

9

What Examiners Look For

OBJECTIVES

In this chapter you will learn how to:

- Ensure that your response to an exam question is on target
- Present your answer to impress the examiner
- Demonstrate a critical approach in addressing your topic
- Present arguments that use evidence and show independent learning
- Use problem-based learning to improve the quality of your responses
- Respond accurately to the shades of meaning in exam questions

9.1 Answering the set question!

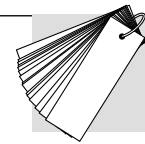
It is wise to remember that it is possible to look without seeing – we can sometimes be primed to see what we want to see rather than what is actually there. Of course if you are asked to write an appreciation of a piece of art or poetry it may well be that you should project your personal interpretation on to the work. Outside this, it is more likely that you will be expected to produce relevant evidence and arguments to address the set question in the exam with a clear focus. Although the virtue of using past papers for revision has been extolled, the danger with this approach is that you may twist the meaning of a question into what you hope it is going to be. Another danger is that the question you wanted so much is right in front of your eyes but you fail to see it because the form of wording is different from the previous occasions and in blind panic you de-select that one as an option!

Therefore, the general advice at this point is, slow down, read carefully and make your question selection advisedly.

When you have made your choice, write the question out and this will be the final insurance that you have not misunderstood its intent.

In a famous optical illusion, Rubin's vase can be seen as a vase or as two faces that look towards each other. You can see it both ways and it can 'change' from one to the other. In contrast, exam questions are usually set so that they can be addressed in one way (although there is room for variety in structure, style and perhaps some substance).

A worked example



Question: Evaluate the important ingredients in the security, prosperity and happiness of a city.

Strategy for response: First, make a list of major city functions, such as:

Health	Infrastructure	Crime
Education	Housing/Property	Entertainment
Transport	Finance/Banking	Leisure/Sport
Trade	Parks and Greens	Art/Museums
Security	Traffic	Employment

What you should not do is:

- Merely describe the function of each
- Focus only on the ones that are of interest to you
- Go off on a tangent such as the effects of flooding on a city

What you might think of doing is:

- Describe each one in a brief sentence of two
- Highlight how the quality of life would be diminished if any of the above were missing
- Show that the various facets are dependent on other aspects of city life
- You may want to list essential and non-essential services and then rank each of these in turn

9.2 Initial evidence of focus

It is said that 'you never get a second chance to make a first impression', and in the first paragraph of your response to the exam question you have the opportunity to shape the initial impression in the examiner's mind. That does not mean that his or her final impression is sealed, but it does give you the opportunity to set up and then confirm a positive overall impression. If the initial few sentences are good in quality, this will also help you to settle down and you will feel spurred on to do well.

PRACTICAL SCENARIO: A JOB INTERVIEW

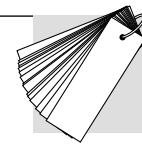
To give a good initial impression when you go for a job interview, you could:

- **Walk confidently into the room**
- **Be smartly and neatly dressed, trimmed and clean**
- **Smile and say hello to each member of the interview panel**
- **Briefly get eye contact with each panel member but without a fixed gaze**
- **Shake hands if offered and exchange courtesies diplomatically**
- **Sit when you are invited to**

In an exam situation you do not have the non-verbal cues that you can use to create a good impression in an interview, but you have written cues you can use to demonstrate that you have purpose, focus, direction, knowledge and understanding. In the next section you will see how rough work can be used in shaping a good impression, but another tool is the preliminary use of key words and terms.

A worked example

Question: Discuss the essential elements that help in building good friendships that will last.



(Continued)

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A good strategy is to list the important ideas that spring to mind, such as:

- Not being too demanding
- Inviting your friends to events that are important to you
- Overlooking faults
- Showing acts of kindness and generosity
- Being willing listen when friends need someone to talk to

You may want to add a few of your own to the above list.

