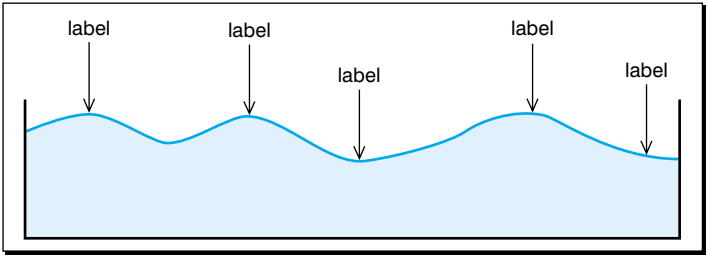
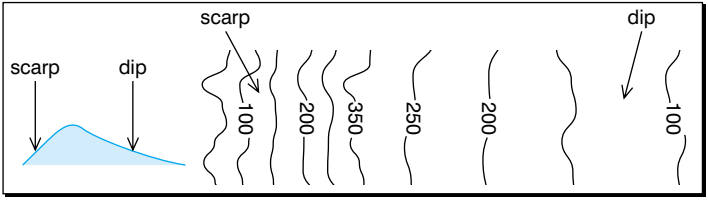
Reading OS Maps (1)

- Most GCSE geography examinations include work on Ordnance Survey maps. This may be an entire question or a piece of stimulus within a question testing a particular part of the syllabus. The scales used are mostly 1:25,000 or 1:50,000. The questions test basic map reading skills, as well as description and interpretation of maps.
- The basic map reading skills concern four and six-figure grid references, measurement of distance, compass directions and map symbols. The map usually has a key so there is no need to learn the symbols off by heart.
- Questions will often ask you to draw annotated sketch maps or cross-sections. Cross-sections are useful for showing relief or a particular physical feature. Remember that a sketch map is a view from above, whereas a cross-section is a view from the side. Label cross-sections using arrows over the surface:



- Use technical terms such as convex/concave, dip/scarp, etc. when describing slopes. Use the correct technical terms for landforms too, e.g. valley, plateau, steep-sided hill. The closer together the contours the steeper the slope. Try to recognise distinctive landforms by the pattern of their contours. For examples of this, see the reverse side of this card.



Recognising landforms using map contours

- Remember that you will be asked to **describe** a landscape. If the question is specific to map reading you will not be asked to **explain** how the landform came about; unless the map is part of a physical geography question.
- It is useful to memorise a series of checklists for answering map reading questions. This will help you to organise your answers and show the examiner that you can answer methodically.

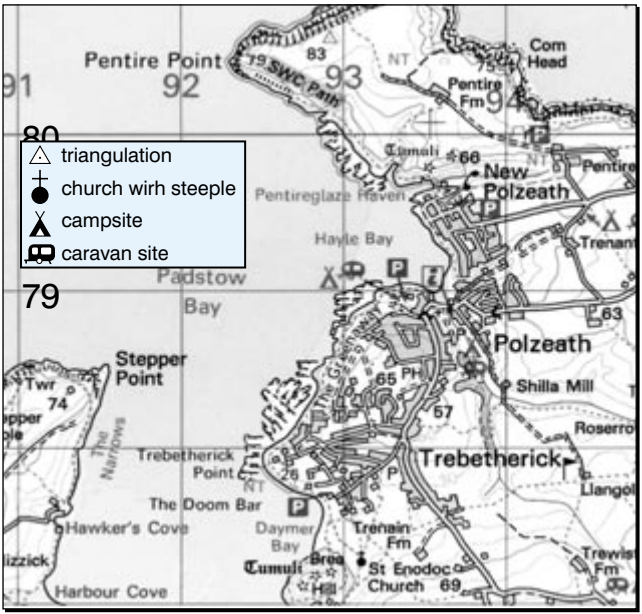
Description of relief
What is the highest point? What is the average height? What kind are slopes are present?

Description of drainage
(This is the pattern of rivers and surface streams.)
What are the main rivers? In which direction do they flow? Are there any major watersheds?

Description of coast
In which direction does the coast run? Is it smooth or irregular? Are there signs of erosion or deposition? Are there any beaches or sand dunes? Is there any evidence of coastal management?

Description of settlement
What is the general shape of the built-up area? Have any physical features influenced this shape? Have communications influenced the settlement's growth? Was the original site a wet-point or a dry-point? Can you recognise the CBD, the inner city and the suburban areas by the road pattern?

Reading OS maps (1–2)



1 Study the OS map extract. Imagine you were walking along the South West Coast path from 935797 north westwards to Pentire Point. Describe the countryside around you. (5)

2 Suggest three reasons why Daymer Bay in square 9277 might be a suitable place to take children. (3)

3 Describe the pattern of settlement inland from the coast. (2)

4 Suggest why a settlement grew up at the site of Polzeath. (4)

5 Describe and explain the layout of the combined settlements of Trebetherick, Polzeath and New Polzeath. (6)

SCORE

1 You would see a river inlet at the start. (1) Moving further north-west there are flat rocks to the west. (1) The path has a relatively steep slope (1) rising from 66 to 83 metres in just over a kilometre. (1) The headland at Pentire Point levels off. (1) The question allows you to describe both physical and human features.

2 It does not face open sea (1) so it may be more sheltered than other parts of the coast. (1) There is a large area of sand at low tide. (1) This question is more difficult because you are asked to interpret the map not just describe it.

3 The area is sparsely settled. (1) Settlement consists of a series of randomly spaced isolated farms and hamlets. (1) Remember, state general terms first, then specific points.

4 There is a source of fresh water from the stream (1) so it is a wet-point settlement. (1) It is at the head of Hayle Bay and therefore well sheltered. (1) The land around the bay is not too steep for building houses. The rest of the coast has steep cliffs. (1) You need to give a reason for each of the points you make.

5 The oldest part of the settlement appears to be Polzeath (1) which developed where the stream enters Hayle Bay (1). The settlement appears to have grown north (1) to New Polzeath and south (1) to Trebetherick. There has been ribbon development (1) along the roads especially in Trebetherick. New developments (1) appear to be present west of the road towards The Greenaway. Evidence for this is the more modern, geometric pattern of the roads. Remember to include both description and explanation in your answer. Use technical terms whenever possible.

TOTAL