

GLOSSARY OF COMMON TERMS USED IN EXAMS

When answering an exam question, it's easy to misread what's being asked and simply answer it in the wrong way. Your argument may be logical, thoughtful and well researched, but if you aren't tailoring your response to the question, you stand to lose some points! Below are definitions of some common instruction words.

Instruction word	What you have to do
Advise	Requires you to help somebody reach a decision through a mixture of facts, opinions, commands and options
Analyze	Take apart an idea, concept or statement and examine and criticize its sub-parts in detail. You have to be methodical and logical.
Argue	Put forward a point of view in a structured and reasoned way – usually one sided but takes account of other points of view.
Assess	Describe a topic's positive and negative aspects and say how useful or successful it is, or consider its contribution to knowledge, events or processes (this is usually about how important something is).
Calculate	Work out.../ Points are sometimes awarded for both the process and outcome.
Combine	Put together. . .
Comment on	This requires you to analyze and evaluate in a balanced way. Give your opinions or point of view, with reasons.
Compare	Put items side by side to see their similarities and differences – a balanced (objective) answer is required.
Complete	Finish in full
Consider	Discuss from all angles/analyze.
Contrast	Emphasize the differences between two things.
Criticize	Point out a topic's mistakes or weaknesses as well as its favorable aspects. Give a balanced answer (this will involve some analysis first).
Define	Give the meaning of an idea, either a dictionary definition or from an academic authority in your subject of study (technical definition).
Describe	Give details of processes, properties, events and so on.
Describe in detail	Will often be linked to more marks and therefore you will be required to go into more depth in your answer and develop your key points using precise, clear language
Describe the differences	Structure around key points which you compare across the two things up for discussion – don't describe all the features of one thing and then all the features of the other – link ideas together.
Develop. . .	Go beyond and expand something; take it forward; add detail; improve upon a basic idea.
Discuss	Describe, explain, give examples, points for and against, then analyze and evaluate the results. Also known as 'examine' and 'consider' – give the main reasons 'for' and 'against' and come to a conclusion.

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<i>Draw</i>	Draw is similar to ‘sketch’ or ‘illustrate’. Obviously I know, but people can panic in an exam and do completely the wrong thing...don’t let this be you
<i>Ensure</i>	Make sure/ make certain
<i>Estimate</i>	Guess/ calculate approximately/ give an idea with evidence.
<i>Evaluate</i>	Evaluate is similar to <i>discuss</i> , but with more emphasis on a judgement in the conclusion.
<i>Examine</i>	Take apart and describe a concept in great detail.
<i>Explain</i>	Give detailed reasons for an idea, principle or result, situation, attitude and so on. You may need to give some analysis as well.
<i>Explore</i>	Investigate/ Look deeply at – often this will require you to look at reasons
<i>Give</i>	These tend to be short, factual answers and normally they will specify how many points are to be made.
<i>Give Reasons</i>	Say why or how something might happen
<i>How</i>	Explain something
<i>Identify</i>	Pick out/ select/ find/ highlight.
<i>Illustrate</i>	Give concrete examples – including figures or diagrams.
<i>Interpret</i>	<i>Illustrate</i> is usually added on to another instruction.
<i>Interpret</i>	Explain and comment on the subject and make a judgement (evaluation).
<i>Interpret</i>	Explain the meaning in your own words. How do you ‘see’, ‘read’ or ‘understand’ something?
<i>Justify</i>	Give reasons to support a statement – it may be a negative statement, so be careful!
<i>List</i>	Provide an itemized series of parts, reasons or qualities, possibly in a table.
<i>Modify</i>	Change/ adapt a drawing or sketch (more often than not).
<i>Name</i>	Again, simply name but be very specific – no general terms.
<i>Outline</i>	Give only the most important details/ give a brief overview/ a brief explanation – often carries fewer points.
<i>Persuade</i>	Aim to change your reader’s mind about something using biased points and persuasive devices.
<i>Predict</i>	Say what you think or expect will happen – the second part of this question may require you to explain this and justify your ideas.
<i>Present</i>	Show your ideas/ demonstrate your ideas (remember to look how you are meant to be presenting – drawing? writing?).
<i>Produce</i>	Create/ make/ construct/ bring to life/ bring into being.
<i>Prove/disprove</i>	Provide evidence for or against and demonstrate logical argument and reasoning – you often have to do this for abstract or scientific subjects.
<i>Relate</i>	Emphasize the links, connections and associations, probably with some analysis.

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<i>Review</i>	Analyze and comment briefly, in organized sequences – sentences, paragraphs or lists – on the main aspects of a subject.
<i>Show the Method</i>	Demonstrate/ illustrate/ explain a way of doing something or a process.
<i>Show How</i>	Explain how...
<i>State</i>	Write, briefly, the main point. Give the relevant points briefly – you don't need to make a lengthy discussion or give minor details.
<i>Study</i>	Look in detail at a picture, passage or drawing in order to access information necessary to answer the question.
<i>Suggest</i>	Offer ideas/ put forward ideas/ propose something. Summarize Draw Give possible reasons – analyze, interpret and evaluate. <i>(This is also the verb most commonly used to quote another author.)</i>
<i>Summarize or outline</i>	Just give the main points, not the details.
<i>Trace</i>	Give a brief description of the logical or chronological stages of the development of a theory, process, a person's life and so on. Often used in historical questions.
<i>Use</i>	This often means they are directing you to a specific passage, rule or drawing – check carefully.
<i>What is meant by...</i>	You are being asked for a definition of the word.
<i>What are the disadvantages and advantages...</i>	A simple form of discussion.
<i>What do you need to consider...</i>	You are being asked to highlight key information appropriate to a process in your response. (What' questions usually carry fewer points.)***
<i>Why</i>	Involves you discussing and explaining a process, outcome or point of view using evidence to back up your ideas. Will usually involve a balanced approach.
<i>Work out</i>	Asks you to solve something – marks are usually awarded for you showing the process behind your thinking as well as the answer you come up with.
<i>Write down</i>	Could mean 'Describe' or require you to select relevant information.
<i>Write about how</i>	This is more detailed and requires you to explain a process/ how something happens.