GCSE Geography Command Words

Command words are the words in the exam questions (often one of the first words) which indicate what the examiner wants from the question and the style of the response needed. Knowing what command words mean is important for understanding the demands of the question – however the rest of the wording in a question is just as important to read. The rest of the wording will contextualise the question and might contain key words which affect how students should answer the question.

Within this resource are a number of the most common command words that we use. These suggested definitions could be used to aid discussion however the important thing is that students understand what is required in their answer if they see the particular command word. Therefore teachers should translate the definitions into wording that will resonate with their students so they can understand what is required.

Advice from our Principal Examiners

*"In many cases, candidates provided **explanations** where **descriptions** would suffice, or visa-versa, while the command word '**examine'** requires comments **beyond description and explanation**."*
GCSE Geography A, J383, examiners' report June 2018

*"The **best answers were those that identified the command words** in the questions, such as assess and evaluate, and **then linked their answer to those words**."*
GCSE Geography B, J384, examiners' report June 2018

*"To reach **Level 3**, it is best to take **one idea** and **develop it as fully as possible**, rather than try to explain three or four ideas much more basically, ending up with a list like answer."*
GCSE Geography B, J384, examiners' report June 2018

*"There is also a need for candidates to come up with **more ideas or extend the ideas** that they have identified to **gain all the marks** in a 3 or 4 mark question."*
GCSE Geography B, J384, examiners' report June 2018

Note, dependent on the command word, candidates may need to **develop their ideas**, e.g. '**explain**'.

This resource can be used alongside the themed webinar entitled 'Understanding GCSE question demands – command and key words' as well as the Examiners' reports for both GCSE qualifications. The themed webinar can be downloaded from the CPD hub: https://www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk/DesktopDefault.aspx?e=fjefcbdbhgnidcpoonie&CATN_ID=27. The Examiners' reports can be found via the qualification pages:

https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/gcse/geography-a-geographical-themes-j383-from-2016/assessment/

https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/gcse/geography-b-geography-for-enquiring-minds-j384-from-2016/assessment/

The list of commands words provided in this resource is not exhaustive, but we have provided this to support teachers and their students in preparing for the assessments.

Command Words	Potential definition
Assess	Weigh up whether a statement is true.
Calculate	Mathematically work out the value of something.
Compare	Describe the similarities and differences of something.
Define	State or describe exactly the meaning of.
Describe	Set out the characteristics.
Discuss	Bring forward the important points of or set out both sides of an argument/issue/element of content, for and against.
Evaluate	Give your verdict after providing evidence which both agrees with and contradicts an argument.
Examine	Look in close detail and establish the key facts and important issues.
Explain	Set out the causes of something and/or the factors which influence it.
Identify	Select a piece/s of information.
Justify	Give valid reasons and evidence to support an answer.
Make a prediction	Look at evidence provided to make a judgement about the future.
Outline	A brief written description / account of something.
Propose	To suggest a course of action or intention.
State	Provide a specific piece of information (e.g. name or value) without explanation.
Suggest	Offer an opinion for a particular course of action on an event or issue.
To what extent do you agree	How much you agree with a statement based on the evidence in argument.

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How do we decide which command term to use?

When the question papers are initially planned these are done by assessment objective. The author can then think about the command term and which part of the specification topic or skill they need to assess. Within the exam questions there will be a number of important constituent parts which include the command term, key word(s) (e.g. influence, success), specification link (e.g. topic / skill) and for some a resource interaction.

The table below shows a variety of command terms and how they are influenced by the assessment objectives. Where assessment objectives are being individually targeted, these examples can be found. The Sample Assessment Materials, Practice Papers and the summer series (2018) all have examples of these question types.

Assessment Objectives and Command Words	Rationale	Question examples
AO1 command words • Describe • Define • Outline • State	AO1 requires candidates to demonstrate knowledge of the specification content through recalling information – including in a case study context. Questions which target AO1 alone would tend to be shorter answer questions.	GCSE A (01) 2018 3(ci) Define the term renewable energy (1) GCSE B (01) 2018 1(a) Define the term extreme weather (1) GCSE B (02) 2018 1(d) State **two** causes of suburbanisation in ACs. (2)
AO2 command words • Explain how • Explain reasons/one reason • Discuss	All AO2 marks will focus on understanding. AO2 marks will be directly linked to the specification but not just recalling what has been learnt, instead ensuring that students comprehend the content.	GCSE A (02) 2018 3(aiii) Explain how human activity creates the enhanced greenhouse effect (4) GCSE B (02) 2018 4(aii) Explain how mining can affect ecosystems (3)
AO3 command words 	Interacting with resource	No resource
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Describe	Assess
Give	Examine
Suggest	Evaluate
Outline	To what extent do you agree		Command words will vary depending on whether students are applying their knowledge and understanding by interacting with a resource(s) or not.	**Interacting with a resource** GCSE A (01) 2018 1b(i) Study **Fig. 2** which shows a photograph of Blakeney Point spit. Describe the characteristics of the spit in the photograph (2) 3(ciii) Study **Fig. 5** which shows energy sources used to produce electricity in the UK in 2009 and 2020 (predicted). Suggest **two** reasons to explain the changing contribution of gas in the UK between 2009 and 2020 (2) GCSE B (01) 2018 1(b) Using **Fig. 1**, suggest how South America may be affected during an El Nino year (3) **No resource** GCSE A (03) 2018 5(b) Assess **two** fieldwork techniques used in your investigation. Explain which technique was the most effective(4) 5(c) Evaluate how effective the fieldwork data you collected was in helping you to reach a conclusion. (8) GCSE B (01) 2018 5(d) You will have carried out some physical geography fieldwork as part of your GCSE Geography course. To what extent was your primary data collection successful? (8)