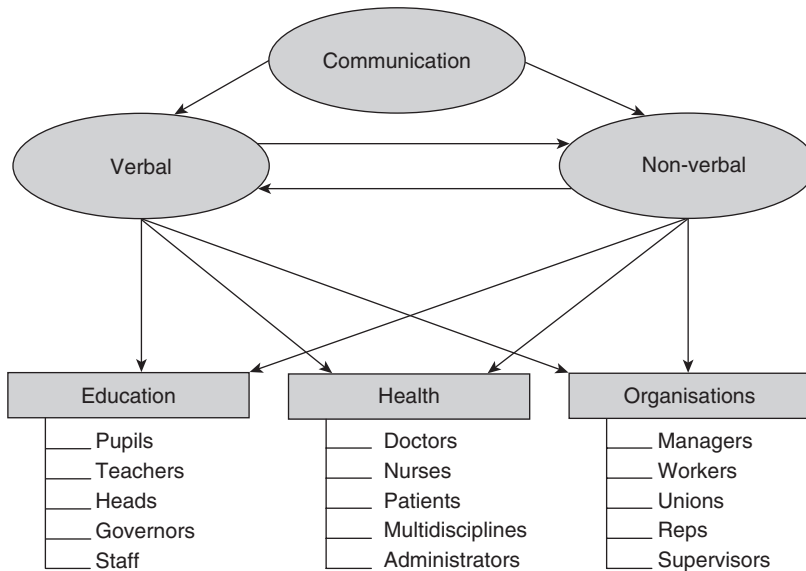
It is also a good strategy to drop key words such as these into the opening sentences to demonstrate that you know exactly where you are taking the examiner in your journey together. As an example of mapping out a strategy in advance, think of going for a walk in a country forest park – you may find maps at the beginning of the walk so that you can decide which routes you want to take and in what order.

In the first couple of sentences of your exam question response you can, as it were, create a map for your examiner. You can tell her or him where you are going to take them. Be sure to give the impression that you know where you are leading them.

9.3 Rough work may be helpful

Some students prefer to use mind maps in drawing up plans for an essay or exam question. It is acceptable to draw out your own mind map design, and this is all you will be able to do if you opt for this method in your exams as you cannot resort to software. However, this approach may not be appealing to all and you may prefer to use a simple structure approach such as the use of headings and subheadings. When mind mapping is used with software packages you can achieve complexity by using colour codes, circles, squares, rectangles and ellipses, and you can set up pathways in which your variables are joined by direct or indirect routes. These may be very useful in your revision or even in a presentation, but in your exam you will not need all the decorative niceties. Your aim should be to draw a basic map as quickly as possible. The more complex your map is, the more difficult it will be to remember all the points and the longer it will take to draw out all the parts. Consider the following question and then see how the response can be briefly plotted out in a mind map (or even in the form of a flow chart).

Question: Outline the essential factors and applications of communication in a variety of human settings.



9.4 Balance, connection and fluency

On the point of balance, it is essential that you do justice to all aspects of an argument. For example, in terms of length, this suggests that paragraphs should be of approximately similar length although there are no hard-and-fast rules. Some aspects of your subject may require a little more treatment than others, but if you alternate between very long and very short paragraphs your argument may appear to be lopsided.

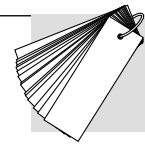
It is also vital that you do not suddenly introduce an argument that appears to be grossly out of place or sequence – there has to be some connection between your points and you should not assume that your reader will always see these without you demonstrating them.

Finally, aim to communicate the impression that your work flows from start to finish. If you achieve this, you will have integrated a variety of valid points into one coherent

and convincing whole. What fluency will do for you is to give your essay some life. Your response to the question should not be a mere list of hard, cold facts that are joined up by nothing more than punctuation and conjunctions.

Use of illustrations and applications can add colour, spice and variety to your responses unless these have been outlawed in your subject domain. However, illustrations should not become an end in themselves, and neither should they be irrelevant or forced.

A worked example



Question: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the widespread introduction of computers into higher education?

- An additional task that almost all students are now required to master
- Possible advantage to those from comfortable backgrounds
- Most universities are well equipped with modern computers
- Pressure on finding computer space at busy times in university libraries
- Students can still schedule time for off-peak periods
- Up-to-date electronic journals are readily available
- Library searches are much easier than before
- Word processing means work is easily modified
- Quality of presentations can be enhanced using computer graphics
- Advantages include spelling and grammar checks and word counts
- Anxious students avoid using computers and may therefore fall behind
- Economically disadvantaged students may not be put on an equal footing
- Computer skills are transferable (across modules and years)
- Computer skills are impressive on a CV
- Computers can become addictive – a time-wasting distraction for students

This is an applied topic and all students will have views on it both from their own personal experience and from observation of other students. If this were your exam topic, you could go into the test armed with information from computer and educational studies, and this could be complemented by case studies and your own anecdotal experience and observations.

