

Command words

The following list of command words covers those most commonly used in Economics papers at AS and A-level. However, this list is not exhaustive and similar words may be used from time to time. The meanings come from the Ofqual approved list of command words and meanings (except 'Draw'), and the examples are taken from the specimen papers for the new specifications. This document aims to illustrate how command words may be used in examination questions. It should help both teachers and students to identify the different types of response that would be expected for different command words.

Assess

Make an informed judgement.

Examples and guidance

Example question

Assess the view that a system of road-pricing is the best way to tackle the problem of worsening traffic congestion in the UK. (*Specimen A-level Paper 1 Q14*)

Example of a key point in the answer

An alternative suggestion would be to subsidise public transport, for example bus and/or rail travel. This involves a payment from the government to the rail/bus companies which will reduce their costs and enable them to lower prices (a diagram could be included here to support the written analysis). This should lead to an extension of demand for public transport and a decrease in use of cars, thereby reducing congestion in the UK.

However, the effect on car use depends on its cross elasticity of demand, ie when the price of public transport drops by a given percentage, to what extent will demand for cars/car use drop? Also, the subsidy could be expensive and has an opportunity cost. The government may lack the information to determine the 'correct' subsidy and therefore the subsidy may be too little to be effective or too much, reducing the potential benefits of using the money elsewhere.

This answer would be marked on a levels mark scheme and to earn the full 25 marks, it would have to contain sound, focused analysis and well-supported evaluation. There would need to be good application of relevant economic principles and clear, logical chains of reasoning. There would also need to be supported evaluation throughout the response as well as in the final conclusion.

Guidance

In order to assess if a particular method is 'best', at least one alternative must also be considered. This must be analysed and evaluated in order to make an informed and supported judgement on the question at the end.

Calculate

Work out the value of something.

Examples and guidance

Example question

Using the data in **Extract A**, calculate, to **two** decimal places, the overall percentage change in household bills from 2009 to 2013. (*Specimen A-level Paper 1 Q01*)

Example (full marks) answer

24.02% (the 2009 figure was £1145 and for 2013 it was £1420)

Guidance

A correct final answer, to the required degree of accuracy and with the correct units, will score the full 2 marks here. Working is not required.

Define

Specify meaning.

Examples and guidance

Example question

Define 'multiplier effect'. (*Specimen AS Paper 2 Q27*)

Example (full marks) answer

Where an initial injection into the economy leads to a greater overall increase in national income/output

Guidance

A complete and accurate specification of the meaning is required for the full 3 marks, usually possible in only one sentence. If the term contains a qualification of the concept, eg 'negative externalities', then the meanings of both 'externalities' and 'negative' in this context must be specified for full marks.

Discuss

Present key points.

Examples and guidance

Example question

Discuss the view that free trade is more effective than aid in promoting economic development in developing countries such as Ethiopia. (*Specimen A-level Paper 2 Q14*)

Example of a key point in the answer

Free trade, ie trade unhampered by artificial barriers, will result in cheaper imports. If these imports are raw materials, this will reduce the costs of domestic producers and enable them to lower their prices, making their products more competitive in international markets. This could enable them to increase sales, create jobs and generate more money for the economy, thereby aiding development.

However, the industry may be relatively new, and although the country may have a comparative advantage in the production of this good, it requires a tariff to raise the price of competing imports to enable the industry to grow and 'learn by doing' in a protected home market. Free trade would make it very difficult for such an industry to develop.

This answer would be marked on a levels mark scheme and to earn the full 25 marks, it would have to contain sound, focused analysis and well-supported evaluation. There would need to be good application of relevant economic principles and clear, logical chains of reasoning. There would also need to be supported evaluation throughout the response as well as in the final conclusion.

Guidance

In order to discuss the view, key points must be presented for and against. These points must be analysed and evaluated in order to reach a supported judgement at the end.

Draw

Produce a diagram.

