

Learning Questions-A Quick Guide

Describe:

If you are asked to describe something you should state the features in such a way that another person could recognise what you are describing if they saw it. E.g. 'Describe a donkey'? It would be insufficient to say "it has four legs and a back", as this could be a description of a chair. A more appropriate description might be, "a four legged animal similar to a horse but smaller and make a unique 'hee-haw' sound". This second description would probably help the other person who saw or heard this animal identify it as a donkey.

Define:

If you are asked to define something you should describe it in such a way that the reader could follow what you are saying and arrive at the same point as you. It often relates to the classification of objects into groups and categories or the collective meaning of something. E.g. 'define how medicines are classified'. The answer would require the learner to name the different categories of medicine and give examples of each category.

Explain:

The learner should give details to make clear what you are saying in plain English. You should avoid jargon and give an in-depth answer.

State:

This usually requires only a short answer which might even be a single sentence. An example would be, 'state what the acronym BBC stands for'? The answer would simply be 'British Broadcasting Corporation'.

Outline:

This requires the learner to submit a brief answer without the detail required to 'explain'. The answer should include limited detail, but cover all the steps or parts involved. A question asking you to outline how to catch a train from point A to point B would require an answer along the lines of; 'Check the train times from A to B; choose what time to travel and arrive; get to the station and purchase a ticket; find the correct platform and board the train'. Your answer would not need to include details of how you would check the train times or get to the station or how you buy a ticket.

Identify:

You should give sufficient detail so that someone can recognise your description. This is sometimes used instead of 'list' or 'state', so try to think of what the question is asking for.

Demonstrate:

This means you have to show me what you would do? This is mainly applicable to NVQs but can appear on some certificates. It requires someone to observe and witness the demonstration and submit a short report which is signed by the learners and the observer.