

Command Words Explained

Student-friendly guide | Foundation & Higher Tier

2. Algebra and simplifying expressions

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?
Simplify	Make an expression shorter without changing its value.
Simplify fully	Keep simplifying until no more can be done.
Multiply out	Multiply everything inside the brackets.
Expand	Remove brackets by multiplying.
Factorise	Put an expression into brackets.
Factorise fully	Take out the greatest common factor or factorise completely.
Solve	Find the value of the unknown letter.
Rearrange	Change a formula to make a different letter the subject.
Express ... as	Write a number or expression in the form asked for.
Give your answer in terms of π	Leave π in your answer instead of using a decimal.
Give your answer in terms of ...	Write your answer using the letter given.

Test yourself

Challenge A – Match the Meaning

Match each command word to its meaning.

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Simplify | A. Find the value of an unknown. |
| 2. Expand | B. Put an expression into brackets. |
| 3. Factorise | C. Make an expression simpler. |
| 4. Solve | D. Change the subject of a formula. |
| 5. Rearrange | E. Remove brackets by multiplying |

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Challenge B – Choose the Correct Answer

1. What does "Factorise fully" mean?
 - a. Multiply out all brackets.
 - b. Factorise as much as possible.
 - c. Find the value of x.
2. What does "Simplify fully" mean?
 - a. Keep simplifying until no more can be done.
 - b. Write the expression in brackets.
 - c. Change the subject of a formula.
3. What does "Give your answer in terms of π " mean?
 - a. Replace π with 3.14.
 - b. Round your answer.
 - c. Leave π in your final answer.

Challenge C – Who Am I?

1. I ask you to write a number in a different form.
Who am I? _____
2. I ask you to multiply everything inside the brackets.
Who am I? _____

Challenge D – Fill in the missing gaps.

Command word	What does it mean?
	Remove brackets by multiplying.
	Change a formula to make a different letter the subject.
	Multiply everything inside the brackets.
	Put an expression into brackets.