

Guidance for writing accessible examination questions.

The points listed below are simply tips for question writers and should not replace the intervention of a trained and BATOD accredited Modifier during the paper production process.

1. Separate the question from the information.

Weak readers find it easier to have introductory information followed by a question in a simple form presented as a separate sentence and on a separate line.

2. In general, use short simple sentences.

Shorter sentences are easier to assimilate and are less likely to include difficult grammatical structures.

3. Separate multiple questions.

Sometimes several parts of a question are included in one sentence. These should be separated and presented as individual items.

4. Choose the most frequently used word or phrase for nontechnical terms (carrier language) for example:

- 'make' not 'produce'
- 'need' rather than 'require'
- 'enough' rather than 'adequate'
- 'before' rather than 'prior to'
- 'find' rather than 'locate'

5. Use the most common meaning of a term that has more than one meaning.

Candidates with delayed language may take the most common meaning of a term that has more than one meaning and therefore misunderstand the sentence.

- '**Draw** conclusions from data in the **table**'
- '**Present** a **case** to persuade students to travel widely'

Some commands such as 'outline', 'sketch', 'argue' can also be ambiguous

6. Be aware that a verb is more commonly understood than the equivalent abstract noun.

- 'protect rather than 'protection'
- 'complete' rather than 'completion'

There are exceptions. 'Behaviour' is a more common word than 'behave'.

Sometimes the same word can act as a noun or verb. In this case, some readers may only know the verb:

- 'The **use** of slang is common among teenagers'
is easier as

- 'Teenagers often **use** slang'
7. **Be aware that some readers might not have the knowledge to understand common idiom, simile or metaphor.**

'He had the best of both worlds'

'In some religions it is wrong to touch alcohol'

Idioms

'Her fingers were as cold as ice'

'The two sides fought like cats and dogs'

Similes

'The teacher was drowning in paperwork'

'The key to this problem can be seen in the diagram'

Metaphors

8. **Avoid phrasal verbs.**

Phrasal verbs are usually made up of a simple verb and a preposition which together create a verb of a different and usually non-literal meaning.

- 'Hanif **put down** a deposit of £500 on a new car'.

Phrasal verbs are common in everyday speech but can confuse some candidates. Some have many meanings. 'Put down', for example, could refer in different ways to an adversary, a pencil or even a pet.

Common phrasal verbs in examination questions include 'carry out' (e.g a survey), 'come across' (e.g 'encounter'), 'go through' (e.g 're-read').

9. **Avoid using a passive voice.**

Passives can affect the word order and create difficulties.

There are three passives in this question:

- 'Identify two faults that **have been made** in the design of the experiment **shown**, describing in each case how the fault **can be corrected**'

This would be more accessible as:

- 'Identify two faults in the design of this experiment.
Describe how to correct each fault.'

10. **Avoid using negatives.**

Questions containing negatives can confuse candidates because they may take the focus of the question in the opposite way to that which the examiner intended.

Candidates may pick up the meaning of 'no' or 'not' but miss other signal words such as 'lack' or 'despite'.

For more detailed advice please refer to BATOD's document 'The Language of Examinations' from which this guidance is taken.