

GCE



Revised GCE
Biology

Glossary of Terms used in Examinations

For first teaching from September 2017



Account (for): provide an explanation for biological phenomenon. Candidates can be asked to account for biological content within the specification, e.g. account for variation in offspring as a consequence of sexual reproduction, or account for the data provided in an examination question, e.g. account for the levelling off of the data in the table.

Calculate: provide an answer for a numerical problem. For example, candidates could be asked to calculate percentage increase or decrease of biological data or to calculate the magnification used in a photograph.

Comment (on): state the key features in a structure, process or biological information provided.

Compare: state the similarities and/or differences between two or more items, e.g. compare the rates of photosynthesis in the two experimental settings shown.

Complete: provide extra information, e.g. complete the table by calculating the percentage increase at 40 °C.

Contrast: state the difference(s) between two or more items, e.g. contrast the action of rods and cones in the eye.

Compare and contrast: state the similarities *and* differences between two or more items, e.g. compare and contrast the roles of the transmission and scanning electron microscopes in the understanding of cell structure.

Define: state concisely the meaning of a term, e.g. define the term water potential.

Describe: state the key points without providing an explanation. Candidates could be asked to describe the main features of, e.g. the cell membrane, or describe the main points in a set of data, e.g. describe the effect of temperature on enzyme activity in a graph.

Describe fully: state the key points in greater detail or state a greater number of relevant points. For example, candidates could be asked to describe fully the relationship between prey and predator numbers in a table over time. Describe fully questions will be worth at least two marks and often more.

Determine: use information provided to arrive at a correct answer or outcome. For example, determine the minimum light intensity that produces the maximum rate of photosynthesis.

Discuss: use continuous prose to give an account of the question asked. Discuss questions typically involve linking together a number of points, e.g. discuss the arguments for and against GM crops.

Distinguish (between): state the differences between two or more features. Distinguish between the light-dependent and the light-independent processes in photosynthesis.

Explain: provide the reason or justification for biological phenomena, e.g. explain how competitive inhibition affects enzyme activity or explain why a pH buffer is necessary in this investigation. Many questions are asked as 'Describe and explain.' In this type of question, it is important to answer both the 'what' and the 'why'.

Give: provide information based on your understanding of biology or from an analysis of data provided, e.g. give one piece of evidence from the table that shows that immobilised enzymes are more thermostable than enzymes that are not immobilised.

Identify: recognise a feature in a diagram or photograph. For example, identify structure X in the photograph.

List: provide a list from biological knowledge or information provided, e.g. list the environmental factors which affect the rate of photosynthesis.

Name: provide an answer based on biological understanding, e.g. name the process that can explain differences in gene expression without the underlying DNA base sequence being affected.

Outline: state the essential or key points in biological phenomenon or in information provided. When the command term outline is used, minimal detail is normally required.

State: provide a brief answer to the question asked, e.g. state the function of cellulose in plants.

Suggest: provide a reasonable account based on the information provided. In 'suggest' question there is usually not a single correct answer. For example, suggest an explanation that could account for the large variability in the data shown.

This list of command terms is not exhaustive. For example, questions involving 'what' and 'which' are often asked, e.g. Which diagram most accurately describes the induced fit model of enzyme action.