Assessment Objectives and Command Words	Rationale	Question examples
AO4 command words • Describe the pattern • Using data • Calculate • Identify • Make a prediction	AO4 requires students to select, adapt and use geographical skills, as well as communicate findings. Command words may vary depending on the level of interaction with a resource.	<u>GCSE A (03) 2018</u> 2(c) The South Hams region of Devon makes up part of the Tamar catchment area. Its population structure is shown in **Fig. 5** in the separate Resource Booklet. Using Fig. 5, describe the evidence that shows that South Hams has an ageing population (3) 3(c) In 2010, forests covered 31 percent of the world's land surface, at 4030 million hectares. Between 1990 and 2010, 135 million hectares of previously forested land was removed. Calculate the percentage of the world's land surface covered by forests in 1990 to the nearest whole number. You must show your working out. (2) 4(aii) Physical geography fieldwork on Dartmoor. Identify **two** further pieces of information that the students could collect about the river. (2) <u>GCSE A (02) 2018</u> 2(bi) Calculate the mean life expectancy. (1) <u>GCSE B (02) 2018</u> 4(b) Study **Fig. 5**, a world map showing food security risk index by country. Describe the pattern for countries with the lowest level of food security (3). <u>GCSE B (03) 2018</u> 1(ai) Identify **one** human feature of Rio de Janeiro shown on **Fig. 1**.(1) 1(aii) Identify **one** physical feature of Rio de Janeiro shown on **Fig. 1**. (1)

What happens to the command term with multiple assessment objectives?

Some exam questions target more than one assessment objective and this can be reflected in the types of command words used as well as the key words. The tariff (marks allocated) of the question also gives an indication about how much detail the students need to include in their answer.

AO1 and AO2	AO2 and AO3	AO1, AO2 and AO3	AO1 & AO3
• Explain (case study and non-case study) • Suggest • Discuss	• To what extent • Explain (interaction with resource) • Assess • Discuss • Evaluate • Propose and justify (GCSE B -Decision making question)	• Examine • Assess • Evaluate • To what extent • Analyse	• Compare • Evaluate (Case study) • Examine • To what extent

The different assessment objectives and the combinations of them are used by the authors to 'assess' varying requirements of students:

Assessment objective combinations	Requirements	Question examples
AO1 and AO2	*Knowledge* (AO1) *and Understanding* (AO2) • Knowledge - recalling information learnt directly from the specification, including a case study • Understanding - going beyond recall to demonstrate comprehension of the specification content	<u>GCSE A (01) 2018</u> 3(b) **Case Study – a flood event in the UK caused by extreme weather conditions**. Explain **two** causes of the UK flood event. (4) <u>GCSE B (01) 2018</u> 3(e) **Case study – the landscape of a UK river basin**. Discuss the influence geology in the formation of river landforms within your chosen river basin (6)
AO2 and AO3	*Understanding* (AO2) *and application of knowledge and understanding* (AO3) Application of knowledge and understanding could require students to interpret, analyse, evaluate and / or make a judgement. The question wording will give an indication of the requirement alongside the mark scheme.	<u>GCSE A (03) 2018</u> 2(d) 'The ageing population of rural counties such as Devon is a more serious challenge than any faced by UK cities.' To what extent do you agree with this statement? (8) <u>GCSE B (02) 2018</u> 3(b) Evaluate the importance of the UK's role in **one** example of a global conflict. (6)

Assessment objective combinations	Requirements	Question examples
AO1, AO2 and AO3	*Knowledge* (AO1), *understanding* (AO2), *and application of knowledge and understanding* (AO3). The type of command word (and relative complexity of the question) indicates that these questions are likely to be 8 or 12 marks. These questions are therefore extended response questions and students need to write in more depth and develop their ideas.	GCSE A (01) 2018 3(d) Examine the impacts of the development of **one or more** renewable energy sources on **people** and the **environment** in the UK (8) GCSE A (02) 2018 1(c) Evaluate whether tropical rainforests are of more value than coral reefs to humans and the planet. (12) GCSE B (01) 2018 1(d) Assess the technological developments used to mitigate the impacts of a tectonic hazard. (8) GCSE B (02) 2018 2(c) **CASE STUDY – Low-Income Developing Country (LIDC) development** For an LIDC you have studied, assess how successful it has been in meeting **two** of the Millennium Development Goals. (8)
AO1 & AO3	*Knowledge* (AO1) and *application of knowledge and understanding* (AO3)	GCSE B (01) 2018 4(e) **Case study – Sustainable management of an area of tropical rainfores**t. Evaluate the effectiveness of one way in which an area of tropical rainforest you have studied is being sustainably managed. (6)

Appendices

GCSE Geography A J383 June 2018 question papers:

https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/gcse/geography-a-geographical-themes-j383-from-2016/assessment/

GCSE Geography B J384 June 2018 question papers:

https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/gcse/geography-b-geography-for-enquiring-minds-j384-from-2016/assessment/

The OCR Guide to Examinations:

This guide to examinations has been produced by OCR to help students prepare for their examinations. It has not been written to accompany any particular subject or specification, but focusses instead on understanding exam structures and formats and the ways in which students can support their performance in examinations.

https://ocr.org.uk/Images/231995-the-ocr-guide-to-examinations.pdf