

Understanding exam questions:

Command words

You can't do very well in an exam if you don't understand what the question is asking for. This is why it's important to have a good understanding of the words used by examiners.

It's well worth spending time looking at exam questions and working out exactly what they mean.



➔ What do examiners want me to do?

COMMAND WORDS are the instruction words that tell you what to do such as **outline, describe, discuss, identify, assess.**

ACTIVITY

UNDERSTANDING COMMAND WORDS

Match these command words with their correct definitions. Draw a line to connect the command word with its correct definition.

1. Justify
2. Examine
3. Summarise
4. Compare
5. Criticise
6. Discuss
7. Contrast
8. Prove
9. Describe
10. Evaluate

- a. Explain the difference between
- b. Sum up the main points
- c. Support (with facts/figures/examples)
- d. Explain the similarities and differences
- e. Debate the issue from different standpoints
- f. Give a concise statement of meaning and/or identify the main characteristics
- g. Identify problems/disadvantages
- h. Investigate closely, ask questions of
- i. Demonstrate, make certain
- j. Weigh up the strengths and weaknesses

Go through a past exam paper and list all the commands in the questions. If any of them are not listed above, find out exactly what they mean.

Command word	Explained above? y/n	If no, what does it mean?

Answers: 1c 2h 3b 4d 5g 6e 7a 8i 9f 10j