

Report on the Examination

<p>NQF unit: 1.02 Introduction to Business Communication</p>
<p>Date of Examination: June 2015</p>
<p>Introduction/General comments: The paper allowed good candidates to display their abilities, but the usual difficulties showed themselves among weaker students: poor question selection, careless reading of the Q, and lack of detail in answers.</p>
<p>Question 1: In part (a), weak answers relied, as ever, on “it is fast” or “it is cheap” or “it is easy” without relating these claims to the Q. We were looking for candidates to distinguish between the particular characteristics of email, telephone, and letter, in order to consider their particular suitability for replying to a customer’s emailed complaint. The answer should always keep the scenario in mind.</p> <p>Part (b) saw a wide range of standards, with the best answers showing a thorough knowledge of their three chosen terms, while the weaker responses were limited in the detail they provided, or in many cases were, quite simply, wrong.</p>
<p>Question 2: The business letter tends to be done competently, although a small number of answers ignored the scenario and wrote a letter attempting to recruit staff, rather than clients. Here, attention to detail in tone as well as content was important. The best letters offered a service that was hard to resist, while the weakest were incorrect, untidy, and lacking in purpose.</p> <p>It is essential to re-read a letter once you have written it, putting yourself in the shoes of the receiver, in order to try and judge the effect your letter is going to have.</p>
<p>Question 3: There was frequent confusion between part (a) and part (b) in answers. Part (a) asked about preparation, so that anything to do with the delivery or content of the speech was not relevant. In part (b) we were looking for answers to show how a speech can be delivered in order to have maximum impact, so this was much more about the way a speaker interacts with the audience than it was about the layout of the venue.</p> <p>Answers that relied on the seven Cs or the PASS structure were rarely convincing, as they were hardly ever adapted to suit the Q.</p>
<p>Question 4: This was the most popular Q on the paper.</p> <p>The biggest issue with part (a) was the inability of almost every candidate to compose a memo heading using email addresses, a “cc” line and a subject line. Some memos were presented as letters, and many of the messages were unnecessarily long.</p> <p>Most candidates understood the advantages and disadvantages of communicating via a notice.</p> <p>In part (c), however, there were a surprising number of candidates – some of whom were clearly very good at this subject – who completely confused passive listening with active listening. It is a mistake for which there seems no good excuse.</p>
<p>Question 5: The differences of culture that we were offered almost always included language differences, along with differences in eating habits and dressing. This was fine, and there were other very acceptable examples; but not many students, once they had identified a difference, knew how to explain well how it can become a barrier to communication. The exception to this was language differences, which was normally explained clearly with a solution for overcoming that barrier.</p>

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As with Q4c, Q5 (b) saw a significant number of answers that failed to define “preconception” properly, and were even weaker on explaining how it can affect communication. As this is a term that should be very familiar to ABE students, there is no excuse for not knowing about it.

The third part of Q5, about the barrier of Time, saw many good responses about lateness, lack of time, time differences, and approaching someone at the wrong time.

Question 6: Pagers are less common nowadays than they used to be, but we did not expect to find such a substantial minority of students to be unaware of how they work. Some answers even suggested that they had something to do with turning the pages of books.

Students were more assured writing about skypeing, and understood why it is popular.

Among the potential threats to data on a computer, there remains confusion about what a virus does and what a hacker does. Students need to be clear about the differences, and also the different ways to protect data against these particular threats.

Question 7: This Q was generally well done. The benefits and drawbacks of an open plan office layout seem to be well understood.

In part (b) there was evidence of careless reading of the Q, since a number of answers dealt with soft copy storage rather than the hard copy storage that the Q specified. Such an answer was, therefore, almost always completely wrong.

The function of photocopiers is well known, but there was less assurance when attempting to describe the functions of an office scanner. Since the Q specified “office,” references to scanners at supermarket checkouts, and at airports, were irrelevant.

Question 8: The summary proved to be the least popular Q, yet it was often chosen by students who had no idea how to approach the task, and who simply copied large slabs of text from the passage with no attempt to adapt their information nor to set it out in the form of a report, with headings.

If students are going to attempt to write a summary they must be properly taught the skills – and everyone should know by now what these skills are. If they do not have the skills they would be well advised to avoid the task.

Conclusions:

Recommendations to students and tutors for future examinations: To students, we say: choose your four questions with care. Do not try to answer a Q that you don’t understand. Take your time to read it so that you know what is wanted. Give examples in your answers, and be prepared to develop your points so that your understanding is made clear.

Tutors should focus some of their teaching time on exam technique as well as on an understanding of the syllabus. Students who fail the exam often do so because they have made an unwise question choice; or because they have written answers that are short, superficial, or irrelevant.



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