

## **Command words: A glossary**

**Account...** Give reasons for.

**Analyse...** Break down the topic into parts and give an in-depth account. Comment.

**Annotate...** Add labels.

**Assess...** This is an evaluative question - weigh up the importance of the subject. This means there are a number of possible explanations. You need to give the main ones and then say which you tend to go for.

**Briefly...** Be concise and straightforward. Don't spend much too much time on this part (but don't list - sentences still required).

**Classify...** Use classification in your answer (ie divide into groups or categories).

**Compare...** What is wanted is a point by point identification of **similarities** and of **differences** ('compare' includes looking at contrasts, while a command to 'contrast' means only looking for differences). Use comparative adjectives eg. larger than, smaller, more steep, less densely.

**Comment...** Summarise the various points and give an opinion.

**Contrast...** on its own, means only looking for **differences**.

**Decide ... or make a decision ...** Here you are usually asked to compare different possible solutions to a problem. This means assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the alternatives. In the end, you have to decide which solution is best. Sometimes you may be asked to suggest how alternative solutions can be combined. It is important to make a clear decision. Your decision may not be a perfect solution – but it should be the best from amongst the alternatives.

**Define ... Or explain the meaning of ...** These words ask for a relatively short answer (**check the marks given**) – usually two or three sentences – where the precise meaning of the term is identified (usually doesn't need an example/case study).

**Describe ...** This is one of the most widely used command words. Unless the question says 'describe and explain', don't be tempted to explain (just avoid writing 'because' in your answer).

'**Describe the characteristics of ...**' means what does the feature look like, eg in the case of a landform - shape, dimensions, composition, location in relation to other features; for a population pyramid shape, dimensions, composition of cohorts, relation to other examples of pyramids.

'**Describe the changes in ...**' is often used with a graph or series of graphs (eg DTM). Accurate verbs are required, and using words like rapidly, steeply, gently, gradually. (One word to avoid is 'steadily' as any graph shape can be 'steady'.)

'**Describe the trends in...**' means more of an overall picture is required – not a 'blow by blow' account of what the graph shows. Major exceptions to the trend should be included.

'**Describe the differences between ...**' means **only** differences are required – no credit is given for similarities or for descriptions of one of the items. Might best be done with individual sentences each identifying a difference.

**'Describe the relationship between ...'** means **only** the links between the two items are required. You must identify and establish the link clearly.

**'Describe the distribution of ...'** mostly used with a map or set of maps. Describe the location of high concentrations of a variable together with significant low concentrations or isolated 'islands' within the distribution. Remember the idea is to describe the overall pattern.

**'Describe the effects of ...'** means a factual account of what has occurred, **after or as a result of** whatever the question has identified.

**Describe and comment on ...** This demands a higher level of response than just 'describe...'. Usually the description is straightforward, with judgements about the description getting most of the marks.

**Discuss ...** Usually you are expected to build up an argument about an issue and to present more than one side of the evidence with supporting examples. This creates a written debate identifying both positive and negative points and then you must **reach a conclusion** from the debate. You should both describe and explain. Try to create a balanced answer.

**'Discuss the extent to which ...'** requires a judgement about the validity of the evidence or outcome.

**'Discuss varying attitudes to ...'** there is a variety of viewpoints (eg decision makers and others affected) and priorities to be included in the answer.

**Evaluate ... or assess ...** This is similar to the idea of **'discuss'**.

**Assess** requires a statement of the overall quality or value of the feature/issue being considered. **Evaluate** asks the candidate to give an overall statement of value.

In both cases you need to state a viewpoint, after consideration of the evidence. In both cases your own judgement/opinion is wanted. Although an opinion cannot be marked incorrect, credit is given for the justification of the position you've taken up. It usually best not to adopt an extreme viewpoint (a balanced answer is best).

**Examine...** Look closely.

**Explain ...** Give **reasons or causes**. Description is not enough (and may not be needed at all). Show an understanding of why or how something has occurred.

**Give an explanatory (or reasoned) account of ... or describe and explain...** This is a combination of a 'describe' question, and a 'suggest reasons for' question. The logical way to answer is to describe first and then provide an explanation for the feature, but sometimes it is possible to provide the reasons first and then describe the consequent feature.

**How...** Describe. What methods are involved?

**Identify... State or name...** Point out and name. These words ask for a short answer to a simple task such as: a) 'Identify the landform from the photograph ...' b) 'Identify the value of ... from the graph' c) 'Name an example of ...' Don't just answer with a single word - it is always better to put the answer in a brief sentence.

**Interpret...** Bring out the meaning of...

**In what ways...** Describe. Identify a pattern.

**Justify...** Usually applies to decision-making questions. When you have made your decision you must justify why that course of action was better than the alternatives. Explain why your chosen course is better than the options that you rejected. Also explain how your choice meets the criteria set out for you in the question (or which you had to describe earlier in your answer).

**Locate...** State where it is.

**Outline...** Note the main features.

**Quote map evidence...** Give examples, including grid references, from map provided. Use compass points. Use scale.

**Rank...** Put in order of size.

**Select...** Choose.

**Study figure 1...** If you're asked to look at a diagram, then you must use that to help you answer the question which follows.

**Suggest...** Put forward an idea or reason.

**To what extent...** Agree and disagree (for and against). There are a number of possible explanations - give these. Then say which you tend to favour.

**With reference to specific examples/cases...** You must refer to a specific place, preferably a case study you know in some detail. Don't just say something vague like 'for example Brazil'; much better to say 'the Tucuruí dam scheme in Amazonia, Brazil, where...' .