

# Command Words Explained

Student-friendly guide | Foundation & Higher Tier

## **3. Explaining, reasoning and proving**

Command words are words used in GCSE Maths exam questions. They tell you exactly what you need to do to answer a question and get the marks.

| Command word                        | What does it mean?                                              |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Explain                             | Say how or why something happens.                               |
| Describe                            | Say what you notice using maths words.                          |
| Give a reason                       | Explain why your answer is correct.                             |
| Why?                                | Give a mathematical reason or calculation.                      |
| Show that                           | Use calculations to show that the given result is correct.      |
| Prove that (Higher)                 | Use clear mathematical steps to prove something is always true. |
| Evaluate a method or claim (Higher) | Check whether a method or statement is correct. Explain why.    |
| What mistake has ... made?          | Find and explain the error.                                     |
| Give an example                     | Write one example that follows the rule.                        |
| Give a counterexample               | Find an example that shows a statement is not always true.      |
| Show working to support your answer | Include calculations that explain your decision.                |
| Make a criticism                    | Point out a problem or weakness.                                |

## **Test yourself**

### **Challenge A – Choose the Correct Answer**

What does "Make a criticism" mean?

- A. Find a weakness or problem.
- B. Rewrite the question.
- C. Give the final answer only.

# Command Words Explained



Student-friendly guide | Foundation & Higher Tier

## **Challenge B – Guess the Command Word**

Choose the correct command word.

Word Bank: Explain | Describe | Prove | Show that | Give a reason

Say why something happens. \_\_\_\_\_

Use mathematical words to say what you notice. \_\_\_\_\_

Show why a statement is always true. \_\_\_\_\_

Show the steps that lead to a given result. \_\_\_\_\_

Support your answer with mathematical evidence. \_\_\_\_\_

## **Challenge C – True or False?**

"Prove" means give one example that works. \_\_\_\_

"Give a counterexample" means find an example that shows a statement is not always true. \_\_\_\_

"What mistake has been made?" means identify an error. \_\_\_\_

"Evaluate a claim" means decide whether it is correct and explain why. \_\_\_\_

## **Challenge D – Fill in the missing gaps.**

| Command word | What does it mean?                                           |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Explain      |                                                              |
|              | Say what you notice using maths words.                       |
|              | Point out a problem or weakness.                             |
|              | Check whether a method or statement is correct. Explain why. |
|              | Find an example that shows a statement is not always true.   |