# Command words and phrases

OCR examination questions are written to give candidates every opportunity to show what they can do. They are not written to catch the candidate out. Candidate answers are marked positively – which means that candidates gain marks for what they can do, rather than lose marks for what they do not do. Therefore, any valid and appropriate approach to a question is considered relevant and is rewarded. Examiners know and understand the time constraints in an examination.

In preparing for the exam, candidates might like to begin by assuming that every question has a “for”, an “against”, an “agree” and a “disagree” element. As candidates get more confident, they can begin to explore ways of drawing out the grey areas in questions.

The word ‘critically’ is sometimes used (see below) in front of a word but it does not change the examiner’s expectations: they will be looking for analysis and evaluation throughout an essay. It might be added in topics where it is easier to skim over the material and the examiner wants to emphasise the need to analyse and evaluate in depth.

Whatever the command word or phrase, examiners will use the levels of response in the mark scheme to assess the two assessment objectives. The command word is part of the question and using it as a focus will ensure that the question is answered and answering the question is the main aim of writing an essay.

**Statement followed by “discuss”**

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| **Explanation** | * The statement will usually be controversial in some way. * The specification will have prepared candidates by exploring more than one angle for this topic. * An essay needs to consider what the different views on this question are. * It needs to examine critically the points for and against before reaching an evaluative judgement at the end. |
| **Example** | **‘”Good” is meaningful.’ Discuss.** ([H573/02, Religion and ethics, June 2018](https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/536241-question-paper-religion-and-ethics.pdf)) |
| **Illustration** | This question invites the candidate to explore the concept of ‘good’ from any perspectives the candidate chooses, as long as a range of views are critically analysed (in line with the levels of response). A judgement may conclude that the word “good” is meaningful or is not, or something in between. |

### (Critically) Discuss…

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| **Explanation** | * The rest of the question will often be controversial in some way within the subject. * The specification will have prepared candidates by exploring the topic from several points of view. * An essay needs to focus in on what the question is asking (not just the topic in general). * It needs to explore the focus of the question, analysing strengths and weaknesses in order to reach a judgement. |
| **Example** | **Discuss** the view that the idea of purgatory makes more sense than hell. ([H573/03, Developments in Christian thought, June 2019](https://interchange.ocr.org.uk/Downloads/Religious20Studies20-20QPs20(June19).zip?downloadId=814874)) |
| **Illustration** | This question gives a key aspect of Christian thought to explore. Candidates are invited to explore the issues of purgatory and hell critically and reach a judgement on whether purgatory makes more sense (i.e. is more or less coherent or meaningful) than hell. The judgement is likely to conclude that the idea of purgatory is or is not more coherent than that of hell – or potentially reject both. |

### To what extent…

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| **Explanation** | * The rest of the question will often be controversial in some way within the subject. It may not be a straightforward yes/no or agree/disagree question. * The specification will have prepared candidates by exploring the topic from several points of view. * An essay needs to consider both approaches that agree and disagree and standpoints that may partially agree or disagree. * It needs to explore more than one approach and demonstrate that it is not a fixed for/against question before reaching a judgement. Sometimes that judgement may agree or disagree with the issue only partially. |
| **Example** | **To what extent** is the ontological argument successful in proving the existence of God? ([H573/01, Philosophy of Religion, SAM](https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/242924-unit-h573-01-philosophy-of-religion-sample-assessment-material.pdf)) |
| **Illustration** | A response to this question is not necessarily straightforward. One version of the ontological argument might be successful where another might not be – or aspects of the argument might be successful where others are not. Critical analysis of the ontological argument and its strengths and weaknesses will give a range of different possible solutions about which an evaluative judgement will be needed. |

### (Critically) Assess…

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| **Explanation** | * The rest of the question will often be controversial in some way within the subject. It might not be a straightforward right/wrong viewpoint that is being assessed. * The specification will have prepared candidates by exploring the topic from several points of view. * An essay needs to consider a range of different approaches to the view but must focus on the view or idea in the question and not the topic as a whole. * It needs to explore and analyse approaches to the issue or topic or scholar in the question and reach an evaluative judgement. |
| **Example** | **Assess** the view that situation ethics is of no help with regard to the issue of euthanasia. ([H573/02, Religion and ethics, SAM](https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/242925-unit-h573-02-religion-and-ethics-sample-assessment-material.pdf)) |
| **Illustration** | This question offers a controversial view and asks the candidate to explore it. It is not a simple for/against essay as some might suggest that some aspects of situation ethics are helpful. Any aspects raised will need to be explored critically. The judgement will agree or disagree with the idea that situation ethics is of no help when discussing euthanasia or may decide that it is of some help. |

### (Critically) Evaluate…

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| **Explanation** | * The rest of the question will have an issue or viewpoint from the course that needs analysing and evaluating. * The specification will have prepared candidates by exploring the topic from several points of view. * An essay needs to consider whether the view or issue is right or wrong and whether there are points in between. * It should explore the relevant aspects of the topic and reach an evaluative judgement on the question. |
| **Example** | **Evaluate** the view that the thinking mind is separate from the body.  ([H573/01, Philosophy of Religion, SAM](https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/242924-unit-h573-01-philosophy-of-religion-sample-assessment-material.pdf)) |
| **Illustration** | The question points the candidate to a general idea from the specification that can be evaluated in a for/against way. However, candidates might choose to explore a mid-point view which states that the two are different but cannot be separated. Whichever views are explored, they will need to be analysed critically according to the levels of response. A judgement might agree or disagree with the idea of the thinking mind being separate to the body or suggest that there is no such thing as a mind as separate ‘thing’ itself. |

### (Critically) Compare…

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| **Explanation** | * The rest of the question will have aspects of the course that do not agree with each other that need to be compared. * The specification will have included all aspects of the question and so candidates will have explored them in detail. * An essay might consider where the weaknesses of one aspect might be overcome by the strengths of another. * It needs to use the AO2 as a way in, rather than simply making factual comparisons before reaching a final judgement. |
| **Example** | **Critically compare** the *via negativa* with symbolic language as ways of expressing religious beliefs in words. ([H573/01, Philosophy of Religion, SAM](https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/242924-unit-h573-01-philosophy-of-religion-sample-assessment-material.pdf)) |
| **Illustration** | Both aspects of the religious language topic have strengths and weaknesses. This question explores whether one overcomes the weaknesses of the other or whether neither can work. Higher marks would go beyond a list of similarities and differences between the two and give a critical exploration, leading to a final judgement about the two areas of religious language. |

### (Critically) Analyse…

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| **Explanation** | * The rest of the question will have a view or idea or a part of the course that has been studied. * The specification will have included critical study of that aspect of the course. * An essay needs to consider the strengths and weaknesses of this topic. * Candidates are likely to have explored many different aspects and so are free to choose a sample when discussing in an essay before reaching an evaluative judgement on the topic. |
| **Example** | **Analyse** Aristotle’s four causes. ([H573/01, Philosophy of religion, June 2019](https://interchange.ocr.org.uk/Downloads/Religious20Studies20-20QPs20(June19).zip?downloadId=814874)) |
| **Illustration** | This question allows the candidate to pick any aspects of Aristotle’s four causes and explore the strengths and weaknesses critically. Some might explore general strengths and weaknesses of Aristotle’s four causes; others might look at each cause in turn and what the implications of that philosophical approach might be. An overall judgement will look at the conclusions reached through the argument of the essay. |