

Exam Command Words

Command words tell you what an exam question is asking you to do. Identify the command word before you begin, and check that every part of your answer responds to it.

Analyse Break the topic into parts and explain how those parts relate to one another.	Evaluate Weigh up strengths, weaknesses and evidence, then make a supported judgement.
Apply Use your knowledge, a theory or a method in the situation given.	Examine Investigate the topic closely and explain the important facts, issues or relationships.
Assess Consider the evidence and make a reasoned judgement about importance, value or effectiveness.	Explain Make something clear by giving reasons, causes or steps - show how or why.
Calculate Work out the answer from the information given and show your working.	Identify Name or point out the relevant feature, factor or issue.
Compare Identify relevant similarities and differences between two or more things.	Justify Give evidence and reasons to support an answer, decision or conclusion.
Contrast Focus on the differences between two or more things.	Outline Give the main points or general structure without unnecessary detail.
Critically evaluate Question the evidence and assumptions, consider strengths and limitations, then reach a well-supported judgement.	Recommend Choose the most suitable option and support your choice with evidence and reasons.
Define Give the precise meaning of a term or concept.	State Give the required information clearly and briefly, without explanation unless asked.
Describe Give the main features or characteristics. Say what it is like or what happened.	Summarise Present the main points briefly, leaving out minor details.
Discuss Explore the main viewpoints or arguments, support them with evidence and reach a conclusion.	To what extent Decide how far you agree or how true something is, using evidence and a clear conclusion.

Remember: The number of marks and the time available indicate how much detail your answer needs.