

Approaching A-level answers in Geography

Below are a list of command words that could be used in the A-level exams and their definitions.

Command word	Definition
Analyse	Use geographical skills to investigate an issue by systematically breaking it down into individual components and making logical, evidence-based connections on the causes and effects or interrelationships between the components.
Assess	Use evidence to determine the relative significance of something. Give balanced consideration to all factors and identify which are the most important.
Calculate	Produce a numerical answer, showing relevant working.
Complete	Create a graphical representation of geographical information by adding detail to a resource that has been provided
Draw/Plot	Create a graphical representation of geographical information.
Evaluate	Measure the value or success of something and ultimately provide a balanced and substantiated judgement/conclusion. Review information and then bring it together to form a conclusion, drawing on evidence such as strengths, weaknesses, alternatives and relevant data.
Explain	Provide a reasoned explanation of how or why something occurs. An explanation requires understanding to be demonstrated through the justification or exemplification of points that have been identified.
Suggest	For an unfamiliar scenario, provide a reasoned explanation of how or why something may occur. A suggested explanation requires a justification/exemplification of a point that has been identified.

When approaching the questions consider the command words within the context of the marks allocated. For example:

6-8 markers

- For a 6 mark **explain** question, for example, explain the causes of tsunamis, you should consider:

Definition – i.e. what are ‘*sediment cells*’

Justifications x2 points x3 links each

For each point (why something occurs) create a chain of development with 3 links (which means.... this means.... therefore....) to justify the points with clear details in relation to the question.

Similarly if it was an 8 mark **explain** question such as, explain how the sediment cell concept contributes to the understanding of coastal systems, you should consider the same process but develop 3 points with 3 links each.

12 markers

- For a 12 mark **assess** question, for example, assess the extent to which emerging countries need both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power to extend their global influence, you should consider:

Definition – i.e. what is meant by ‘*hard*’ and ‘*soft*’ power

Agree x 2 points x 3 links

Disagree x 2 points x 3 links

Decision – starting with “In conclusion I believe” (and add a further reason to justify your decision)

For each agree/disagree create a chain of argument with 3 links (which means.... this means.... therefore....)

16 markers

- Similarly if it was a 16 mark **evaluate** question, for example, evaluate the relative importance of tectonic and glacial processes in generating the hazard at the Vatnajökull ice sheet, you should consider the same process but develop 3 points with 3 links each.

20 markers

- For a 20 mark **evaluate** question, for example, evaluate the relative importance of local and national government decision-makers in the regeneration of either urban or rural areas, you should consider:

Definition – what is meant by ‘*decision makers*’ in this instance

Important x 3-4

Not important x 3-4

Conclusion – starting with “In conclusion I believe” (and add further reasons to justify your decision based on the evidence already used)

For each important/not important create a chain of argument with 3 links (which means.... this means.... therefore....)

- Don’t forget you should always have case studies for **assess** and **evaluation** types of questions – so you will get awarded marks for knowledge, application to the case study(s), analysis and if it’s an evaluation question, for evaluation as well.
- Obviously this formula can be altered slightly if the assess or evaluate questions ask about the advantages or disadvantages, agree or disagree, level of impact, level of influence, etc....