

Data Interpretation & Short-Answer Technique

Two of your three assessment types in this course — and a big slice of every examination — are **data interpretation** and **short-answer** questions. They reward a method, not just knowledge. This guide gives you that method so you stop losing easy marks.

Read the directive verb first

Every question is built around a **directive verb** that tells you exactly what to do. Match your answer to it:

Verb	What the marker wants
State / Identify	A single fact or figure. One line. Don't explain.
Define	The precise meaning of a term. One or two sentences.
Calculate	Show the formula, substitute the numbers, give the answer with units.
Describe	The main features or the trend — what it looks like, no causes.
Explain	Cause and effect — <i>why</i> or <i>how</i> . Link your points with "because", "therefore", "which leads to".
Analyse	Break it into parts and show the relationships between them.
Evaluate / Discuss	Both sides, then a supported judgement.

The single most common reason for lost marks is answering the wrong verb — *explaining* when asked to *describe*, or *describing* when asked to *evaluate*. The verb is not decoration; it is the instruction.

The mark-allocation rule

The marks tell you how much to write. Treat each mark as roughly one distinct point or one step of reasoning.

- **1–2 marks:** a fact, a definition, or one cause-and-effect link.
- **3–4 marks:** two to three linked points, usually with a reason and a consequence.
- **5–6 marks:** a developed chain of reasoning, ideally with a diagram and/or data reference.

Reading a data set

When a table, graph or stimulus appears, work through it deliberately:

1. **Title and axes** — what is being measured, in what units, over what period?
2. **Trend** — is it rising, falling, steady, or volatile? Over what time frame?
3. **Turning points** — where does the direction change, and roughly when?
4. **Magnitude** — quote actual figures. "Exports rose from \$X to \$Y" beats "exports rose".

Always **quote a figure from the data** in a data-interpretation answer. Marks are reserved for candidates who use the stimulus, not those who answer from general knowledge while ignoring it.

A worked short-answer

Question (4 marks): "Explain how a rise in the terms of trade affects Australia's national income."

Strong answer: "A rise in the terms of trade means export prices have risen relative to import prices (*definition / link 1*). For a given volume of exports, Australia now earns more foreign income per unit sold (*link 2*). This raises national income and, through higher company profits and wages, lifts domestic spending (*link 3*). The effect is strongest for commodity exporters during a price boom (*application — 4th mark*)."

Notice: four linked statements for four marks, each adding one idea, connected by cause-and-effect language.

Quick self-check before you move on

- Did I answer the **verb** that was actually used?
- Did I make roughly **one point per mark**?
- For data questions, did I **quote a figure** and name the **trend**?
- Where useful, did I include a **labelled diagram**?

Method beats memory in these question types. Read the verb, budget by the marks, use the data, and link your reasoning. Do that consistently and the marks follow.