relevance and therefore a critical judgment must be made about the validity of each.</p> <p>For example, general unattributed research will not be as reliable as information from university research.</p> <p>Are staff going to be honest in interviews or on surveys?</p>

		<p>Do the findings make sense in terms of recognised motivational theory? It is important to look critically at the ideas and information gathered in order to make a sound judgement.</p>
<p><b>Critically analyse</b> What makes this work the way it does, and why?</p>	<p>Implies careful, exact, in-depth, or detailed analysis. Tends to focus more on the components and to comment on their significance, causal relationships or impact on the whole. Requires informed judgement with reference to some conceptual theory, idea, practice or experience so will always be fairly high level of cognitive skill.</p>	<p>Critically analyse the leadership styles prevalent within an organisation and form a judgement as to how effective these are. In order to analyse effectively, an understanding of leadership theory is required e.g. Hersey Blanchard, Goleman, Tannenbaum Schmitt. This knowledge can then be applied to the performance of senior managers in order to critically analyse what styles are used and how effective these are e.g. are KPI's being met, are staff fully involved and consulted or is this irrelevant?. The information should be used to produce a detailed, evidence-based analysis of the leadership styles within the organisation and then critique how effective each style is.</p>
<p><b>Critique</b> What are the reasons for my views and conclusions on this?</p>	<p>To critique is to analyse something in detail in order to draw conclusions and provide reasons for your opinion as to its worth or value.</p>	<p>'Provide an analysis of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and its relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.' This is asking for a critique of the strength and weaknesses of the theory and an analysis of its value to the changing workplace. Whatever views and conclusions are drawn must be validated with sound reasoning.</p>
<p><b>Define</b> What, exactly, does it mean?</p>	<p>To state precisely the meaning of.</p>	<p>Define the meaning of a 'Full and Fair' recruitment policy.  To be considered 'fair', a policy must fully meet relevant legislation e.g. Equality and Diversity. It must be transparent, so everyone knows exactly what is required e.g. the application process is the same for everyone. There must be a clear and objective job description and person specification that applies equally to all. Employers must ensure that criteria and conditions are all relevant to, and necessary for the job role so as not to result in indirect discrimination.</p>
<p><b>Describe</b> What does it look like?</p>	<p>An account of the principal features of the topic. Involves some element of selection of the more important features. Again, context and possible variation is significant, as is the degree of detail required in the description.</p>	<p>Describe the organisational structure within a company/department. The information could be presented in a matrix structure.</p>
<p><b>Detail</b> What are the important features?</p>	<p>To detail is to include all the important elements or features.</p>	<p>What are the important elements to bear in mind when planning a training session?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Logistics – time place venue, length of session</li> <li>• Number of learners</li> <li>• Motivation – why are they there?</li> <li>• Experience or knowledge of the subject – is it a mixed group or all at the same level?</li> </ul>

		Looking at all the detail will enable a session to be planned that meets its aims and engages the learners.
<b>Differentiate</b> How is this different?	Distinguish one thing from another.	How does a public sector organisation differentiate itself from a private one? Consideration may be given to any of the following - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shareholders</li> <li>• Funding,</li> <li>• Profit/surplus</li> <li>• governance</li> <li>• government influence, public accountability.</li> <li>• pay and rewards</li> </ul>
<b>Determine</b> What is the scope? What have I found out?	To fix in scope To conclude after observation or consideration	When looking at problem solving it is important to identify its full scope e.g. How long has it been going on? Who is involved? Where does responsibility lie? What is the long- and short-term impact of the problem?  It is then a case of collecting facts and evidence e.g. by observation or reviewing data.  Once all the information has been analysed then the best course of action can be determined.
<b>Establish</b> How permanent is this? How true is this?	Create or set up on a permanent basis  To prove correct, to confirm, to ratify, to validate, etc.	Establishing a grievance and disciplinary policy for a company involves reviewing the legislation and current processes and creating a new policy that will be adopted by the organisation.  When following up an allegation of misconduct it is important to establish the facts e.g. what actually happened, who was involved, has the disciplinary procedure been followed accurately? Failure to do this could result in a claim for unfair dismissal.
<b>Evaluate</b> How well does each part of this work, and what needs to be done to make it work better?	An evaluation is an examination of complex issues, requiring higher level cognitive skills, that is more focussed (narrower area, but in more detail) than a review. An evaluation is normally detailed and provides a solution or conclusion and/or recommendation (perhaps for further exploration). An evaluation could include a comparative element and will ascertain the usefulness or contribution of each part to the whole.	Effective evaluation is a skill that can be used in many aspects of management. A manager can look back on a project and evaluate how effective it was against the success criteria. They could also use it in problem solving. Most problems will have more than one solution and so leaders need to evaluate the alternatives and decide which is best.  For example, a cost benefit analysis may look at either buying a new state of the art piece of equipment or re-organising a workflow. Re-organising the workflow may be marginally less effective but cost a lot less. Managers evaluate both options and reach a decision that is best for the organisation.
<b>Examine</b> What can you find out about it?	Examine is about exploring a topic in some detail (identifying positive and negative features of the topic) without necessarily drawing	A manager is asked to look into expanding their company's presence on social media. They need to explore different sites, costs, coverage, relation to own market segment etc. Their examination can then be used to plan and develop a social media strategy.

