

Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Biology 1411/2411

Other Guidance:

Glossary: Instructions in question papers



GLOSSARY: INSTRUCTION IN QUESTIONS PAPERS

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Instructions to candidates in question papers

Sometimes candidates fail to do themselves justice because they do not follow the specific requirements of individual questions. This list defines the meanings of the instructions that are used in question papers. In reading it, the following points must be borne in mind.

Many questions are best asked as direct questions prefaced by the words “What?”, “Why?” or “Where?”. These words are commonplace and no attempt has been made to define them.

AQA’s guiding principle is to set questions that are clear and unambiguous. While instructions will normally be taken from the list that follows, AQA may use alternative expressions if they make the meaning of the question clearer.

Calculate

This term is used where the only requirement is a numerical answer, expressed in appropriate units. The additional instruction, “Show your working”, will be used if details or methods are required. The working can be used to allow credit where a candidate has made an arithmetical error but has used a correct method for deriving the answer.

Define/ What is meant by...?

This requires a statement giving the meaning of a particular term or of a word used in a comprehension passage. A definition requires the use of appropriate scientific terminology.

“What is meant by...?” is used more frequently as it emphasises that a formal definition, as such, is not required.

Describe

Means no more than it says: “give a description of ...” This can be used in one of two ways. The first involves the translation of information from one form to another, For example, “Describe the shape of the curve” requires a translation of information from one form to another. This involves a description of the shape of the curve, relating the trends or patterns to key points or values. The second involves giving an account of a process. For example, “Describe an experiment” means give an account of how such an experiment should be carried out.

Describe how you should/	The expression is often used when asking questions about experimental design. What is required is an account of how something should be done by <i>you</i> as a student working in the context of an A level specification in an ordinary school or college laboratory. Candidates who write that they would do something inappropriate or unsafe would not be given credit.
Evaluate	Evaluating is more than just listing advantages and disadvantages. It means judging the worth of something.
Explain	A reason or interpretation must be given, not a description. The term “Describe” answers the question “What?”; the term “Explain” answers the question “Why?”. Thus, “Explain the curve on a graph” requires biological reasons for any change of direction or pattern which is evident. It is a good idea to start answers that require an explanation with the word “Because ...”
Give	Used when a statement or an account of the similarities/differences between two or more items is required e.g ‘Give two differences between X and Y’.
Give the evidence from.../ Using examples from...	Answers to questions involving these phrases must follow the instructions in the questions. Marks are always awarded for appropriate references to the information provided. Answers that do not, will not gain maximum credit.
List	A number of features or points, each often no more than a single word, with no further elaboration or detail required.
Name/ What is the name of...?	This usually requires a technical term or its equivalent. Answers to this type of question normally involve no more than one or two words.
Sketch	This term refers to the drawing of graphs. “Sketch” requires a simple estimate of the expected curve, and can be made on ordinary lined paper. Even in a sketched graph, the axes should be correctly labelled.
Suggest	“Suggest” is used when it is not possible to give the answer directly from the facts required by the specification. The answer should be based on a general understanding of biology rather than on recall of learnt material. It also indicates that there are usually several alternative answers that are valid from the limited information given to candidates.