

Glossary of command terms

Command terms for psychology

Students should be familiar with the following key terms and phrases used in examination questions, which are to be understood as described below. Although these terms will be used frequently in examination questions, other terms may be used to direct students to present an argument in a specific way.

The command terms used in psychology are arranged into four groups labelled assessment objectives (AO). The first three, AO1, AO2 and AO3, are hierarchical with more challenging verbs for assessment as you progress from AO1 to AO3. AO4 is not hierarchical, but represents actions related to subject-specific tasks.

Assessment objective 1 (AO1)	
Knowledge and comprehension of specified content	
These terms require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding and learn and comprehend the meaning of information.	
Describe	Give a detailed account.
Identify	Provide an answer from a number of possibilities.
Outline	Give a brief account or summary.
Assessment objective 2 (AO2)	
Application and analysis of knowledge and understanding	
These terms require students to use and analyse knowledge and understanding, explain actual situations, break down ideas into simpler parts and to see how the parts relate.	
Explain	Give a detailed account including reasons or causes.
Suggest	Propose a solution, hypothesis or other possible answer.

Assessment objective 3 (AO3)

Synthesis and evaluation

These terms require students to make a judgment based on evidence and, when relevant, construct an argument or rearrange component ideas into a new whole and make judgments based on evidence or a set of criteria.

Contrast	Give an account of the differences between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.
Discuss	Offer a considered and balanced review that includes a range of arguments, factors or hypotheses. Opinions or conclusions should be presented clearly and supported by appropriate evidence.
Evaluate	Make an appraisal by weighing up the strengths and limitations.
To what extent	Consider the merits or otherwise of an argument or concept. Opinions and conclusions should be presented clearly and supported with appropriate evidence and sound argument.

Assessment objective 4 (AO4)

Selection and use of skills appropriate to psychology. The terms require students to take action.

Design	Produce a plan, simulation or model.
Investigate	Observe, study, or make a detailed and systematic examination, in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions.
Predict	Give an expected result.