Exercise – See if you can condense each of the bullet points above into a brief word or two that you can use as memory joggers for your rough work in an exam. It may help to underline a key word or two in each. For example, just the use of ‘CV’ could help you remember the penultimate point.



Checklist – Golden Rules

- ✓ Can't say everything about everything
- ✓ Must make selections
- ✓ Choose examples from each domain
- ✓ Find some major headings
- ✓ Cluster examples under appropriate headings
- ✓ Draw connections between major concepts
- ✓ Decide on order for working through these step by step
- ✓ Decide if there is one or more central concept
- ✓ Avoid too much complexity in sketching outline
- ✓ Balance the number of issues under each heading

9.5 Corroborate with evidence

Many academic subjects are driven by theory, research and empirical findings, and if this is the case, then you must show that you know the relevant literature. The more evidence you can use the better (if you use it effectively). However, you cannot go into a detailed description of every relevant study you have read. Rather, you can summarise and show the relevance of a given study in a brief few sentences.

Make sure you give the impression that you are using the evidence to support your arguments and to build up your case.

Of course, you will want to come to some definitive conclusions in your exam essay, but on the journey there you will need to show that you have reached your conclusions in the light of (perhaps) conflicting evidence. It may be that your overall

conclusion is that the balance of probability lies in one side of the argument, but you may conclude that further studies are needed to address some unresolved issues. An example of a question like this would be the MMR issue that was discussed in Chapter 7: Can it be concluded with certainty that the triple vaccine for mumps, measles and rubella is now safe?

Checklist – Using evidence

- ✓ Describe findings accurately and succinctly
- ✓ Use relevant names (authors of theories or research)
- ✓ Use as many dates as you can remember
- ✓ Cover the development of the topic and incorporate up-to-date findings
- ✓ Present all sides of an argument
- ✓ Only make strong claims that are evidence-based
- ✓ Use a variety of evidence to build a case (showing convergence)
- ✓ Come to conclusions based on the balance of probabilities (if need be)
- ✓ Identify unresolved or inconclusive issues
- ✓ Map out where future research needs to go

9.6 Independent and problem-based learning

What your assessors will not be looking for is a verbatim account of what they delivered to you in a lecture or tutorial. You should show evidence that you have read from the sources they have directed you to in reading lists. Examiners also like to see that you have taken some initiative by delving into other sources that they had not highlighted.

From the standpoint of a marker, it is most refreshing to assess students who have taken the time and trouble to bring some new facet of research to the subject under investigation.

It is especially impressive if students can integrate some up-to-date sources, and this should not be too difficult given the plethora of electronic journals that are available in modern universities. Moreover, these sources are a great advantage when there are constraints upon your time. They are easily accessed and summaries of central findings are often available in abstract form. The main findings can be rapidly outlined, grasped and noted.

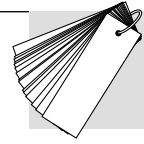
A form of learning that has been advocated in higher education circles and has gained popularity is the notion of problem-based learning. In this form of learning activity, a group of students is given a task by their tutor, and individual students go their separate ways to extract the information they need. When each has finished their task they come together and use their collated information to try to solve the problem that had been posed by the tutor. Instead of being taught directly, students endeavour to find answers for themselves, and it is believed that this can be an effective form of learning because it facilitates a deeper processing of information. Therefore, in order to prepare thoroughly for your exams, you may want to engage in some problem-solving activities either alone or with other students.

