Command words: fact sheet

Exam skills · The underlined words in a question tell you what to do

Command word	What it wants you to do	Example
Write down / State	Just the answer. You can usually see or know it straight away.	Write down the value of the 7 in 4721
Work out / Calculate / Find	Do a calculation and **show your working**. You get method marks even if the final answer is wrong.	Work out the total cost.
Show that	The answer is given to you. Write **every step** that gets there, and finish by writing the answer they gave.	Show that the angle is 62°.
Explain / Give a reason	Write a sentence that uses numbers or maths words. Start with “because…”	Give a reason for your answer.
Is … correct? / right?	Write **Yes** or **No**, then the working that proves it. A yes or no on its own gets 0 marks.	Is Leo correct? You must show how you get your answer.
Estimate	Round every number to 1 significant figure first, write the rounded numbers, then work it out.	Work out an estimate for 61 × 2.87
Describe fully	Name the transformation and give **every** detail: rotation (angle, direction, centre), reflection (the mirror line), translation (the vector), enlargement (scale factor, centre).	Describe fully the single transformation…
Compare	Make two comparisons: one average (mean or median) and one spread (range). Say what it means in the question’s words.	Compare the distributions.
Simplify / Expand / Factorise / Solve	Simplify: collect like terms. Expand: multiply out brackets. Factorise: put into brackets. Solve: find the value of the letter.	Factorise 6x + 9
Draw / Plot / Complete / Construct	Draw on the diagram or grid. Construct: use ruler and compasses and leave the arcs showing.	Complete the table. Draw the graph.
Give a reason for each stage	For every angle you find, write the rule you used (e.g. angles on a straight line add up to 180°).	Give a reason for each stage of your working.

Answer instructions and model answers

Command words · Lose fewer marks by doing exactly what the question asks

Read the end of the question

- correct to 1 decimal place, 3 significant figures: round at the end, not before.
- in its simplest form: divide top and bottom (or both sides of a ratio) by the HCF.
- in standard form: A × 10^n with A between 1 and 10.
- in terms of π: leave π in, e.g. 80π.
- as a mixed number: e.g. $2\frac{3}{5}$, not $\frac{13}{5}$.
- Give your answer in pounds / minutes / km: change the units before you write the answer.

"You must show your working"

If the question says this, a correct answer with **no working gets no marks**. Write each calculation on its own line.

Model answer
6 × 18 = 108
108 + 15 = 123
150 − 123 = **£27**

"Show that..."

Start from the facts in the question. Never start from the answer you are given.

Show that the angle is 62°.
180 − 118 = 62 (angles on a straight line add up to 180°)
so angle *x* = **62°**

"Give a reason" / "Is ... correct?"

Decide first, then use the numbers as evidence.

Is Ben correct? He says the mean is 8.
No, because the total is 42 and 42 ÷ 6 = 7, not 8.

Bold words

Words in **bold** are a warning: **not**, **two**, **both**, **single**, **total**. Read the question again and check you answered what it asked.

Before you move on

- Is the answer on the answer line?
- Have you written the units (cm, £, °)?
- Have you done what the underlined word asked?
- Count the marks: 3 marks means about 3 steps of working.