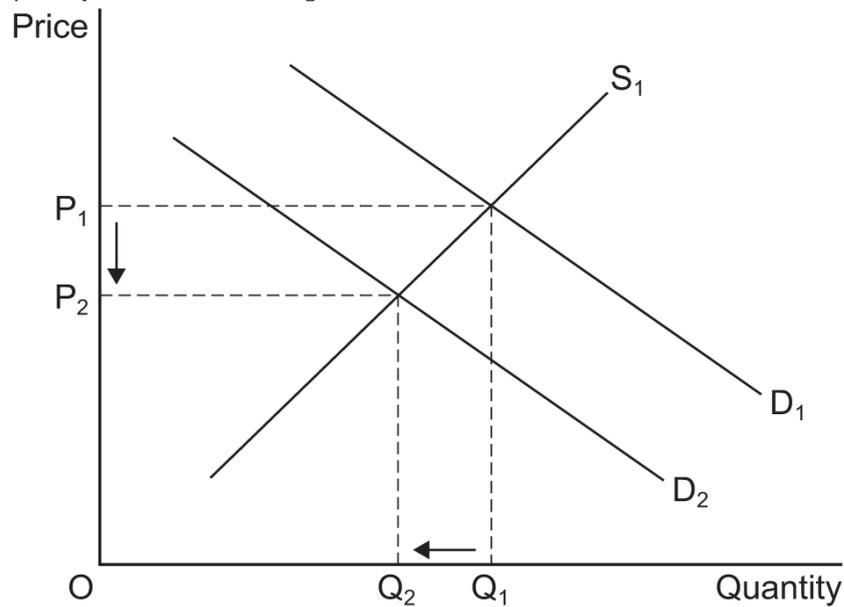
Examples and guidance

Example question

Draw a supply and demand diagram showing the effects of an increase in income on the price and quantity sold of an inferior good. (*Specimen AS Paper 1 Q24*)

Example (full marks) answer

Figure 1. A supply and demand diagram showing the effects of an increase in income on the price and quantity sold of an inferior good.



Guidance

The diagram must be accurately drawn, display the information required, including correct labelling of axes, curves and coordinates. Conventional abbreviations may be used for labels. In the question above, the demand curve had to be shifted to the left to arrive at the new price and quantity.

Evaluate

Judge from available evidence.

Examples and guidance

Example question

Using the data in the extracts and your economic knowledge, evaluate the view that the use of protectionism is inevitably damaging to economies. (*Specimen A-level Paper 2 Q04*)

Example of a key point in the answer

One justification for the use of protectionism is when dumping is suspected. This occurs when firms/countries are selling overseas at less than cost price, possibly due to government subsidies. Although this provides cheaper products for consumers, at least in the short term, the fear is that this will destroy the domestic industry, leaving the country vulnerable to exploitation by an overseas monopoly. An appropriate measure may be a tariff (a tax on imports), to bring the price of the imports up to a 'fair' level.

However, firstly, it is quite difficult to identify dumping as opposed to a country being able to sell more cheaply than domestic firms due to their comparative advantage in producing the good. Also, it may result

in retaliation, for example, in Extract C it says that China has put a levy/tariff on European wine in response to the EU imposing anti-dumping tariffs on solar panels. This can then escalate, reducing further the benefits to be gained from specialisation on an international scale.

This answer would be marked on a levels mark scheme and to earn the full 25 marks, it would have to contain sound, focused analysis and well-supported evaluation. There would need to be good application of relevant economic principles and clear, logical chains of reasoning, supported by good use of the data provided (since the question also contains the command 'using the data'). There would need to be supported evaluation throughout the response as well as in the final conclusion.

Guidance

In order to evaluate the view, its validity must be considered, together with counter arguments and consideration of circumstances when it may or may not apply. These points must be analysed and evaluated in order to reach a final judgement on the question from the available evidence at the end.

Explain

Give reasons.

Examples and guidance

Example question

Explain why firms, such as Apple, might be able to charge different prices for the same product in different markets. (*Specimen A-level Paper 1 Q09*)

Example of a key point in the answer

One reason why a supplier may be able to charge different prices in different markets is due to their ability to separate different markets. This could be by time. For example, a higher price may be charged for peak-time travel on trains because people travelling then may have to be at work by a certain time. They are able and willing to pay more and their demand will be relatively inelastic due to the lack of substitutes available. The service cannot be bought for off-peak travel and then transferred for use at peak times.