DIRECTIONS FOR PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING

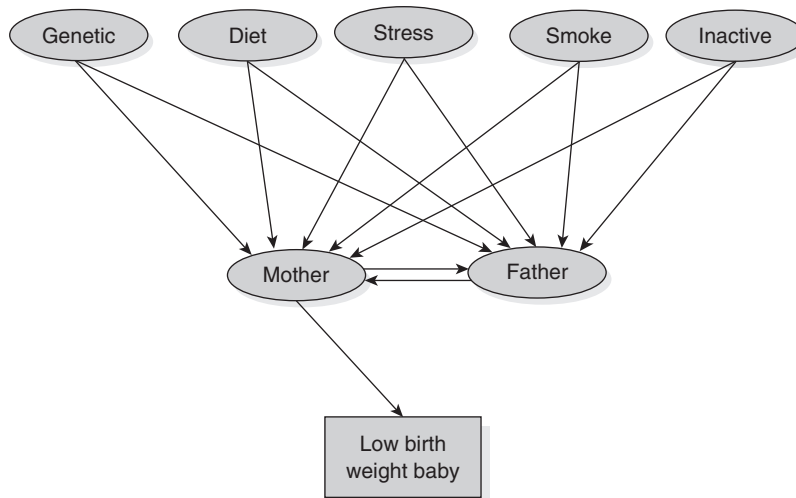
- Find a question or problem that will get you engaged with your topic
- Trace relevant sources and read around the topic
- Make a full list of all the relevant ideas
- Rank in order the steps that will lead to the solution
- Draw these out in a mental map or a flow chart
- Judge if any step can be removed without making a difference
- Is there more than one route to your goal?
- Are there direct and indirect pathways that should be mapped out?
- Are there bi-directional pathways?
- Is there one answer or multifaceted answers?

These steps will become clearer after you look at the worked example and the diagram presented below.

A worked example – Low birth weight babies:
what is the cause?



- Smoking in pregnant women has been implicated as a possible cause
- Stress has also been highlighted
- Stressful women might be more likely to smoke during pregnancy
- The father's smoking habits have also been suggested
- Therefore stress in fathers may also be implicated
- Parents can either buffer or trigger stress in each other
- Poor nutrition may also have a large causal impact
- Both parents may be responsible for the mother's poor nutrition
- A genetic component might be implicated, and also inactivity
- A conceptual diagram can be drawn to suggest possible causal pathways



Like so many problems, there is a multifaceted explanation and by presenting the problem in diagram form you will show the examiner that you are aware of all the direct, indirect and bi-directional effects. For example, the mother and father may both influence low birth weight babies through genetics. They may also influence each other through four of the five variables shown in the diagram. It is clear that to put the whole problem down to pregnant women smoking is rather naïve.

Exercise – If you look at the five variables at the top of the diagram you may be able to work out how some of them impact on each other, and you can draw linking lines with arrows to denote the pathways.



9.7 Characterised by critical thinking

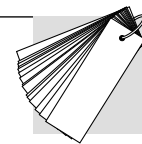
It is possible to argue through issues in the world of academia without becoming vitriolic towards other colleagues or fellow researchers. Critical thinking goes on all the time and academics constantly raise questions and problems in relation to each other's work. It is a violation of academic professionalism to run a vendetta against a colleague. Students sometimes find it a little difficult to make the transition from the secure world of comfortable thought and certainty to the real world of academia where findings evolve and develop through critical thinking, which may sometimes appear to be more like verbal sparring.

You should understand clearly that it is critical thinking that will get you your best grades in your exams, but the critical thinking must be evidence-based and not driven by personal prejudices or hunches.

It is often a difficult task to rise above our personal, subjective world in order to evaluate objectively the full range of evidence without giving the impression that we have a personal 'axe to grind'. A writer can set up the alternatives to their preferred explanations to knock them down again in order to give the impression that they are even-handed and objective. Emotional involvement with a given topic may not be a bad thing in driving the investigation but it can lead to disguised distortions of reality. In order to illustrate critical thinking with an example, we will therefore address the issue of prejudice.

A worked example – Critical thinking about prejudice

Imagine that you have been asked the following question in an exam:
Discuss the assertion that it is impossible for a human being to be totally free from prejudice. Before examining the drafted response below, you might want to make some notes of your own in response.



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It may help to start with a definition of prejudice: A prejudiced person can be defined as being like a jury that gives a verdict before it hears all the evidence.