	conclusions and making judgements. An examination could be used to inform decision making; in itself it will probably not be conclusive.	
<b>Explain</b> How does it work?	Involves some description of a topic with an account of the practices or uses associated with the topic, or characteristics of the topic. It may also imply some reasons for those practices, depending on context. Again, the level of cognitive skill involved will depend on the complexity of the subject matter.	Following on from the manager's examination above, they may be asked to explain social media and how it works to the senior leadership team. Their explanation could include listing websites or Twitter with a rationale of potential benefits to the company.
<b>Identify</b> What are they?	Involves some selection of subject matter from a larger set or context. Requires ability to recognise - the level of cognitive skill required depends on the context. And the degree of variation in the set from which the identified elements are being drawn.	Identify the stakeholders in a business e.g. the people involved and their influence on the organisation. This could be <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board of Directors</li> <li>• Shareholders</li> <li>• Senior management</li> <li>• Colleagues</li> <li>• Customers</li> <li>• Suppliers</li> <li>• Wider community</li> </ul>
<b>Justify</b> Why do it?	Present an argument for a particular action or choice. Will usually imply some form of assessment or analysis and may be linked with one or other action.	The company Christmas party is cancelled, and the staff are obviously unhappy  'As you are aware, trading conditions have been very difficult over the last 12 months and we have not achieved our projected income. As a result, all non - essential spending is being cutback. Because of this we will not need to make anyone redundant and all jobs are safe for the foreseeable future'.  This argument justifies the cancellation and will, hopefully, appease the employees.
<b>List</b> What exists?	Presentation of specific, required information in a structured format. Essentially a recall of learnt information; although this may be quite complex information, listing does not imply significant cognitive skills.	List the 5 reasons why dismissal may be deemed to be fair. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Conduct – when the employee has done something that is not appropriate or acceptable</li> <li>2. Capability – when the employee is not able to do the job or does not have the required qualifications</li> <li>3. Redundancy – when the job is no longer needed</li> <li>4. Legal reasons –for example, a bus driver who is banned from driving</li> <li>5. Some other substantial reason' – a term used for a wide variety of other situations</li> </ol>
<b>Outline</b>	To give general idea and overview without going into detail.	Outline the main features of Honey and Mumford's theory of learning styles:

<p>What are the main features?</p>		<p>Honey and Mumford identified 4 learning styles that people will fall into. Pragmatist, Activist, Reflector and Theorist. They then give examples of how each category learns best and this can be used when planning teaching or training sessions.</p>
<p><b>Reflect</b> What have I learnt from this experience?</p>	<p>A process or model of learning from an experience in order to give consideration to what might be an improvement or be done differently next time.</p>	<p>At the end of a training course it is good practice to reflect on what you have learned eg:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were your expectations met?</li> <li>• How useful was the training?</li> <li>• How can I apply it in my work role?</li> <li>• What can I move onto next?</li> </ul> <p>By questioning/reflecting on your experience, you can learn from it and move forward.</p> <p><b>Theory example</b> In 1984 David Kolb published his 4 stage Experiential Learning theory that shows how learning depends on reflection. In summary: <b>Stage 1</b> is when we encounter a new experience or situation. <b>Stage 2</b> is when we reflect on the experience - what went well, what could have gone better? Did we achieve the right outcomes? <b>Stage 3</b> The reflection is turned into new ideas and improvements <b>Stage 4</b> completes the circle with the application of the new ideas/processes. The success of this learning circle depends on the ability to reflect objectively on what has happened and apply the lessons learned to future actions.</p>
<p><b>Research</b> What can you find out about it?</p>	<p>Identifying and collecting data or information about a subject and presenting it in a codified or structured form. Research does not imply any analysis of the data collected, although that may be implied by the context. Research does not imply any judgement about the data collected but may well be combined with related verbs (analyse, evaluate) to ensure that these actions take place.</p>	<p>A company is expanding, and a manager is asked by the CEO to identify potential sites for larger premises. They need to research alternatives, collect relevant data e.g. size and location of sites, potential building costs, rent, rates. The research can then be presented in a factual report to the board for a final decision to be made.</p>
<p><b>Review</b> Overall, how well does this work, and what may need to be done about it?</p>	<p>Making a judgement about a topic which relies upon a combination of evidence and some kind of theoretical model(s), construct, or practice. A review is a 'snapshot' of an activity that has breadth and will focus more on the whole. A review may well lead onto detailed further exploration and/or</p>	<p>As organisations move more towards virtual meetings, it is important to review these to see how effective they are and if changes need to be made e.g. Do they meet their intended aims? Is the IT working efficiently? Are contributors engaging with the new format? In this instance it may be useful to draw up a SWOT – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats of the new system as a framework for the review.</p>

	recommendations for further actions.	
<b>Select</b> Which are the most important?	Choose in preference to others	In the workplace a number of ways to communicate are available to select. An employee may choose an e mail to inform a large number of staff. A personal presentation may be more appropriate for a board of directors whilst a poster might be the best way of reinforcing a Health and Safety message. It is important to select the most effective in each circumstance.
<b>Specify</b> What, exactly, is it?	Precise and exact; the particular qualities or characteristics of something	When drawing up a contract it is vital to be specific and accurate about the content. This ensures that clients will get precisely what they expect and require. For example, if a Facilities Manager is negotiating a contract for building work, they will need to be exact about the design, materials, costs, and timescale so that they are fully protected by the contract should anything go wrong.
<b>Summarise</b> What are the main points?	A brief account giving the main points.	A brief summary of the main points in <b>Tuckman's theory of team development</b> is: <b>Forming</b> – team are new and may be reserved and sounding out each other. <b>Storming</b> –Staff are vying for their place in the team <b>Norming</b> – Things settle down as team get to know each other better. <b>Performing</b> – Team are experienced and working well together.
<b>Verify</b> How have I checked this to ensure it is correct?	To verify is to confirm by investigation.	A manager is told by a team leader that one of their staff is consistently late for work and disciplinary action needs to be taken. Before doing so, the manager should check with HR and/or time sheets to verify the information is correct. They then have the valid data needed to take appropriate action.