The BIGGEST Exam Trick

This guide by **FutureLogic Education** explains how to structure answers based on command words and mark allocation in IGCSE Computer Science exams. Master this one skill and you will pick up marks on every single question.

The BIGGEST Exam Trick

Most students lose marks not because they lack knowledge — but because they do not match the amount they write to the number of marks available. Write too little and you miss marks. Write too much and you waste time. The trick is simple: **let the mark allocation tell you exactly how much to write.**

How Many Marks = How Much Writing

Marks	What is expected
	One clear, accurate point. No explanation needed.
2	Two distinct points, or one point with brief development.
	A developed explanation — what happens, why it happens, with relevant detail.
4	Two developed points each with explanation. Cover both sides if comparing.
	Multiple linked explanations with depth and breadth. Structure your answer clearly.

Teacher note: Display the marks guide permanently in your classroom. Before every exam question, train students to look at the mark allocation first — it removes the guesswork from answer length.

The Command Words

IDENTIFY

What it means:	Name something — one word or a short phrase.
Examiners want:	A short, direct answer only. No explanation.
Common mistake:	Students add unnecessary explanation, wasting time and gaining no extra marks.

✗ Bad answer	✓ Good answer
"A printer because it prints things onto paper."	"Laser printer."

EXAM TIP: IDENTIFY = just name it. If it says identify, don't explain.

Teacher note: Use this to show the cost of over-writing. Spending 3 sentences on a 1-mark identify question wastes time needed for higher-mark questions later in the paper.

STATE

What it means:	Give a fact only — no explanation needed.
Examiners want:	A short, accurate technical statement.
Common mistake:	Students write definitions that are too long, adding detail the question does not ask for.

✗ Bad answer	✓ Good answer
"RAM is memory that stores programs while the computer is running and it is temporary."	"RAM is volatile memory."

EXAM TIP: STATE = one short fact. Maximum one sentence.

Teacher note: Pair State with Explain questions in practice to reinforce the difference in depth. Students are often surprised how little is needed for a State question.

DESCRIBE

What it means:	Say what happens — give steps, features, or characteristics.
Examiners want:	A clear account of a process or feature, with enough detail to show understanding.
Common mistake:	Students give vague one-word answers, or confuse Describe with Explain by adding reasons.

✗ Bad answer	✓ Good answer
"Because it is faster."	"Packets are split into smaller sections and each packet is sent separately across the network."

EXAM TIP: DESCRIBE = what happens. Focus on the process, not the reason.

Teacher note: Encourage students to use sequencing words: first, then, next, finally. A step-by-step description almost always earns full marks on Describe questions.

EXPLAIN

What it means:	Give reason AND effect — say what happens and why.
Examiners want:	A linked technical statement showing cause and effect.
Common mistake:	Students state what happens but forget to give the reason — missing the most important mark.

✗ Bad answer	✓ Good answer
"It is better."	"SSDs are faster because they have no moving parts, therefore data can be accessed more quickly."

EXAM TIP: EXPLAIN = what happens + why. Always use: because, therefore, which means, so that.

Teacher note: Train students to spot the missing "because". Mark their answers and highlight every response that states without reasoning — this single habit is worth several marks per paper.

How Examiners Award Marks

✔ Examiners REWARD	✗ Examiners DO NOT reward
Technical vocabulary Developed explanations Accurate Cambridge terminology Direct, focused answers Cause and effect for Explain questions	Vague words like "better" or "faster" Repeating the question Waffle and filler sentences Answers with no technical terms One-word answers to Explain questions

Teacher note: Read the "DO NOT reward" column aloud in class. Students are often surprised that words like "better" and "faster" earn zero marks without qualification. It motivates them to add technical reasoning to every answer.

Common Student Mistakes

✗ Writing too much for 1-mark questions.
One clear point is all that is needed. Extra writing earns nothing and wastes time.

✗ Giving definitions instead of explanations.
Defining a term tells the examiner what something is — not how or why it works. Explain questions need both.

✗ Missing technical keywords.
Cambridge mark schemes are keyword-driven. Words like "volatile", "bandwidth", "packet" earn marks. Vague words do not.

✗ Repeating the question.
Restating the question in your answer adds nothing. Get straight to the point.

✗ Not developing answers.
Stopping after one sentence on a 3-mark question almost always loses marks. Develop every point.

FutureLogic Final Tips

✔ **Read the command word first.**
Before reading the rest of the question, identify the command word. It tells you exactly how to answer.

✔ **Match answer length to marks.**
Glance at the mark allocation before writing. It tells you how many points to make.

✔ **Use technical terminology.**
Cambridge rewards precise language. Learn the key terms for every topic.

✔ **Answer directly.**
Get to the point immediately. Do not warm up with vague introductions.

✔ **Do not overwrite simple questions.**
1-mark questions need 1 point. Spending time over-answering them costs marks elsewhere.

FutureLogic Exam Checklist

Before moving on to the next question:

■	Did I read the command word before answering?
■	Did I match my answer length to the marks available?
■	Did I use technical vocabulary?
■	Did I give enough separate points?
■	Did I include cause AND effect for any Explain question?
■	Did I answer directly without repeating the question?