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Exam Command Verbs

Command words are the words and phrases used in exams that tell students how they should answer a question.

The following command words are taken from The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation's (Ofqual) official list of command words and their meanings are relevant to this subject. In addition, where necessary, we have included our own command words and their meanings to complement Ofqual's list.

Balance

Students need to balance a chemical equation.

Calculate

Students should use numbers given in the question to work out the answer.

Choose

Select from a range of alternatives.

Compare

This requires the student to describe the similarities and/or differences between things, not just write about one.

Define

Specify the meaning of something.

Describe

Students may be asked to recall some facts, events or process in an accurate way.

Design

Set out how something will be done.

Determine

Use given data or information to obtain an answer.

Draw

To produce, or add to, a diagram.

Estimate

Assign an approximate value.

Evaluate

Students should use the information supplied, as well as their knowledge and understanding, to consider evidence for and against when making a judgement.

Explain

Students should make something clear, or state the reasons for something happening.

Give

Only a short answer is required, not an explanation or a description.

Identify

Name or otherwise characterise.

Justify

Use evidence from the information supplied to support an answer.

Label

Provide appropriate names on a diagram.

Measure

Find an item of data for a given quantity.

Name

Only a short answer is required, not an explanation or a description. Often it can be answered with a single word, phrase or sentence.

Plan

Write a method.

Plot

Mark on a graph using data given.

Predict

Give a plausible outcome.

Show

Provide structured evidence to reach a conclusion.

Sketch

Draw approximately.

Suggest

This term is used in questions where students need to apply their knowledge and understanding to a new situation.

Use

The answer must be based on the information given in the question. Unless the information given in the question is used, no marks can be given. In some cases students might be asked to use their own knowledge and understanding.

Write

Only a short answer is required, not an explanation or a description.