Answering Short Answer Questions in Exams

- Make clear and concise points
- Keep answers short: usually 2-3 sentences or a short paragraph.
- Even if you are unsure of the answer, write something! It’s better to get a few marks than nothing at all.
- If you don’t have enough time, list points or write in note form.
- It’s helpful to make notes before you answer the question.
- Read the question carefully at least two times and pay attention to the instruction words (e.g. list, describe, compare)
- Identify the parts of the question and what steps are required to answer the question.

Example:

**Question:**

There are two articles used in the English language. Identify them, define their purpose and explain briefly how they are used. Give examples. (8 marks)

This question has four parts which the four instruction words (identify, define, explain and give examples) make clear.

In order to get full marks (8) you would need to:

- Identify the two articles (i.e., name them)
- Define their purpose (i.e., say what an article does)
- Explain how they are used
- Give examples of each article in a sentence

**Sample answer:**

The two articles are the indefinite article “a” and the definite article “the”. Articles show whether the noun refers to something definite or indefinite. The definite article shows that the noun refers to a particular example of something, for example, She is in the garden. The indefinite article shows that the noun refers to something general or something which has not been referred to by the speaker, e.g. I’m thinking of getting a dog.