

How to survive the question paper!

◆ A. Question Words

Question Word	Function	Example
what	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> asking for information asking for repetition asking about an object 	What is the novel about? What did the poet say? What is the denouement?
when	asking about time	When was the poem written?
where	asking about place or position	Where was the author born? Where is the climax in the storyline?
which	asking about choice	Which poem is your favourite?
who	asking about a person or people (the subject)	Who is the poet addressing? Who delivered the speech?
whom	asking which person - used with a preposition	To whom did he speak? With whom did she go?
whose	asking about ownership NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH WHO'S (WHO IS)	Whose book did you borrow?
why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> asking for a reason asking for justification 	Why do you read reviews? Why did he make that decision?
how	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> asking for an explanation asking about quantity 	How did she learn to drive? How many people? (countable) How much money? (uncountable)

B. Instruction words are very important but they are often overlooked and misunderstood by learners during tests/exams. It is important for your learners to know what is expected of them when they encounter words such as 'analyse', 'account for', 'comment on' and 'discuss' in examinations. Valuable points can be earned or lost depending on their understanding of these words.

To follow is a list of the most commonly used instruction words and their meanings:

- **account for:** to give reasons for
- **analyse:** to look at in detail so that you can explain what something means; to take apart a concept or a process and explain it step by step.
- **comment:** to explain the relevance of the fact or statement.
- **compare:** to show similarities between two ideas, texts, etc.
- **contrast:** to show differences between two ideas, texts, etc.
- **define:** to provide a definition of a key word, term, statement or concept; to explain the meaning of something.

continued...

- **describe:** to give a detailed account of something.
- **demonstrate:** to provide proof of your answer by using an example.
- **discuss:** When asked to 'discuss', your examiner wishes to determine whether you understand both sides of an issue. You need to demonstrate that you know the strengths and weaknesses of both sides. When approaching this type of question, pretend that you are having a conversation with a friend and voice both sides.
- **examine:** to use your own judgement to explore a topic/issue and comment on significant facts or ideas. Provide your opinion and explain how or why you came to your conclusions.
- **explain:** to provide an answer that gives a 'why' response; to give detail by providing reasons.
- **give your opinion:** to state your point of view; state exactly how you feel or think about something and clearly give your reasons.
- **illustrate:** to show or explain using examples.
- **identify:** to find something in the text and name it.
- **interpret:** to read between the lines and draw conclusions; to explain the meaning of something within its context.
- **justify:** to use examples or evidence to show why (in your opinion) something is correct; to provide reasons for your conclusions and opinions.
- **list:** to provide a series of answers.
- **outline:** to provide an explanation usually using headings and subheadings - common to literature exams.
- **order/sequence:** to provide a chronological or value-based answer by listing several items in their correct placement.
- **paraphrase:** to reword; to put into your own words to show your understanding of the text.
- **pinpoint:** to identify with great accuracy or precision.
- **prove:** to use evidence from the text to back up your answer.
- **quote:** to take exact words/phrases out of the text and to use quotation marks '....' to show this.
- **recount:** to tell or relate in detail using your own words.
- **refer:** to go to the place in the text you are directed to.
- **review:** to recall and repeat all the most important elements or facts that you know about a specific subject.
- **state:** to express something clearly and definitely.
- **support:** to provide examples or evidence to back up your answer.
- **summarise:** to give a brief statement of the main points of something; to condense information.
- **view:** to look at or inspect with a critical eye.