EXAM MASTERY INTERNATIONAL · FREE RESOURCE FOR SCHOOLS

GCSE OCR GCSE Mathematics

Spec code: J560 · Command Word Guide & Grade Boundary Tracker

Grade Boundaries

Session	Max	9	8	7	6	5	4	3
Jun 2025 Higher	300	258	212	166	126	86	47	27
Jun 2024 Higher	300	245	195	145	110	76	42	25
Jun 2023 Higher	300	242	193	144	109	74	39	21
Jun 2024 Found (F)	300	—	—	—	—	180	131	93

OCR uses a 300-mark total (three 100-mark papers). Higher sits Papers 4, 5, 6; Foundation sits Papers 1, 2, 3. Paper 1 (Foundation) and Paper 4 (Higher) are non-calculator. Source: OCR published grade boundaries. Always verify at ocr.org.uk.

Command Word Mastery

Mark schemes attach specific meaning to each command word below. Misreading one of these costs marks that working had already earned.

Command Word	What It Demands	Common Student Error	Workshop Fix
Calculate	Use numbers given in the question to work out an answer. Show the substitution and any intermediate steps that the examiner can follow.	Giving a bare answer without the substitution line. If the answer is wrong and no method is shown, zero marks result.	Workshop standard: the substitution line is written before the calculator is touched. Peer review checks for it.
Show your working	OCR explicitly requires working to be visible. Unlike some boards, OCR mark schemes award working marks independently of the final answer.	Using a calculator silently and recording only the answer. OCR's mark scheme cannot award method marks it cannot see.	Students work in pairs: the reader cannot see the question — only the working — and must be able to reconstruct every step.
Explain	Give a mathematical reason or justification, not just a description of what was done.	"I subtracted" rather than "because the angles are supplementary, I subtracted 180 degrees from..." Full explanation needed.	Students draft explanations in full sentences; peer reviewers underline the mathematical reason and confirm it names the rule.
Sketch	Draw a diagram that shows the key features (intercepts, turning points, asymptotes) without precise plotting.	Plotting precise points on a sketch question, consuming time that earns no additional marks.	Timed sketch practice: 90 seconds maximum per sketch, with a checklist of required features to label.
Write down	No method required — the answer should be obtainable directly without extensive calculation.	Writing lengthy working for a write-down, then making an error in the working that contradicts the correct direct answer.	Students highlight "write down" before reading on. 30-second rule applies: if it takes longer, re-read the question.

Factorise fully	"Fully" means remove all common factors, not just one. A partial factorisation earns partial marks at most.	Factorising to 2(x + 3x) when the full factorisation is 2x(1 + 3). OCR mark schemes specify "fully factorised" as a condition for the final mark.	Checklist: after factorising, students expand their answer back and compare to the original. Non-match = not fully factorised.

How EMI uses this: OCR J560's examiner reports consistently flag working not shown as the leading cause of unnecessary mark loss. EMI workshops build the "write before you calculate" habit from session one — students learn that OCR rewards visible reasoning, and that a correct answer with no working is worth less than a partially correct answer with clear method.