- All grown-up human beings are likely to have or have had some degree of prejudice against others
- Prejudiced people attend to and select information that confirms their views
- Prejudiced people are likely to filter out information that does not support their views, or they will absorb it as an exception that proves the rule
- Prejudice is very resistant to change
- Prejudice may be intransigent because it is perceived as a mechanism for preservation and a buffer against insecurity
- Many will not admit to prejudice unless they are with trusted friends
- Some may not even realise that they are prejudiced
- Many may like to present the façade of fairness and objectivity
- The middle classes may be more cunning in their use of prejudice
- These complexities may make prejudice more difficult to address
- Getting to know the people you are prejudiced against may help to reduce prejudice
- Working models that have attempted to counteract prejudice is a useful starting point
- Courageous individuals who admit their prejudices (and the wrongness of them) may be more effective challenging others than those who merely point the accusing finger
- The goal of eliminating prejudice entirely may be unrealistic
- It may be possible to reduce prejudice and bring it under control

A glance at the above points will clearly demonstrate that you are armed with a series of points and counterpoints that will form the heart of a good, critical essay.

9.8 Year one and beyond

If you are in the first year of a university course it is likely that your results will not count towards your final degree classification. Therefore, all that will be required is to pass your exams at the stipulated level (typically 40 per cent in the UK for undergraduate programmes). That does not mean that you should content yourself with

marginal passes, as this is not good for your confidence or anxiety! However, the knowledge that your degree classification is not at stake will give you the time and opportunities to develop the skills presented and advocated in this book. If you have already progressed beyond year one, then it is essential that you cultivate the skills presented in this book. The object of learning is not just about reproducing knowledge and demonstrating good memory skills. It is also about:

- **Addressing the question directly**
- **Writing succinctly and with focus**
- **Using a critical thinking approach**
- **Using relevant and up-to-date evidence to support your claims**
- **Presenting balanced arguments**

If what you have been doing to date has not been working for you in terms of the grades you are attaining, then it is time to do some diagnostic troubleshooting.

Do not allow yourself to lapse into the thinking mode where you convince yourself that you cannot change. It is possible to change your thinking style and strategy into one that will produce dividends for you. The following summary checklist will also help you to focus your attention on your strengths and weaknesses.

Checklist – What examiners look for

- ✓ Ensure that you are addressing the question before you start writing
- ✓ A mind map or flow chart, or headings and subheadings, will aid your essay structure and help you plan and pace your answer
- ✓ Aim for a balanced structure that avoids padding and does justice to all facets of an argument
- ✓ Hit all the right notes in your introductory paragraph and include relevant key words
- ✓ Make a point of sprinkling your exam essay liberally with cited evidence
- ✓ It is useful to demonstrate that you have done some independent learning
- ✓ Evidence of critical thinking will demonstrate that you have learned at a deeper level than rote reproduction

- ✓ Problem-based learning will provide you with an impressive format for addressing exam issues
- ✓ Time management (highlighted in earlier chapters) will allow you to pace out all the issues you aim to tackle

9.9 The key words in the question

IF YOU ARE ASKED TO WRITE A DISCUSSION

Whenever you are engaged in discussion, you are *examining* possibilities and *exploring* various avenues of thought. There should be a tone of investigation and enquiry, but with the important proviso that there is an end product. The discussion should be going somewhere – it must have shape and direction. There is room for a discussion to be tentative, but no place for it to be vague.

As an example, you could think of a television discussion show that includes a panel of experts and a person in the chair to guide the proceedings. If you are the person in the chair you would be concerned to:

- **Establish that the invited guests represent all shades of opinion on the issue**
- **Ensure that contributors have the opportunity to articulate their views**
- **Give contributors the opportunity to respond when their views are challenged**
- **Prevent any individual monopolising the discussion**
- **Control the interruptions that would make the discussion chaotic**
- **Summarise the conclusions in a fair and even-handed manner**

In an exam you are to be ‘the chairperson’ and it will be your responsibility to conduct the discussion in a well-ordered, fair and thorough manner. Although the tone of the discussion is different from, say, a critique, this does not mean that it should be tame in nature. There is room in the discussion for a vigorous exploration of evidence and counter arguments.

IF YOU ARE ASKED TO WRITE A CRITICAL REVIEW

The tone of a critique should be a little more 'adversarial' than a discussion.

In the discussion you are the chair to guide the panel, but in the critique you are the judge to guide the court proceedings.

