



**LCCI**

International  
Qualifications from EDI

## Your guide to examination success

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## How to answer exam questions

*There isn't a 'knack' to examination success. It's a combination of hard work, preparation, and clear thinking.*

If you were to ask an examiner the most common reason why some students do poorly on exams, it is likely that he/she would say that "students just don't answer the question". While there are different ways of 'not answering the question', it is more often the case that students misinterpret the **command words** in the exam questions.

Every exam question will use one or more command words. These command words tell you what the examiner is asking you to do and give you guidance on how you should answer the question. If the question has two command words, this means that you are being asked to do two specific things; if you only respond to one command word then you would not be awarded full marks as the marks available would have been split between the two things that are required in order to answer it.

Below is a list of command words along with the approach that you should take when answering exam questions that use these words. Having a good understanding of how to answer questions based on the command word will certainly help you to avoid falling into the trap of not answering the question.

### List

Very basic skill – asking you to simply remember items and write them in the form of a list – no need to go in detail.

### State

Not difficult – just write what you are asked about in a clear, simple and 'to the point' way; no need to explain or clarify, unless you think that what you've written isn't clear.

### Give

Very straight forward – just outline your points briefly.

### Outline

Just give the main features or general idea.

### Define

This mainly tests your memory. Here you need to give the specific meaning of words, terms, etc.; it may be the definition from a textbook or you could use your own words.

### Describe

You just need to tell what it is – imagine and give information that paints a complete picture. Think of it as the next step on from 'list' or 'state'.

### Distinguish

You can only distinguish between things, so there needs to be two or more things given in the question. The key is only to write about the features of each of the things that make them different from each other.

### Explain

Not a difficult one but students sometimes give a description instead of explain. When you're asked to explain something, use a paragraph: write a sentence that makes your point, and then write another to explain why the first sentence is so, or the consequences of the first sentence. If your point still isn't clear, write a third sentence that makes it clearer. Use examples to help your explanations.

### Identify

This requires a selective use of your knowledge; this means that you apply bits of your knowledge to the context or the situation described in the question.

### Illustrate

Fairly easy – just clarify or explain using examples. If there's a scenario, give a relevant example. If not, pick whichever you like. Depending on the subject you could draw a diagram or do a quick calculation as a way of illustrating.

### Apply

Asking you to put something to practical use; not just talking about the theory but showing how the theory works in practice.

<b>Calculate/ Compute</b>	Just as it says - you have to do the maths.
<b>Demonstrate/ Show</b>	You need to show or prove something to be true, beyond any doubt, or show that it applies in the situation described, by giving evidence.
<b>Prepare</b>	Mostly used in book-keeping and accounting - when this verb is used, there is a fair amount of data (often numerical) in the question. You need to take the relevant data, process it (perhaps by calculation, but often just by rearranging it), then provide it in a particular format; for example, preparing a balance sheet from the trial balance.
<b>Analyse</b>	This is one of the more difficult words. This is asking you to examine something in detail; break it down into smaller parts and give detailed explanations with examples if appropriate; often opinions rather than facts.
<b>Examine</b>	Inspect carefully or look at in detail; investigate.
<b>Classify</b>	This is asking you to arrange or put things into groups or classes. You will need to explain why you have put each in a particular list and not one of the others.
<b>Compare and Contrast</b>	Explaining how things are similar and how they are different (similarities and differences). For example, compare and contrast a pig and a dog - they both have four legs (similarity) but one barks and the other grunts (difference).
<b>Summarise</b>	Giving the important ideas in brief.
<b>Discuss</b>	This can be a tricky one. In order to discuss something, there needs to be an 'argument' i.e. you need two or more differing or opposing viewpoints. Also, any discussion should, if possible, end with a conclusion. Think about: advantages, disadvantages, and conclusion. Or: reasons why, reasons why not and conclusion. It is also possible to 'discuss' one viewpoint. For example you may be asked to 'discuss the advantages of...'. Does this mean you have to do the disadvantages as well? No - simply go through the advantages, saying whether they apply in this situation, or whether they are each a major advantage or a relatively minor one.
<b>Review</b>	Giving an overview of ideas and establishing their qualities and features.
<b>Interpret</b>	Can be challenging - you need to explain your view of facts and ideas and how they relate to one another. In some sense, translating from one form of words to another. 'Interpret' is often the second stage of 'analyse'.
<b>Evaluate/ Assess</b>	Another tricky one - this is asking you to judge the worth, importance or value of something, whether in monetary terms or not. Think of this as a higher level discussion.
<b>Suggest/ Recommend</b>	As it says - telling them what to do. This is normally the last requirement in a question because you first need to identify, explain and evaluate before you can recommend or suggest a way forward.

Practical exam tips on the next page...

## Practical exam tips

<b>Revision</b>	Revision is important for examination success. There are different techniques to help you revise – mind maps, acronyms, flash cards, etc – find the technique that works for you. Don't forget to use past and sample papers – however, don't fall into the trap of revising only what has been tested before.
<b>Before the exam</b>	Make sure that you are properly registered for the exam. Check the time, date and place of the exam. If you are not sure of location, visit before the date of the exam.
<b>The night before</b>	Have an early night – don't try to study any completely new material; instead use the time for a general overview. Gather the things you will need for the next day – don't forget your ID if this is a requirement in your country!
<b>Arriving at the exam room</b>	Get to the location on time. Settle in as quickly as possible and avoid distractions and have all the necessary tools ready.
<b>The exam paper</b>	<p>Check the instructions and directions on the exam paper – confirm that the format is what you expect. Read the entire paper and identify the questions you prefer to answer, if you are given a choice. Put an 'X' against those you prefer not to answer or cannot answer. Quickly write down ideas for answers as they come to you so you don't forget them later.</p> <p>When deciding which questions to do first, it is better to start with your favourite topic – this will make you more confident. However, if you prefer, you may start with the more difficult question and save your favourite for later – go with what works best for you.</p>
<b>Question timing</b>	<p>Plan how long you will spend on a question based on the number of questions you need to complete and the total examination time and keep checking on this. Don't spend too long on multiple choice questions – if you cannot answer the question come back to it later and have a guess if you really don't know.</p> <p>Never omit an entire question – no matter how well you answer other questions, you must leave time for all questions. If you write nothing, you cannot be awarded any marks for that question – writing something may at least give you a few marks. Remember your command words – do not waste time writing what isn't necessary!</p>
<b>Obey the examination rules</b>	These will be read to you before the examination starts. Follow all instructions for completing the front cover of your booklet.
<b>Check your answers</b>	Spend the last few minutes checking your answers for any mistakes and any omissions.
<b>General tips</b>	Write as clearly as possible – the examiner will be pleased if your script is well written and easy to understand. If you have to correct answers do it neatly. Don't look for 'hidden traps' that don't exist – the examiner is not trying to trick you! All the examiner wants you to do is 'just answer the question'!

***All the best!***



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