

GCSE Religious Studies

One of the major pitfalls that face candidates in any examination is their difficulty in interpreting the demands of the questions asked of them. Thorough revision is essential, but candidates also require an awareness of what is expected from them in the examination itself. Too often candidates attempt to answer the question they think is there rather than the one which is actually set. Answering an examination question is challenging enough, without the extra self-imposed handicap of having misread the question.

Examiners always try to set questions which are clear in what they ask for, and can be answered by everyone who has followed the course and has prepared adequately for the examination. It is not in the interest of the examiner for a question to be read ambiguously, or to be answered by only a few candidates. Several checks are made before the final version is printed to eliminate ambiguity, wordiness or undue difficulty.

Correct interpretation of the **Command Words** of a question is therefore very important. In a Religious Studies examination paper, a variety of command words are used. Some command words demand more of candidates than others do. Some require a simple task to be performed; others require greater intellectual thought and synthesis. What follows is an attempt to describe what is required by some of the command words used in Religious Studies.

The command words are given in alphabetical order, with details as to their meaning and usage. Each embodies two clear criteria:

- (i) they are appropriate to GCSE; and
- (ii) carry a clear definition of what is required.

Thus parity across papers and specifications can be ensured.

AO1 Command Words		
Describe	Give a detailed account of... The account should be factual, without any attempt to explain.	
	(This is used to examine knowledge .)	(AO1)
Describe briefly	Give a brief account of... This is used in 2– or 3–mark questions.	
	(This is used to examine knowledge .)	(AO1)
Explain	Interpret, analyse or give reasons for.	
	(This is used to examine understanding .)	(AO1)
Explain briefly	Interpret, analyse or give reasons for. This is used in 2– or 3–mark questions.	
	(This is used to examine understanding .)	(AO1)
Explain, using an example,	Interpret, analyse or give reasons for. An example needs to be included in the answer.	
	(This is used to examine understanding .)	(AO1)
Give	Present briefly information requested.	
	(This is used to examine knowledge .)	(AO1)
Give reasons	The question may test understanding of beliefs and/or practices.	
	(This is used to examine understanding .)	(AO1)
How	Give brief factual, descriptive or explanatory information.	
	(This is used to examine knowledge .)	(AO1)
In what ways	This can test just knowledge, asking for examples of beliefs and practices.	
	(This is used to examine knowledge .)	(AO1)
Look at	Examine closely, pay special attention to, look carefully at, interpret.	
	(This is used to direct a candidate's attention to the stimulus material.)	(AO1)

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AO1 Command Words		
Name	Requesting the candidate to show knowledge of specific information or technical terms. This command asks the candidates to state, specify or identify.	
	(This is used to examine knowledge .)	(AO1)
Outline	Give key points of.	
	(This is used to examine knowledge .)	(AO1)
Retell	Describe in your own words (a story, eg a parable).	
	(This is used to examine knowledge .)	(AO1)
What	Give factual information.	
	(This is used to examine knowledge .)	(AO1)
What is meant by...	The question is testing understanding of specialist terminology or of a symbol or concept.	
	(This is used to examine understanding .)	(AO1)
What is the importance of/for....	This phrase is often asking for a comment on the way in which beliefs, symbols, words or customs relate to modern practice or lifestyle.	
	(This is used to examine understanding .)	(AO1)
Why	Give reasons for.	
	(This is used to examine understanding .)	(AO1)
AO2 Command Words		
Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.	No marks are given for agreeing or disagreeing. Candidates must evaluate as required giving reasons for their evaluation. Evaluation will involve making a judgement based on evidence, analysis and argument.	
	(This is used to examine evaluation .)	(AO2)
...showing that you have thought about more than one point of view.	Candidates are expected to show an understanding of the complexity of an issue and the reasons why not all people will agree. They are not expected personally to hold two points of view at once. Hence, answers in which the candidate states, "I agree because" and "I disagree because" are sometimes not as well developed or coherently reasoned as answers which use phrases such as "while some believe... I think that..." or "I can see that some people think that... but..."	
	(This is used to examine evaluation .)	(AO2)
Refer to religious arguments/ Christianity/Judaism, etc in your answer.	Include reference to religious arguments in your answer.	
	(This is used to examine evaluation .)	(AO2)
What do you think? Explain your opinion.	This requires the candidate to confirm his or her own views on an issue, supported by reference to religious teaching.	
	(This is used to examine evaluation .)	(AO2)