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# **Introduction to Business Communication**

**NQF**

## **Subject Examiner's Report**

**Unit Title:** Introduction to Business Communication...

**Unit Code:** NQF IBC...

**QCF Level:** NQF...

**Session:** December 2015

## Question 1

- (a) Your manager has invited you to take part in a task that requires co-operation with other colleagues. Describe five ways in which people can show that they are willing to cooperate with each other in a face-to-face situation. **(10 marks)**
- (b) The relationship between people can affect how they communicate with each other. Describe how communication can change, depending on whether you are the superior or the junior of the other person. **(10 marks)**
- (c) Describe what is meant by the term 'horizontal communication'. Give an example of the type of message that can be passed in this way. **(5 marks)**

### 1. Comments on learners' performance

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Parts (a) and (c) of this question were generally answered well. Many candidates were able to identify several ways that people could show their willingness to co-operate with others, but all too often there was a lack of development of these points. Most candidates concentrated on 'positive' ways such as 'nodding' or 'listening attentively'; relatively few candidates considered the 'negative' ways such as 'avoiding confrontational language' or 'not seeking to dominate the discussion'.

In part (c), candidates were generally well able to *describe* what is meant by 'horizontal communication' but the supporting example often failed to evidence the definition given: thus, one might read an example that inaccurately linked a manager with a clerk.

Part (b) posed more difficulties and there were many below average responses that failed to address the question. Rather, there was a concentration on criticizing what was perceived as the dominating or bullying role of a superior. Again, too many candidates made only a very limited number of points and then tended to ramble on with a largely irrelevant 'development' or example.

### 2. Mark scheme

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#### Question 1

- (a) 1 mark per behaviour, + 1 mark for good elaboration. Answers which merely list correct behaviours with no elaboration = max 6. The minimum number of behaviours needed to obtain 10 marks is five; there is no upper limit on how many may be offered. Accept all reasonable answers, even if not included in the model answer.
- (b) 1 mark per point + 1 mark for good elaboration. The Q is worded in a way that can accept a variety of answers. Do not accept repetition or opposites. Good elaboration may be more elusive than in Q1a, so allow up to 8 for a list of undeveloped points. Answers that deal only with being a senior OR a junior, also max 8. Accept all reasonable answers, even if not included in the model answer. Be alert to, and be prepared to accept, cultural differences.
- (c) 1 mark per point as follows: different departments.; same rank; specific example of a job title for sender; specific example of a job title for receiver; specific example of message content.

### 3. Recommendations

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Tutors should remind candidates that question wording such as 'Describe five ways ...' when the question is worth ten marks implies that equal weight is being given to the development/elaboration of the points. Candidates should, as a matter of course, be encouraged to justify what they say and write. This 'good practice' will stand them in good stead when required to provide evidence and examples in their exam responses.

#### Examiner's tips

Make your point – then justify it.

## Question 2

- (a) You have been asked to draw up a formal written report. State the main headings that you will use when you write the report, and describe briefly the information you will include under each heading. **(5 marks)**
- (b) You are composing a curriculum vitae (CV) (also known as a résumé). Describe what steps you will take to ensure that it is presented in the most effective way. **(10 marks)**
- (c) Your company sells clothes, and the directors have decided to have a sale. Design a flyer that can be handed out in the street, advertising the sale to local people. **(10 marks)**

### 1. Comments on learners' performance

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It was encouraging to note that relatively few candidates fell into the time-consuming trap of writing full length reports (a) or CVs (b). Many candidates accurately identified a number of relevant headings for the report, but all too often the 'brief descriptions' that were meant to follow were either non-existent or added nothing to the heading itself. The two weakest elements concerned 'The Brief' (as opposed to 'Subject') and 'Procedure' (very rarely addressed).

In part (b), too many candidates concentrated on the *content* of a CV and failed to gain marks for the *presentation* aspect of the question.

Part (c), the flyer, elicited many similar responses that gained marks towards the higher end of the spectrum. Some weaker candidates, perhaps mindful of what had gone before in parts (a) and (b), presented a list of points rather than an acceptable design. It was noticeable that some candidates failed to appreciate that points such as 'variety of text size' or 'sense of colour' could easily have been evidenced in their responses.

### 2. Mark scheme

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(a) Accept any five of the seven headings in the model answer, as long as each heading is correctly elaborated. Treat To/From/Date as a single heading. Up to four correct headings without elaboration = 1 mark; five or six correct headings without elaboration = 2 marks.

