GCSE ICT

One of the major pitfalls that face candidates in any examination is their difficulty in interpreting the demands of the questions asked of them. Examiners always try to set questions which are clear in what they ask for and which can be answered by everyone who has followed the course and has prepared adequately for the examination. Correct interpretation of the Command Words of a question is, therefore, very important.

In an ICT question paper, a variety of command words is used. Some command words demand more of the candidate than others. 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 major command words in the GCSE and GCE examinations.

Please note that the level of demand is also indicated by the number of marks awarded for the question and that more would be expected from GCE candidates when compared to GCSE. It should be noted that, in combined question paper/answer booklets, the size of the mark allocation and the space allowed for the answer will give an indication of the length or detail of answer required.

Command Words	
Tick one box	Candidates are required to tick one box from a selection of four or five to identify the answer to a question. A variation is that candidates are required to tick two or more boxes, in which case a larger selection is usually offered. Candidates ticking more boxes than required will often be penalised, this will be detailed in the mark scheme.
Identify.... State…. Give….Name…. Write down….What….?	These words are usually used in the lowest-level questions and require a response comprising a single sentence or short paragraph or, on occasions a single word in answer to a simple task, such as: (a) a named example of an item is required; (b) a specific name or term is required.
List	Candidates are required to merely list the terms, components functions, rules etc which are asked for in the question. No description or explanation is required.
Define….Explain the meaning of ….What is meant by ……Outline….	These command words require a precise definition/meaning of a term. The response will be a relatively short answer, usually no more than two or three sentences. The giving of an example is often helpful as clarification.

Describe

This is one of the most widely used command words. Candidates are required to provide details of the distinctive features of an item. The response should be factual, but there is no requirement for explanation, which is a higher order skill. The examiner will normally give some clue to which particular aspect of the description is required, such as shape, size, performance, etc. Some examples are:

'Describe the characteristics of....'
ie What does the feature look like?

'Describe how....'
ie A description of a process etc. is required without any reasons or explanation.

'Describe the link between....'
Credit will only be given for identification of the links between two sets of data or pieces of information. It is important, therefore, that candidates do clearly establish the relationship, and that the link is clearly stated.

'Describe the changes in....'
Only the changes in pattern, behaviour, response etc. are required in response to this.

'Describe the differences between....'
Credit will only be given for identification of the differences between two or more sets of data or pieces of information. It is better if these are presented in the form of a series of separate sentences, each identifying one difference, rather than a paragraph on one item, followed by a paragraph on another item, as this leaves the examiner to complete the task for the candidate.

'Describe and comment on....'
This command demands a higher level of response than the simpler 'describe'. Usually, the description is straightforward – candidates are required to make a judgement on the description, possibly to offer some explanation, or to infer something which could be responsible for, or develop from, the description referred to. The key point is that candidates are asked to go beyond simple description.

'Describe in detail....'
Candidates are required to describe giving a more detailed account. This will usually carry more marks, with the amount of detail required being determined by the number of marks available.

'Describe one essential feature....'
An essential feature is one that must be present for the system to work.

Use, or Using the information provided….	Candidates should base their responses on information provided, for example, on the content of a table of data or an illustration or a written statement. Credit will only be given for candidates' references to the stated materials.
Refer to, or With reference to….. **With the help of…**	Candidates are asked to produce a response which uses some of the ideas provided in an illustrative technique or other additional material such as a case study. In order to receive higher levels of credit, candidates must make reference to relevant materials.
Compare	Candidates must provide a point by point account of the similarities and differences between two sets of information, or two areas. The emphasis her is on comparison - two separate accounts do not constitute a comparison, and candidates will be penalised if they present two such accounts and expect the examiner to do the comparison on their behalf. A good technique would be for candidates to use comparative adjectives.
Illustrating your answer with…	Such a command might be responded to by the quoting of specific examples or by the use of a diagram. The question might specify a labelled diagram.
Draw… Draw a labelled diagram…	Candidates must give the information requested in the form of a diagram which must be labelled or annotated as requested.
Explain…Suggest reasons why….Suggest how….State two reasons why….	Candidates must give a statement with reasons as to why something occurs. The command word is testing candidates' abilities to know or understand why or how something happens.
Give an explanatory account of… **Give a reasoned account of…** **Give a reasoned argument…**	These commands require a combination of the demands of a 'describe' question and a 'suggest reasons why' question. The examiner has recognised that the logical way to present an answer is to provide a description of a feature, together with an explanation for it. This may be in the same sentence or in statements which follow on shortly from each other. Such questions normally carry a large number of marks and candidates are expected to produce a detailed, and therefore relatively long, response. It is important that candidates present a logical account which is both relevant and well organised.
Analyse	This command requires candidate to break down the content of a topic into its constituent parts, and to give an in-depth account. Again such questions tend to carry a large number of marks and candidates will be expected to produce a relatively long and detailed response. It is important that candidates present a logical account which is both relevant and well-organised.

Design	Candidates must produce an example that will solve the problem or task set in a satisfactory manner, i.e. the solution must work.
Discuss	This is one of higher level command words and is most often used in questions which carry a large number of marks and which require a detailed and lengthy response. Candidates are expected to build up an argument about an issue, ie to present arguments for and against. They must make good use of evidence, with appropriate use of examples, and express an opinion about the merits of each side. In other words, they should construct a verbal debate. In any discussion there are likely to be both positive and negative aspects to it, ie some people are likely to benefit, and some are likely not to benefit. Candidates must weigh up the evidence from both points of view, and may be asked to indicate their opinion.
Discuss the extent to which….	This command requires a judgement about the validity of the evidence, or the outcome of an issue.
Evaluate…./Assess….	These command words require an extension to the idea of a discussion as given above. In both cases, an indication of the candidates viewpoints, having considered all the evidence, is required. 'Assess' requires a statement of the overall quality or value of the feature/issue being considered, and 'evaluate' requires candidates to give an overall statement of value. In both cases, the candidates' own judgements are requested, together with a justification of that judgement.