Imagine there is a defence team and a prosecution team, and your aim is to find the evidence that will stand up in a court of law. You should not be afraid to 'chop down' claims that do not stand up in the light of the evidence. However, that does not mean (to change the metaphor) that you should be a 'knife-happy' surgeon who is intent on operating on every condition. Do not criticise just for the sake of it, or give the impression that you have been 'baptised in lemon juice!' What you really need to ascertain through your critique is what is left of the issue or claim when you hold it up to test it against the evidence? If the basic premise has been supported with evidence again and again, then you can argue that the evidence is robust. For example, you can pose questions, such as those presented below:

- **Has the claim, hypothesis or theory stood the test of time?**
- **Are large claims made on the basis of very flimsy evidence?**
- **Do various studies leave an impression of uncertainty and a need for further investigation?**
- **Does it appear that aspects of previous investigation have been driven by prejudice or vested interests?**
- **Is the evidence supporting the results weak, moderate or strong?**
- **Should you end by highlighting certainties and uncertainties?**
- **Can you identify issues that are no longer relevant to the debate (red herrings)?**
- **Can you earmark issues for further investigation?**
- **Are there issues that are going in the expected direction and are clearly promising?**

Exercise – If you wish, use these questions to challenge the issues raised in the MMR example in Chapter 7.



Exercise – Write your own checklist on the essential steps in a critique (think of yourself as a judge in court presiding over the prosecution and defence lawyers). The exercise will be easier if you choose a theme such as ‘Should parents be allowed to smack their children?’

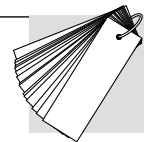


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IF YOU ARE ASKED TO COMPARE AND CONTRAST

If you are asked in an exam or course work essay to compare and contrast two concepts, you will need to identify a range of issues that you can discuss within this context. You may begin by making a list of all the things that the two concepts have in common, and then list all the factors in which they differ. It is best to identify an equal number of issues (if possible) under each heading so that the conclusions are balanced.

A worked example – Compare and contrast popular and classical music



Similarities

Both use the same music clefs
Wide range of instruments used

Differences

Pop often associated with teenagers
Pop often linked to lively parties and discos

(Continued)

(Continued)

Performed with or without lyrics	Pop may be louder and more shocking
Live and recorded performances	Classical often preferred by the middle classes
Listened to for pleasure, relaxation, inspiration and mood control	Classical often has a more complex structure
Variety of styles	Classical pieces are of longer duration
Both used in films and advertisements	Classical pieces often have more musicians
	Different conventions for dress

In drawing this to a conclusion, you could say that:

- Some people listen to both
- Some listen exclusively to one or the other
- Performers have 'migrated' from one to the other
- Some writers/composers have integrated both
- Both serve the needs of individuals and crowds
- Both have useful applications to advertisements, films, therapy, etc.

Exercise – Write your own summary checklist on the major factors involved in producing a well-rounded essay that compares and contrasts two issues.



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- ✓
- ✓

Another variation of the comparing and contrasting approach is when you are asked to outline the advantages and disadvantages of an issue (see the worked example on the

advantages and disadvantages of the widespread introduction of computers in higher education in section 9.4 above). You may want to look back at this example to see if you can classify the advantages and disadvantages and add any points that are needed to balance the arguments. Alternatively, examine the advantages and disadvantages of small, street-corner stores and large supermarkets, or think up a new example of your own.

IF YOU ARE ASKED TO EVALUATE

Illustration – Antique objects and antiquated concepts



If an expert were asked to value a painting or a piece of sculpture, she would be keen to ascertain who the artist was and when the artwork was created. There is no doubt that some objects increase in value with the passage of time. If objects have stood the test of time, they may be very valuable, especially if they were painted or constructed by a master craftsman.

And yet, in academia, the opposite can be true. Although a concept or theory may have been popular and widely accepted 30 years ago, more recent research findings may have chipped away at the foundations over the decades. Other aspects may now have been added to the original proposition, so that what is left now is a modified version of the original. Therefore, if you are asked to evaluate, you may want to consider the following:

- **State the basic premise**
- **Show where findings have attacked aspects of this premise**
- **Highlight aspects that have been strong enough to endure**
- **Identify any new aspects that have been added to the original**

- Present the 'new animal' with its additions and subtractions
- Demonstrate the usefulness of the concept
- Map out the reasons why the premise is set to persist in the future

To wrap up this section just read over the following points. The italicised words are the key words in exam questions. This will give you an idea of how examine questions can be 'spun' from various angles. Remember, each key word requires a different kind of approach.