(b) 1 mark per point. Accept elaborations in terms of how or why a certain step is taken. Be aware that some candidates might answer the Q by presenting their full CV. This was not asked for, but should be marked according to the mark scheme. The Presentation/Content split is for ease of marking; answers are not likely to be presented in that way.

- **Presentation:** typed; neat/clean; use of headings; white space; margins; easy to follow; bold or underlining of headings; indented text; free of errors.
- **Content:** logical sequence; up to two examples of headings OR examples of the details that would appear; stressing achievements/skills.

(c) Mark the flyer out of 10 on the basis of how likely you are to be attracted to the sale. Flyers that are not fit for purpose, either because they are written as a paragraph, or otherwise have no sense of selling, or have omitted place or time/date or name of company, should score max 4. Content to look for includes: 1) eye-catching immediacy; 2) variety of text size; 3) use of colour; 4) use of exclamation marks or question marks; 5) illustrations; 6) use of space; 7) sense of exclusivity; 8) sense of limited opportunity; 9) name of store; 10) location of store; 11) date of sale (or "today").

### 3. Recommendations

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Tutors should stress the need to read the whole question. The opening statement in both parts of this question served to establish contexts but did not contain the specific instructions for the tasks. Candidates who failed to heed this might well have penalised themselves by unnecessarily writing full reports and/or CVs.

#### Examiner's tips

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Remember that **CONTENT** is not the same as **PRESENTATION**.  
If asked to **DESIGN** something, make it look **ATTRACTIVE** and **FIT FOR PURPOSE**.

### Question 3

- (a) When answering the telephone to an unhappy customer, describe the steps you can take in order to achieve a satisfactory outcome to the call, both for your firm and for the customer. **(10 marks)**
- (b) Explain how the use of inappropriate non-verbal signals (body language) can hinder face-to-face communication. **(15 marks)**

#### 1. Comments on learners' performance

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Part (a) elicited a good number of above average responses in terms of basic points made, although the rationale informing the same (development) was rarely a feature in the answers. Candidates should be encouraged to give more thought as to why a particular action (such as 'listening carefully to the complaint') might help towards a mutually satisfactory outcome. Much the same observations could be made for (b) in terms of lack of development/elaboration but here the enumeration of relevant points was decidedly weaker, and few candidates ventured much further than the more obvious 'looking out of the window' or 'putting my hands in my pockets'. Given that candidates are constantly engaged in making decisions and drawing conclusions based on their interpretation of non-verbal signals given off by others, it is perhaps surprising how few can articulate these to their advantage in an exam situation.

#### 2. Mark scheme

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(a) 1 mark for introductory details (e.g. name, company, etc.); then 1 mark per point + 1 mark for elaborations. Look for references to: tone of voice; listening skills; building rapport/empathy; efficiency; customer care. Other good details should be credited.

All 10 marks may be gained without reference to the manager. However, some answers may pass the customer over to the manager before trying all avenues to resolve it, so only a max of 2 marks is available for the section bringing the manager into the answer.

(b) 1 mark per correct point, + 1 or 2 for development. The Q allows students to use as many examples as they choose; however, a minimum of five are needed to score maximum marks. Don't allow more than five undeveloped points; don't credit repetition. Answers may freely deal with either the sender or the receiver of a message, or both. Be alert to possible cultural interpretations of body language.

#### 3. Recommendations

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Tutors should make their students aware of the fact that the word 'steps' in a question implies a chronological/sequential approach will work to the advantage of candidates. They will better organise their thoughts and structure the answer. The candidates can then profitably spend time considering WHY a particular action (step) is recommended, ie its effects and consequences.

#### Examiner's tips

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Take one STEP at a time.  
Use EXAMPLES to EXPLAIN.

## Question 4

- (a) A speaker, while giving a talk to an audience of students, uses many jargon terms. Describe two potential problems with the use of jargon and describe one potential benefit of the use of jargon. **(5 marks)**
- (b) Incomplete information is a common barrier to communication, both in oral and written form. State five reasons why a message may be sent or received incomplete. **(5 marks)**
- (c) Briefly describe two examples of how the use of inappropriate channels or media can be a barrier to communication. **(5 marks)**
- (d) Identify three different types of psychological noise and, in each case, state how that particular barrier to communication may be overcome. **(10 marks)**

### 1. Comments on learners' performance

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This question consisted of 4 tasks, the first 2 of which were generally answered successfully. The same could not be said of parts (c) and (d) which accounted for more than 50% of the available marks. It may well be that candidates were 'seduced' into attempting the question by a cursory reading, believing mistakenly in their ability to address all parts with equal success, only to discover too late that this was not the case.

