

AP Exams – Command Words

What each command word asks you to do . :

Identify

name it. One word or one phrase. No sentence needed, no justification.

Describe

give the relevant characteristics of something. A feature, not a cause. Usually one sentence.

Explain

give the reason or mechanism, showing HOW or WHY. The rubric point sits on the causal link, so the sentence must contain one: because, which causes, leading to.

Calculate

produce a number from given quantities. Show the substitution – most rubrics award the setup separately from the answer.

Justify

give evidence and reasoning that supports a claim or conclusion. Naming the evidence is not enough; say why it supports the claim.

Support a claim

state the claim, then the evidence, then the reasoning that connects them. All three are usually separate points.

Compare

state a similarity or difference explicitly, in one sentence covering both cases.

Predict

state what will happen, with the reasoning that gets you there – a bare prediction rarely earns the point.

Derive

start from a principle or a given equation and work symbolically to the result. Every algebraic step is potentially credited.

Draw / Sketch

a labelled diagram or graph. Axes labelled, shape correct, asymptotes and intercepts where they belong.

Evaluate

judge, using criteria you name. A judgement with no criterion is an opinion, and opinions are not scored.