This answer would be marked on a levels mark scheme and to earn the full 15 marks, the student would have to develop a selection of the key issues relevant to the question, with sound knowledge and understanding of economic terminology, concepts and principles.

Guidance

The point is stated clearly and then developed to address the question posed. Relevant economic concepts are incorporated and where appropriate, examples may also help to support the understanding.

Identify

Name or otherwise characterise.

Examples and guidance

Example question including both command words

Using **Extract D**, identify **two** significant points of comparison between the changes in the price of potash and the changes in the price of crude oil over the period shown. (*Specimen AS Paper 1 Q29*)

Example (full marks) answer

The average monthly price of potash was lower at the end of the period than the beginning (from \$630 to \$390 per tonne), whereas the average monthly price of crude oil was higher at the end of the period than the beginning (from \$62 to \$109 per barrel).

The highest average monthly price of potash was in 2009, at \$630 per tonne, whereas the highest monthly price of crude oil was in 2012 at \$112 per barrel.

Guidance for ‘identify’

To be ‘significant’, an overview must be taken which involves looking at the data as a whole, for example, how the value(s) at the end of the period compared with that/those at the beginning. Correct dates and units are required to score the full 4 marks (2 marks per point).

Guidance for ‘compare’

If a comparison is required between two series of data, the same information must be stated for both, for example, when each was highest and the values. Again, correct dates and units are required to score the full 4 marks.

Illustrate

Present clarifying examples.

Examples and guidance

Example question

Using examples to illustrate your answer, explain how anchoring **and** loss aversion can affect an individual’s choices when deciding how to spend or save their income. (*Specimen A-level Paper 1 Q11*)

Example of a key point in the answer

Loss aversion could affect people's saving decisions. People may be unwilling to sell their shares at a lower price than they paid for them, even if they could use this money to buy other shares which would yield a higher return in the long run. For example, someone bought 5,000 Lloyds Bank shares two years ago for 80p each, for a total of £4,000. Now the share price is only 60p and so these shares are only worth £3,000, hence, on paper, if they sell the shares, they have made a loss of £1000. They continue to hold these shares despite the fact that if they put this money into say BT shares over the coming year, BT shares will increase in value. This is because they are reluctant to sell at a loss even though their behaviour is irrational. Loss aversion often introduces a systematic bias into people's decision making.

This answer would be marked on a levels mark scheme and to earn the full 15 marks, it would have to develop a selection of the key issues relevant to the question, with sound knowledge and understanding of economic terminology, concepts and principles, fully supported by the use of examples.

Guidance

The point is stated clearly and then developed to address the question posed. Relevant economic concepts are incorporated and the example is fundamental in supporting the understanding.

Justify

Support a case with evidence.

Examples and guidance

Example question

Taking into account the news report, **Extract D**, and the original evidence, do you recommend that the company should invest in Brazil? Justify your recommendation. (*Specimen A-level Paper 3 Q33*)

Example of a key point in the answer

The recent protests highlight some of the potential problems faced by the company if it decides to invest in Brazil. 'Crumbling infrastructure' could be a concern depending on where the firm locates within the country. This could add to its costs, both in terms of the transport of raw materials and components to the factory and the transport of the finished cars. It will also depend on whether they are primarily producing for the domestic market or for export. With a population of 201 million and an average growth rate between 2000 and 2012 of 3.41%, there could be considerable potential for sales in the Brazilian market both now and in the future but if the local infrastructure proves to be problematic, this may compromise the profitability of the investment.

This answer would be marked on a levels mark scheme and to earn the full 25 marks, it would have to contain sound, focused analysis and well-supported evaluation. There would need to be good application of relevant economic principles and clear, logical chains of reasoning, supported by good use of the data provided. There would also need to be supported evaluation throughout the response as well as in the final conclusion.

Guidance

To justify a recommendation, view or conclusion, key points must be presented in favour but their weaknesses and the case against should be considered as well. These points must be analysed and evaluated in order to reach a supported judgement on the question from the available evidence at the end.