- *Evaluate* whether modern prisons achieve the aims of reducing crime and reforming criminals.
- *Discuss* other factors that might be run in parallel with the prison system that would be a positive complement to its work.
- *Compare* and *contrast* the work of prisons with rehabilitation day centres.
- Write a *critique* on whether there is value in exploring the criminal mind.

9.10 Attention to the qualifying words in a question

EXAMPLE 1 – IF YOU ARE ASKED TO ADDRESS MORE THAN ONE ISSUE

A close inspection of an exam question may reveal that you are required to address more than one central issue. Unless you have been guided otherwise, you should, in general, try to give equal weighting to all the issues. Consider how you would address the following question: 'Why are some students prone to catch colds, and can anything be done to address this problem?'

The second part of the question should be as important as the first and clearly requires more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer. In the example provided here, you would be advised to link each potential cause with a corresponding prevention or cure. It is probable that examiners will award 50 per cent for each part of the question.

EXAMPLE 2 – WHEN A FEW WORDS FILTER THE DIRECTION OF THE QUESTION

Some questions may direct you into a line of response in the last few words (or in the opening words). Therefore, read the question carefully so that you do not go off track. Consider the following question: ‘Discuss the impact of airport noise on those that live near airports.’

The last part of the question excludes:

- Those who work at airports
- Those who work and travel on planes
- Those who travel to and from airports
- Those who live in low fly zones away from airports

However, it includes the effects of noise:

- During the daytime
- During the nighttime
- On health, quality of life, etc.
- In airports generally – no one airport is specified
- On the value of houses in the vicinity

The question does not specify how close to the airports people should be living in order to be taken into account in your essay – it could be one, two or five miles. So you are probably expected to address the issue in general without specifying a distance.

EXAMPLE 3 – WHEN THE QUESTION DOES NOT HAVE A ‘KEY’ WORD

Another issue to bear in mind is that you may not be asked *directly* to write a critique, discussion or evaluation, but your tutors will probably have directed you to use a

critical approach in general in approaching all exam questions. Take the following two examples:

‘Should sex education be given to children in primary education?’

‘Should Shakespeare’s plays be left in their original Elizabethan language?’

Although no key words such as ‘discuss’ or ‘evaluate’ are used here, it is evident that the questions have been designed to elicit an essay that includes points and counterpoints.

EXAMPLE 4 – WHEN THE QUESTION LEAVES THE SCOPE OPEN-ENDED

Sometimes examiners will leave you to select issues to illustrate the broader principles in the question. This type of essay needs careful thought in order to find the correct balance between the inclusion of too much or too little material. Given that we covered motivation in an earlier chapter, we will use this as our example: ‘Discuss with the use of examples the assertion that motivation is the dynamic behind human change.’

You could select examples on:

- **Attraction and reproduction**
- **Power and promotion**
- **Earnings and savings**
- **Aggression and control**
- **Status and education**

The problem in the question is that you are not asked to discuss a specific number of issues. Rather, you must decide how many examples to include. To help you think through this issue, have a go at the following exercise.

Exercise – Suggest some problems that may be associated with: The use of (a) too few examples and (b) too many examples in your exam responses. Some suggestions are provided after this exercise if you need to consult them.



(a) Potential problems with too few examples in exam responses:

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(b) Potential problems with too many examples in exam responses:

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(a) Potential problems with too few examples in exam responses

- **Temptation to be too descriptive**
- **Insufficient material to make adequate critical comparisons**
- **Extending material to fill space**
- **It may look as though you have not read widely enough**

(b) Potential problems with too many examples in exam responses

- **It can read like a list and therefore distort essay form**
- **It may look like a memory exercise**
- **The common thread between examples may not be clear**
- **It could appear as a shallow exercise**

Exercise – Write your own checklist of the factors that you would choose to guide you in deciding how many examples you would use in responding to an exam question (i.e. if the number of examples to use is not specified).



- ✓
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SUMMARY

Chapter 9 summary points:

- Ensure you answer the question that has been set
- Avoid rough work that takes up too much time
- Present an introduction that shows focus and direction
- Provide balanced arguments that demonstrate objectivity
- Reinforce your arguments with references to evidence
- Ensure your responses are more critical than descriptive
- Show some evidence of independent learning
- Build your answer around the key words in the question