

Decoding Exam Questions

Below is a list of common words that you might see in an exam question. Each one has a specific meaning, and it is vital to know what each one means so that you can write the correct answer. This is not a complete list of every type of question you will be asked, but these are the terms students often get confused over.



You will be given one sweet each. Using the terms below, write about your sweet!

Identify		To be able to name something	AO1
Define		To give a definition	AO1
Outline		To briefly describe	AO1
Describe		To give a more detailed description than “outline”	AO1
Evaluate		To look at the strengths and weaknesses of something. Also, using all the evaluation skills you have.	AO2
Compare		Consider the similarities and differences between two things.	AO2
Contrast		Consider the differences between two things	AO2
Explain		To describe and give reasons behind what you have been asked about	AO2

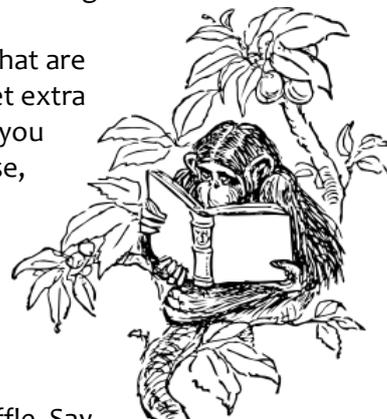
What are AOs?

AOs are “Assessment Objectives”, and it is what the examiner is testing you on. Every subject has different Assessment Objectives. Make sure you know what to do.



General exam hints

- **Look at the marks available.** If it is 1 or 2 marks, one or two well written sentences will be enough. If it is 11 or 12 marks, you will be expected to write more, and go into more detail. Also, look at how much space you are given to write your answer as a guide.
- **Always read the question carefully.** Look at the *precise* words that are used. If the examiner asks for a description only, you will not get extra points for evaluating. If they ask for describe and compare and you only give a description without comparing it with something else, you will lose marks.
 - With any multiple choice exams, you might be asked to tick more than one correct answer. Be sure to read each question, and do not assume that they are all the same.
- **Be concise.** Remember that in an exam, time is short. Don't waffle. Say what you intend to say, and do not repeat yourself in the same question.
- **Use correct terms.** Similar to being concise is using the correct terms. Don't give a long waffly description of something if there is a proper term (e.g. positive reinforcement) that could save you times and words. Some SPaG marks are based on using precise terminology and correct terms.



- **Plan.** On longer questions, it is often worth taking a minute or so to jot down a short plan of what you intend to write. That way, you won't forget and miss anything out, and if you run out of time, you can demonstrate to the examiner that you were going to write more.
- **Use your time effectively.** You might find it useful to read through the whole exam before writing anything, so that you know right at the start what you need to do. You might find it helpful to do the longer essay style questions first so that they are out of the way, and you can come back and review them at the end of the exam.



- **Stay calm!** It can be really stressful taking an exam, so have a plan in place to tackle any stress or panic. Find what works for you. For example, some people find it useful to put their pen down, stare straight ahead and count to ten, and take some deep breaths before carrying on.

- **If you come across a question that you don't think you can answer,** do not panic. Focus on answering the questions that you can, and come back to it at the end of the exam. Try to have a go at every question even if you think it's wrong. You might still get some marks for it!