**Chapter 5: Command Verbs – Part 1 (Describe, Explain, Compare)**

***Summary***

**Reading Summary:**  
Command verbs guide how to answer tasks.

* *Describe* = give detailed facts
* *Explain* = give reasons
* *Compare* = show similarities and differences

**Key Skills:**

* Identifying command verbs
* Structuring responses correctly

**Mini Task:**  
Write one sentence for each verb using a Dutch product as your example.

***Classwork***

**Introduction**

In BTEC, every assignment brief includes a **command verb**—a word that tells you exactly how to respond. If you misunderstand the verb, you might write something good… but still lose marks. That’s why in this chapter is all about learning how to *describe*, *explain*, and *compare*—three of the most common verbs in Pass and Merit-level tasks.

These verbs shape your writing. They tell you whether to give facts, reasons, or comparisons. Once you master them, your assignments will be clearer, more focused, and more likely to hit the criteria.

**What Is a Command Verb?**

A **command verb** is the instruction in your assignment brief that tells you what kind of response is expected. It’s usually found in the task section, like:

“Describe the target audience.”  
“Explain the benefits of the product.”  
“Compare two Dutch snack brands.”

Each verb requires a different style of writing. Let’s break them down.

**1. Describe**

**Definition:**  
To describe means to give a detailed account of something. You focus on **facts, features, and characteristics**.

**What to include:**

* What it looks like
* What it includes
* How it works
* Key details and features

**Example Task:**  
“Describe the packaging of a Dutch snack product.”

**Strong Response:**  
“The packaging is made of recyclable cardboard, with bold red and yellow colours. It features the company logo in the top corner and includes nutritional information on the back.”

**Tips:**  
✅ Use adjectives and specific details  
✅ Avoid opinions or explanations  
❌ Do not say why—just say what

**2. Explain**

**Definition:**  
To explain means to give reasons or causes. You focus on **why something happens or why it matters**.

**What to include:**

* Cause and effect
* Reasons behind decisions
* How something works
* The impact or outcome

**Example Task:**  
“Explain why the product appeals to young consumers.”

**Strong Response:**  
“The product appeals to young consumers because it uses bright colours and modern fonts, which are associated with youth culture. It also includes QR codes that link to social media campaigns.”

**Tips:**  
✅ Use “because,” “so,” or “as a result”  
✅ Show connections between ideas  
❌ Do not just list features—say why they matter

**3. Compare**

**Definition:**  
To compare means to identify **similarities and differences** between two or more things.

**What to include:**

* What is the same
* What is different
* Examples to support your points
* A balanced view

**Example Task:**  
“Compare Tony’s Chocolonely and Lay’s in terms of branding.”

**Strong Response:**  
“Both brands use bold colours and eye-catching designs. However, Tony focuses on ethical messaging and storytelling, while Lay’s emphasises fun and flavour. Tony’s packaging includes mission statements, whereas Lay’s uses playful slogans.”

**Tips:**  
✅ Use phrases like “both,” “however,” “while,” “in contrast”  
✅ Be fair—do not just say one is better  
❌ Do not describe each one separately without linking them

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AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**Common Mistakes to Avoid**

| **Mistake** | **Why It’s a Problem** |
| --- | --- |
| Ignoring the command verb | You might write the wrong type of answer ❌ |
| Mixing up describe and explain | You lose focus and miss the criteria ❌ |
| Comparing without examples | Your points feel vague or unsupported ❌ |
| Writing opinions in a describe task | It becomes subjective instead of factual ❌ |

**Real-Life Scenario**

Imagine you are working on a BTEC Business assignment. The brief says:

“Compare two Dutch snack brands and explain how their packaging influences customer choice.”

A weak response might just describe each brand separately.  
A strong response would compare them directly and explain the impact of their design choices.

**Strong Example:**  
“Both brands use bright colours, but Tony’s Chocolonely includes ethical messages that appeal to socially conscious buyers, while Lay’s uses humour and flavour-based slogans to attract casual snackers. This influences customer choice by aligning with different values and lifestyles.”

| **Pass Command Words** | |
| --- | --- |
| **List** | Write a list of the main items (not sentences). |
| **State** | Point out or list the main features. |
| **Define** | To state the meaning of something using the correct terms. |
| **Identify** | Give all the basic facts which relate to a topic. |
| **Outline** | Write a clear description but without going into too much detail |
| **Demonstrate** | Show that you can do a particular activity or skill. |
| **Explain** | Make your point clear by providing sufficient detail. |
| **Describe** | Give a clear, straightforward description which includes all of the main points. |
| **Summarise** | Write down or articulate briefly the main points or essential features. |

**Reflection Questions**

* Which command verb do you find easiest to use?
* Have you ever misunderstood a task because of the verb?
* How can you check that your writing matches the verb’s purpose?
* What is one strategy you will use to improve your responses?

***Homework & Reading Tasks***

**Homework Task - (Peer Evaluation for Homework):**  
Choose a Dutch product (e.g. Philips, Lay’s, Chocomel) and complete the following:

1. **Describe** its packaging in 2–3 sentences.
2. **Explain** why the design might appeal to a specific audience.
3. **Compare** it with another product’s packaging—what is similar and what is different?

Use clear structure, specific examples, and correct command verb techniques.

You will do a peer evaluation for this task. You will show your finished work to a classmate of yours and get their feedback, and your classmate will take a look at your work and give you feedback. The teacher will give general and overall feedback to the whole class. **You are always welcome to show your work to the teacher in class and get on-the-spot feedback!**