

Command Words Guide

What each command word means, with examples

WHY COMMAND WORDS MATTER

- A **command word** is the first word of a question. It tells you **what to do** with your knowledge
- Two questions on the same topic can need very different answers, for example *State* versus *Evaluate*
- Read the command word first, then the **marks**: the number of marks is a guide to the number of points

Figure 1: Command words by level of demand

Recall	Understanding	Higher order
Define Give Identify State	Describe Demonstrate Explain Compare Contrast	Analyse Discuss Evaluate Justify Suggest
<i>Remember facts and name things</i>	<i>Show how and why things work</i>	<i>Apply, weigh up and reach a judgement</i>

The command words

Command word	What it means	Example question	What a good answer does
Analyse	Examine in detail to show meaning, identify elements and the relationship between them	Analyse how an online shop uses the data it collects about customers.	Break the topic into parts, say what each part does or means, and link the parts together.
Compare	Identify/comment on similarities and/or differences	Compare a LAN with a WAN.	Give at least one similarity and one difference, written as a point about <i>both</i> items.
Contrast	Identify/comment on differences	Contrast a laser printer with an inkjet printer.	Give differences only, and say what each one is, for example 'laser is faster; inkjet is slower'.
Define	Give precise meaning	Define the term <i>malware</i> .	Give an exact, short meaning without examples or extra detail.
Demonstrate	Show how or give an example	Demonstrate how a range check stops an invalid mark being entered.	Show it working with a worked example, such as 'a mark of 105 is rejected because the limit is 100'.
Describe	State the points of a topic / give characteristics and main features	Describe how a barcode reader is used at a supermarket checkout.	Write what it is like or how it happens, using several clear points in order.
Discuss	Write about issue(s) or topic(s) in depth in a structured way	Discuss the use of online learning in schools.	Cover both sides (benefits and drawbacks), develop each point, and finish with a short conclusion.
Evaluate	Judge or calculate the quality, importance, amount, or value of something	Evaluate the use of biometric passwords to protect data.	Weigh up strengths and weaknesses, then give a reasoned judgement.

Command word	What it means	Example question	What a good answer does
Explain	Set out purposes or reasons / make the relationships between things clear / say why and/or how and support with relevant evidence	Explain why backups should be stored away from the computer.	Give a reason and link it to a result, using 'because', 'so' or 'which means'.
Give	Produce an answer from a given source or recall/memory	Give two examples of output devices.	Write the answer from memory or from the source given, with no explanation needed.
Identify	Name / select / recognise	Identify the validation check used for a field that must hold 8 characters.	Name or pick the correct item (here: a length check). One word or phrase is enough.
Justify	Support a case with evidence/argument	Justify the choice of a solid-state drive for a tablet computer.	State the choice and give reasons or evidence for it, for example 'no moving parts, so it is more durable'.
State	Express in clear terms	State one use of RAM.	Give a short, clear answer in a sentence or phrase; no explanation is needed.
Suggest	Apply knowledge and understanding to situations where there are a range of valid responses in order to make proposals / put forward considerations	Suggest two ways a school could reduce the risk of phishing.	Apply what you know to the situation given; any sensible, relevant idea can earn credit.

Worked examples

Command word	Question	Model answer (summary)
State	State one use of RAM.	RAM stores the data and programs that are currently in use. [1]
Describe	Describe how a barcode reader is used at a checkout. [3]	The reader shines a laser or light at the barcode. The pattern of bars is read and turned into a number. The number is sent to the computer, which looks up the product and its price. [3]
Explain	Explain why backups should be kept away from the computer. [2]	A fire or theft could destroy the computer and a backup next to it, so the data would be lost. Keeping it elsewhere means it can still be restored. [2]
Compare and contrast	Compare and contrast a LAN with a WAN. [2]	Both connect computers so data and devices can be shared. A LAN covers a small area such as a school, whereas a WAN covers a large geographical area. [2]
Evaluate	Evaluate the use of biometric passwords. [4]	They cannot be forgotten or easily copied, so they are more secure. However, the equipment is costly and a cut or injury may stop a fingerprint working. Overall they suit high-security sites, but a password or PIN is more suitable where cost matters. [4]

EXAM TIPS

- Underline the **command word** before you start writing
- **Compare** needs both similarities and differences; **Contrast** needs only differences
- **Describe** says what something is like; **Explain** says why or how, so add a reason
- **Evaluate** and **Discuss** need both sides and a conclusion, so do not stop at one point
- **State**, **Give** and **Identify** need short answers; extra detail earns no extra marks
- Use the marks as a guide: a 4-mark question usually needs four separate points or two developed points