**AP Environmental Science: Command Words**

Questions are instructions for you to follow. If you skip any part of a question on the APES exam you will lose points. Sometimes you might skip a question or answer it incorrectly because you **misinterpreted** the words in the question or you didn't know what it was asking you to do.

Students lose points on the APES exam because they are busy trying to recall everything they know about a topic and forget to think about **what the question is really asking for**.

AP examiners try to set questions that are clear in what they ask for and can be answered by everyone who has followed the course and prepared properly for the exam.

Examiners use stock words or phrases in questions known as **command words** - these are the instructions to **do** something in a question. It is important that you know what they mean.

Below are a list of **command words** that may appear in the APES and other exams.

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| **Command Word** | **What the questions is asking** |
| **Analyze** | Break down the topic into parts and give an in-depth account |
| **Briefly** | Be concise and straightforward. Don’t spend much too much time on this part (but don’t list - sentences still required) |
| **Classify** | Use classification in your answer (divide into groups or categories) |
| **Compare** | What is wanted is a point-by-point identification of **similarities**and of **differences** (‘compare’ includes looking at contrasts, while a command to ‘contrast’means only looking for differences). Use comparative adjectives (larger than, smaller, more steep, less densely). |
| **Comment** | Summarize the various points and give an opinion |
| **Contrast** | Describe the differences only |
| **Define / Explain the meaning of** | These words ask for a relatively short answer, usually two or three sentences, where the precise meaning of the term is identified (usually doesn’t need an example/case study) |
| **Describe**  **Describe**  (*continued*) | This is one of the most widely used command words. Unless the question says ‘describe and explain’, don’t be tempted to explain (just avoid writing ‘because’ in your answer).  **Describe the characteristics of ...** means focusing on the appearance or properties of a particular object / feature  **Describe the changes in ...** is often used with a graph or series of graphs. Accurate verbs are required and using words like rapidly, steeply, gently, gradually.  **Describe the trends in...** means more of an overall picture is required – not a ‘blow by blow’ account of what a table/graph shows. Major exceptions to the trend should be included.  **Describe the differences between ...** means **only**differences are required – no credit is given for similarities or for descriptions of one of the items. Might best be done with individual sentences each identifying a difference.  **Describe the relationship between ...** means **only** the links between the two items are required You must identify and establish the link clearly.  **Describe the effects of ...** means a factual account of what has occurred**, after or as a result of** whatever the question has identified. |
| **Discuss** | Usually you are expected to build up an argument about an issue and to present more than one side of the evidence with supporting examples. This creates a written debate identifying both positive and negative points and then you must **reach a conclusion** from the debate. You should both describe and explain. Try to create a balanced answer. **‘Discuss the extent to which …’** requires a judgment about the validity of the evidence or outcome.  **‘Discuss varying attitudes to …’** there is a variety of viewpoints (e.g. decision makers and others affected) and priorities to be included in the answer. |
| **Evaluate / Assess** | This is similar to the idea of **‘discuss’. Assess** requires a statement of the overall quality or value of the feature/issue being considered. **Evaluate** asks the student to give an overall statement of value.  In both cases you need to state a viewpoint, after consideration of the evidence. In both cases your own judgment/opinion is wanted. Although an opinion cannot be marked incorrect, credit is given for the justification of the position you’ve taken up. It usually best not to adopt an extreme viewpoint (a balanced answer is best). |
| **Explain** | Reasons or causes. Description is not enough (and may not be needed at all). Show an understanding of why or how something has occurred. |

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| **Give an explanatory (or reasoned) account of / describe and explain** | This is a combination of a ‘describe’ question, and a ‘suggest reasons for’ question. The logical way to answer is to describe first and then provide an explanation for the feature, but sometimes it is possible to provide the reasons first and then describe the consequent feature. |
| **How** | Describe. What methods are involved? |
| **Identify/ State/ Name** | Point out and name in a brief sentence |
| **Interpret** | Bring out the meaning of |
| **In what ways** | Describe. Identify a pattern |
| **Justify** | Usually applies to decision-making questions. When you have made your decision, you must justify why that course of action was better than the alternatives. Explain why your chosen course is better than the options that you rejected. Also, explain how your choice meets the criteria set out for you in the question (or which you had to describe). |
| **Outline** | Note the main features |
| **Suggest** | Put forward an idea or reason |
| **To what extent** | Agree and disagree (for and against). There are a number of possible explanations - give these. Then say which you tend to favor. |
| **With reference to specific examples / Cases** | You must refer to a specific example/case study and give detailed descriptions and explanations. |
| **Provide one argument** | Provide one thesis statement and one supporting detail in paragraph form. |