



Ready Steady Exams Instruction Words

How to answer an exam question – or what does the examiner really want?

Suggested interpretations - but take the whole question into account.

These definitions and words are the product of academic research into the frequency of use of the most common exam instruction words. In the question type column, decide which approach applies – **implement**, **describe**, **analyse** or **argue**.

Question type	Instruction word	Meaning
	account	describe
	brief account	describe in a concise way
	account for	give reasons for
	analyse	give an organised answer looking at all aspects
	apply	put a theory into operation
	assess	decide on value/importance
	comment on	give your opinion
	compare [with]	discuss similarities; draw conclusions on common areas
	compile	make up [a list/plan/outline]
	consider	describe/give your views on subject
	contrast	discuss differences/draw own view
	criticise	point out weak/strong points i.e. balanced answer
	define	give the meaning of a term concisely
	demonstrate	show by example/evidence
	describe	narrative on process/appearance/operation/sequence...
	devise	make up
	discuss	give own thoughts + support opinion
	evaluate	decide on merit of situation/argument
	exemplify	show by giving examples
	expand	give more information
	explain	give reason for - say why
	explain how	describe how something works
	identify	pinpoint/list
	illustrate	give examples
	indicate	how? point out...not in great detail
	justify	support the argument for...
	list	make an organised list e.g. events
	outline	describe basic factors - limited inf.
	plan	think how to organise something
	report	make an account on process, event
	review	write report - give facts + views on facts
	show	demonstrate with supporting evidence
	specify	give details of something
	state	give a clear account of...
	summarise	briefly give an account
	work out	find a solution e.g. as in a maths problem



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