The questions on the Open Assessment exam paper use a number of ‘action words’, listed below, to show what the examiners expect you to write. It’s essential that you pay attention to them. You'll miss out on marks if the question asks for an ‘outline’ but you only write a list. Equally, if the paper asks for a ‘list’ and you write a longer explanation, you’ll exceed the word count without covering many of the points for which marks can be awarded.

Make sure you read the question carefully – and then read it again! You’ve got plenty of time to complete the assessment, so before you construct your answer make sure you fully understand what the question is asking you to do. If you find yourself struggling to fit your answer into the word count given, check the question again – are you keeping to what it asks or have you added information that’s not required? The main reason why candidates miss out on marks is that they use up the word count on things that the question doesn’t ask for.

**Command word definitions**

**Analyse**
Divide or break down the subject matter or topic into parts, reasons, aspects and so on, and then examine their nature and relationship

**Assess**
Present judgments of the factors raised, their significance, importance and why they’re important and/or significant

**Calculate**
Ascertain or determine by mathematical processes. Remember that it’s important always to show how you’ve worked out your answer

**Classify**
Arrange in classes; assign to a category

**Comment**
Give opinions (with justification) on an issue or statement by considering the issues relevant to it

**Compare and contrast**
Provide a point-by-point account of the similarities and differences between two sets of information or two areas. NB: Two separate accounts aren’t adequate unless the second account refers directly to the first

**Consider**
Offer some detail about an issue or event and discuss its value. If you’re asked to ‘consider the impact of’ something, you need to consider what the impact was and then say what effect it had

**Define**
Give the meaning of a word, phrase or concept, or determine or fix its boundaries or extent. ‘Define’ questions generally require a relatively short answer, usually of one or two sentences, where there is a generally recognised or accepted expression

**Demonstrate**
Prove or make clear by reasoning or evidence how a relationship or event has occurred

**Describe**
Give a detailed written account of the distinctive features of a subject. The account should be factual, without any attempt to explain

**Determine**
Come to a decision as the result of investigation or reasoning

**Discuss**
Give a critical account of the points involved in a topic. You’re expected to put both sides of a case or an issue in your answer and to make some evaluative comment about the factors you’re discussing

**Distinguish**
Present the differences between; separate into kinds, classes or categories

**Draft**
Compose
Draw
Represent by or put in the form of a diagram. Diagrams should be labelled. It’s also acceptable to use words in conjunction with graphics.

Evaluate
Determine the value or character of something by careful appraisal. When required to ‘evaluate’ something, you’re generally being asked: ‘How worthwhile, satisfactory or effective in your opinion is this theory, explanation or policy?’ A question will sometimes ask you to ‘critically evaluate’. This means you should use your judgment and show that you understand that there may be no answer, more than one valid answer, or many perspectives on the problem in question. In short, you need to come to a conclusion after weighing up the evidence.

Explain
Provide an understanding; make an idea or relationship clear. This command word tests your understanding of why or how something happens.

Give
Offer for the consideration, acceptance or use of another – in this context, it often appears as ‘give an example of’ or ‘give the meaning of’.

Identify
Give a reference to an item, which could be its name or title. Normally a single word or phrase will be sufficient, provided the reference is clear.

Justify
Prove or show to be valid, sound or conforming to fact or reason. You need to show good reasons for the issue you’re asked to justify – present your evidence, with facts to support your position.

Label
Place specific names or details on a diagram.

List
Name a number of features to meet a particular purpose. You need to give a number of points, generally each of one word or phrase, with no elaboration. Where a given number of points is specified, don’t give more than this.

Outline
Indicate the principal features or different parts of something. An exhaustive description is not required – you need to give a brief summary of the major aspects of whatever is stated in the question.

Present
Offer or convey by way of message; furnish or provide.

Recommend
Endorse as being fit or worthy; indicate as your preferred choice.

Record
Set down in writing; make an answer.

Review
Make a survey, examine or look over something carefully and give a critical account.

State
Give accurate details of something. This implies a concise answer with little or no supporting argument.

Suggest
Make a judgment and give some support or reason for this.

Summarise
Give a short account of the key points, omitting details and examples.

Use
Base an answer on information provided, i.e. on the content of an illustration or a written statement. You need to refer directly to the stated materials.

Why?
You need to offer reasons, factors or causes of an occurrence, action or event.

What is meant by?
Give the meaning of a word, phrase or concept. This is similar to ‘define’, but is used if there’s no generally recognised or accepted definition.

Write
To put on paper.