



For A2 students, evaluation counts for between 30 and 35% of this summer's exams; for AS students it's 20–25%. In both cases it's a skill that's worth at least two grades. **Ian Marcoué** shows you how to get the marks

Learn the following six lessons to help you score all the evaluation marks in your exam.

Lesson 1: whose perspective?

In November, Tottenham Hotspur FC were at home to Liverpool. The Reds were much the better side for 80 minutes, but a couple of late goals gave Tottenham the three points. The managers were interviewed after the match. Roy Hodgson, for Liverpool, said that: 'We were well worth one point or even three; it's a crushing disappointment to lose so unluckily.' Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp spoke of his players' 'never-say-die attitude' and judged that they had 'deserved all three points'. Both were perfectly understandable evaluations of the same game. Either would have received good marks from an A-level examiner, especially if a student had pointed out the perspective from which the judgement was drawn, i.e. the potential for unconscious bias on the part of the two managers.

Lesson 1: judgement marks can be gained by assessing the motives of key people within a case study.

Lesson 2: opinion isn't evaluation

Evaluation is the ability to draw conclusions from evidence that show judgement and are supported by a logical argument. Most of us do this all the time. *The X Factor's* Simon Cowell has become rich based largely on this talent. He watches an act and then gives a verdict (a judgement) that he supports with — often crushing — argument, e.g. 'That was the worst version of a Beatles song I've ever heard... instead of Paul McCartney it sounded like foxes on heat.' We use the same skill when we watch the show and talk to friends about 'hot' or brilliant contestants.

Yet although you have the skill within you, it can be hard to translate it into marks and therefore grades. Simon Cowell is so highly regarded that he merely has to state an opinion ('I hate that outfit') and it is taken seriously. But no examiner will award marks for an opinion. For an opinion to become 'judgement' it needs a supporting argument that reflects the business or economic situation.

Lesson 2: to turn opinion into evaluation (and high marks), provide a relevant supporting argument.

Lesson 3: there's no 'right' answer

When Britain's new coalition government emerged from the May 2010 elections, its first action was to cut government spending, e.g. halting the school-building programme. It argued that Britain's debt level made this essential. The Labour opposition took a different view, saying that the cutbacks would damage the recovery from the 2009 recession. Cutting school building would cut

construction jobs and therefore affect the labour market. In this case, either side would have received full marks from an examiner (even though the individual examiner may have supported the coalition view).

Lesson 3: There is no 'right' answer to a judgemental question, so don't worry about what the examiner thinks. Make a judgement, supported by argument.

Lesson 4: be sure (even when you're not)

But what if you're not sure? An exam question may ask you to 'Discuss whether the government should have intervened to prevent Kraft taking over Cadbury'. You develop an argument for and an argument against this proposition and end up uncertain about your conclusions. At this point you might state that 'The question is finely balanced, with the case for and against tending to cancel each other out. Therefore I conclude that more evidence would be needed before a firm conclusion can be drawn'. I, the examiner, look at this and think: 'nicely written, but it's too all-purpose, i.e. it could have been memorised as 'my evaluation' — in which case I don't want to award it marks for judgement when it's simply memorised knowledge.'

Your judgement must be bound up in the circumstances of the specific business. It helps if you choose one side or the other in the debate; remember, as long as it's logical, the examiner will accept your argument. In answer to the above question, either of the following would have been fine:

For intervention

Although I doubt the value of the government intervening in every takeover bid, Cadbury is special. Its history in ethical business practices and its exceptional prospects as a UK manufacturer exporting to the growth markets of China and India make it a strategic powerhouse for the British economy and people. The government should have intervened.



Against intervention

The British love of Cadbury's Dairy Milk is hardly the basis for a shift in government policy. Britain encouraged the Tata Group to buy Jaguar Land Rover, so why should it reject the foreign purchase of another famous brand name. Sentiment can hardly be a factor in big industrial decisions such as this, so the government should not intervene.

Lesson 4: make a judgement and support it (in context), don't sit on the fence.

Lesson 5: decision making

The reason why evaluation is so important in business is because the key skill is decision making, and decisions are always about the future, not the past. Consequently, every decision is made in a situation of uncertainty, because no-one can know the future. Typically, decisions in business are based on:

- assumptions, any of which can be questioned
- forecasts, which may be undermined by inaccurate market research, distorted by an entrepreneur's over-optimistic personality, or prove incorrect because of changing external factors
- the tricky balance between quantitative vs qualitative evidence

The quality that Alan Sugar is constantly trying to tease out of his apprentices is good judgement in making decisions. Some decisions will be tactical, such as whether to take 2 hours planning a task or use those 2 hours for extra time making sales to customers. Others will be focused on longer-term strategy, such as whether to manufacture a high-quality, high-priced

product or a low-quality, low-priced one. Either way, each decision can be scrutinised to see whether it was sensible in the given situation.

Lesson 5: practising decision making is the key to developing good judgement.

Lesson 6: writing conclusions

Every answer to a question of 8+ marks should end with a conclusion. This should do three things:

- refer back to the specific question set ('I think they should launch this new product because...')
- make a clear judgement backed by relevant supporting argument...
- ...that stems from the strength of your own argument

But should you ever draw evaluative conclusions within the answer? Yes, but only in response to 15+ mark questions, such as an essay question. When writing an essay it is great practice to draw a conclusion at the end of every paragraph. For example, when you have written a lengthy paragraph featuring three factors in favour of something, it would be good to have a final sentence that explains that: 'In this business case my second factor is the most important because it addresses the underlying problem that the firm's main product has reached the decline phase of its life cycle.'

Lesson 6: when writing an essay, write a short conclusion to each (substantial) paragraph, then a much longer conclusion to the question as a whole.

Ian Marcousé spent 13 years as an A-level chief examiner, working for two major exam boards.

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