

Understanding command phrases (GCSE Version)


One of the key things to identify when **reading exam questions** is the **command phrase** i.e. the word or phrase that directs you as to what the Examiner wants you to do in this question. If you're not clear on this, you may end up writing material which, although may be true and correct, is nevertheless irrelevant, and so will lose you marks.

Learning outcome- to have a better grasp of

- what command phrases are commonly used in exam questions
- what each of them is asking you to do



Edna was horrified when she realised she'd described when the question said "explain".

	Command Phrase	Meaning
<div>Less depth required</div> <div></div> <div>Most depth required</div>	State, state fully one, name, identify, complete, define	These are the most straightforward command phrases, worth one or two marks. A few points: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• they may not need full sentences to answer them• if you do need to write sentences, think in terms of one sentence (with one point) per mark• if you're asked to state a value, don't forget to include the units
	Distinguish between	Often used with two definitions; requires you to point out differences. In the exam, include the definitions and join them with words like 'however, in contrast with, in the other hand' etc.
	Describe	Key word = WHAT – what is going on? What is the pattern you see? Summarise the key features of the thing you're describing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• if you're describing a resource, remember to quote figures where appropriate (When do you quote figures? What do you always quote?)
	Explain	Key words = WHY or HOW ? In this question, you have to show understanding rather than just knowledge
	Evaluate / to what extent	These require you to assess the pros and cons . You should make an overall statement about the aspect you are examining. Do you agree to a <i>large</i> extent? A <i>certain</i> extent? A <i>small</i> extent?