

AS-Level Cambridge CAIE Physics

Spec code: 9702 · Command Word Guide & Grade Boundary Tracker

Grade Boundaries

Combination	Max	A	B	C	D	E
S1 (Papers 11 + 21 + 31)	130	97	85	73	61	49

AS-Level Cambridge Physics is graded A to E only (no A*). S1 combination = Multiple Choice (Paper 1) + AS Level Structured Questions (Paper 2) + Advanced Practical Skills 1 (Paper 3). Source: Cambridge International published grade threshold table, November 2025 series. Always verify current thresholds at [cambridgeinternational.org](https://www.cambridgeinternational.org).

Command Word Mastery

Mark schemes attach specific meaning to each command word below. Misreading one of these costs marks that working had already earned. These conventions apply identically whether the paper is sat at AS or as part of the full A-Level.

Command Word	What It Demands	Common Student Error	Workshop Fix
Determine	Calculate a numerical answer with method shown, to the correct significant figures with correct units	Correct method and value but wrong significant figures, or missing units — both cost the final mark	Drill phase: every "Determine" answer checked against significant-figure and unit conventions
Explain	Give a reasoned account using physics principles — not just a restatement of the observation	Describing what happens without explaining why, in terms of the underlying physics	Anatomy phase: "Explain" answers deconstructed against required physics vocabulary
Suggest	Apply known physics to an unfamiliar context — more than one answer may be acceptable	Treating "Suggest" as requiring one "correct" textbook answer, second-guessing a valid response	Close phase: peer comparison shows multiple mark-scheme-acceptable approaches
Estimate	Use a sensible assumption and simple calculation for an order-of-magnitude answer	Refusing to make an assumption, or over-calculating with unnecessary precision	Open Forum: rapid "Estimate" drills building confidence in stating assumptions

How EMI uses this: Paper 3 (Advanced Practical Skills) is where AS Physics students lose marks fastest — not on understanding, but on the precise conventions Cambridge examiners require for tables, graphs and uncertainty. Every workshop drills this explicitly.