

IB Psychology

Command Terms and Assessment Objectives

www.PsychologyIB.com



Command terms and how they should be applied

When answering IB Psychology exam questions it is important to identify the **command term** in each question. These will determine how you should answer the question. Command terms such as 'explain', 'outline', 'examine', 'to what extent', and so on carry different meanings and this should be reflected in your answers.

The command term in an examination question is very important. It provides two things the examiner is looking for and specifically awarding (or penalising!) you marks for. The first is structure. Are you structuring your answer according to the command term to answer the question? Secondly, has your answer '**effectively addressed the command term**'?

Here is one of the markband descriptors IB Psychology examiners are using to mark your **Short Answer Questions** (i.e. those three 8 mark questions in the Paper 1 exam). Not addressing the command term will limit your maximum mark to 6 marks, instead of the full 8 had your answer addressed the command term.

4 to 6	The question is partially answered. Knowledge and understanding is accurate but limited. Either the command term is not effectively addressed or the response is not sufficiently explicit in answering the question.	
---------------	--	--

In the long answer **Extended Response Questions** (ERQs), those 22 mark essay questions in the Paper 1 and 2 HL and SL IB Psychology exams, examiners are looking for and marking command term application in two of the criteria they are assessing.

Criterion B — Evidence of critical thinking: application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation		
4 to 6	The answer offers appropriate but limited evidence of critical thinking or offers evidence of critical thinking that is only implicitly linked to the requirements of the question .	

Criterion C — Organization		
3 to 4	The answer is well organized, well developed and focused on the question .	

IB Psychology

Command Terms and Assessment Objectives

www.PsychologyIB.com

BURTON INC[®]

Biological level of analysis
1. Explain how one or more neurotransmitters affect human behaviour. [8 marks]

Cognitive level of analysis
2. Outline two principles that define the cognitive level of analysis. [8 marks]

Sociocultural level of analysis
3. Describe one study relevant to social learning theory. [8 marks]

SECTION B

Answer **one** question in this section. Mark will be awarded for demonstration of knowledge and understanding (including the use of relevant psychological research), evidence of critical thinking (e.g. application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation), and organization of answers.

4. Discuss how and why particular research methods are used at the biological level of analysis, with reference to one or more studies. [22 marks]

www.PsychologyIB.com

If the command term is incorrectly addressed in your answer, you will be limited to a maximum of 6 marks for Criterion B (maximum possible 9 marks) and to a maximum of 2 marks in Criterion C (with a maximum possible 4 marks that can be awarded). That is an enormous 5 marks you are giving up for each Extended Response Question in the exams. And you will need to answer three ERQs if you are a HL IB Psychology student, and two if studying at SL. Another 2 marks across three SAQs will be forfeited in the HL and SL Paper 1 exam.

Conclusion: If you do not learn your command terms and practice tailored answers to the IB examination questions

according to the command term requirement you will be foregoing many marks and at least an entire grade boundary in your total IB Psychology score, possible two. Knowing your command terms could easily elevate your IB Psychology Diploma mark from a 5 to a 7 to ensure maximum success, or from a 3 to a 4 to avoid certain failure. Thus, the first rule of IB Psychology is: **KNOW THY COMMAND TERMS.**

The tables below summarises how you should use the command terms when you are answering questions and how they apply to particular questions.

COMMAND TERMS

COMMAND TERMS ASSOCIATED WITH ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE 1: **KNOWLEDGE AND COMPREHENSION**

Command term:	Definition:
1. Define	Give the precise meaning of a word, phrase, concept or physical quantity.
2. Describe	Give a detailed account.
3. Outline	Give a brief account or summary.
4. State	Give a specific name, value or other brief answer without explanation or calculation.

IB Psychology

Command Terms and Assessment Objectives

www.PsychologyIB.com

COMMAND TERMS ASSOCIATED WITH ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE 2: **APPLICATION AND ANALYSIS**

Command term:	Definition:
5. Analyse	Break down in order to bring out the essential elements or structure.
6. Apply	Use an idea, equation, principle, theory or law in relation to a given problem or issue.
7. Distinguish	Make clear the differences between two or more concepts or items.
8. Explain	Give a detailed account including reasons or causes.

COMMAND TERMS ASSOCIATED WITH ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE 3: **SYNTHESIS AND EVALUATION**

Command term:	Definition:
9. Compare	Give an account of the similarities between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.
10. Compare and contrast	Give an account of similarities and differences between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.
11. Contrast	Give an account of the differences between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.
12. 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.
13. Evaluate	Make an appraisal by weighing up the strengths and limitations.
14. Examine	Consider an argument or concept in a way that uncovers the assumptions and interrelationships of the issue.
15. 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.

Important information about IB Psychology command terms:

In the learning outcomes (see syllabus content) the command terms are associated with assessment objectives 1, 2 or 3 and indicate the depth of understanding that is required of students in relation to each item of content. The grouping of command terms under assessment objectives reflects the cognitive demand of each term and is related to Bloom's taxonomy.

IB Psychology

Command Terms and Assessment Objectives

www.PsychologyIB.com

- A command term used in an examination question will be:
- The same as that specified in the related learning outcome, or
- Another command term associated with the same assessment objective, or
- A command term of less cognitive demand.

For example, if a learning outcome begins with the command term “explain”, an examination question based on this learning outcome could contain the command term “explain”, another command term associated with assessment objective 2 (such as “analyse”), or a command term associated with assessment objective 1 (such as “describe”), but not a command term associated with assessment objective 3 (such as “evaluate”).

This means: **A lower level learning outcome** (e.g. ‘Explain one study related to localization of function in the brain’) **will never be asked as a 22 mark ERQ in the IB Psychology examinations.** It means you can plan your ERQ answers in advance and think about how you can adapt each answer if it is asked with a different command term.

Author: **Derek Burton** – Passionate about IB Psychology

Visit www.PsychologyIB.com for more great IB Psychology teaching and learning resources