Most students were familiar with the problems that using jargon can cause; potential benefits were harder to come by, the most common being that it might encourage students to research the terms, thereby educating themselves.

Part (b) saw a good many lists of basic reasons for 'incomplete' messages; perhaps not surprisingly, barriers to forms of oral communication outnumbered those listed for written communication.

Part (c) saw very few accurate responses. A channel was usually identified, perhaps not always intentionally, but the concept of 'inappropriateness' proved a step too far for most candidates. The idea of something being 'lost' or 'damaged' appeared quite frequently, but the vital point about the sender's original choice of channel being unsuitable in context (eg firing a long serving employee by text message) appeared in very few responses.

The paucity of good answers for (d) suggests either that candidates began the question 'blind' to the demands of this part or were hindered by their failure to comprehend the difference between 'psychological noise' and the more prosaic 'physical noise'. The former is a common term in communication parlance and it is difficult to sympathise with students who are ignorant of its meaning.

### 2. Mark scheme

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- (a) 1 mark per drawback to a max of four. 2 marks for identifying a benefit. Max for Q is 5.
- (b) 1 mark per reason. Both oral & written must be included, or max is 3. Answer may deal with sender or receiver or both.
- (c) 1 mark for knowing the difference between channel & medium. Then 1 mark for identifying a situation + 1 for good development. Either or both of oral & written channels are acceptable.
- (d) 1 mark for any three correct examples of psychological noise. The remaining 2 marks per example should be awarded only for examples that are sufficiently different. Accept answers which state how a particular barrier affects communication, as long as the answer offers a solution. The tenth mark can be awarded anywhere for a particularly detailed response. Examples beyond those in the model answer include: reading a book; being ready to finish work; having family problems; etc.

### 3. Recommendations

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Tutors could profitably remind candidates that when a question consists of several parts, they should be confident of answering all tasks. It is imperative that students are familiar with fundamental terms such as 'psychological noise'.

#### Examiner's tips

Learn the differences between the various NOISES that can act as barriers to communication.

## Question 5

- (a) Explain the differences between ‘teleconferencing’ and ‘telecommuting’. State one advantage and one disadvantage of each. **(10 marks)**
- (b) Explain how a LAN helps business communication. **(10 marks)**
- (c) Describe the process of creating a new spreadsheet on a computer. **(5 marks)**

### 1. Comments on learners’ performance

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Relatively few candidates selected this question with its emphasis on the role of technology in communications. In part (a), explaining the differences between ‘teleconferencing’ and ‘telecommuting’ left no room for guesswork and, inevitably, some candidates demonstrated little or no understanding of the second term. This precluded them from fully considering the all important differences and from giving appropriate advantages and disadvantages.

Part (b) was significantly more successful in eliciting good basic descriptions of a LAN (worth 3 marks) together with acceptable examples of how a LAN can help business communications.

On paper, part (c) appeared to be a straightforward task that ideally required a chronological approach. Suffice it to say, it was not the method selected by all candidates. All too often, the sequencing was either muddled or omitted steps in the process. Put bluntly, if the candidate was not used to creating spreadsheets as a matter of course, this question was probably best avoided.

### 2. Mark scheme

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(a) Award 1 mark per point up to 3 each for a correct description. If videoconferencing is described, max is 1 out of 3 for that part. Then up to 2 marks each for one advantage and one disadvantage. Don’t accept repetition (e.g. it saves time/money). If the two terms are confused, the (dis)advantage marks can still be gained.

(b) 1 mark per point. Max 3 for a description of what a LAN is (see first sentence of model answer). The focus of the Q is on its advantages for business, and all ten marks could theoretically be gained without actually defining LAN. Good elaboration may be credited.

(c) 1 mark for any five of these six points: Excel or other named software; click File (word not icon); where it is on the screen; drop down menu; click New; click document icon.

### 3. Recommendations

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Tutors should remind students that in a question giving equal weighting to two specific terms, they should be confident of addressing **BOTH** when selecting the question; no additional credit is awarded for an answer that concentrates on one term to the detriment of the other. Candidates who use computers as a matter of course might well give little thought to a series of actions that they perform on a regular basis. Tutors could profitably remind students of these steps on occasion and not assume that what comes naturally will automatically be straightforward to describe.

#### Examiner’s tips

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**DON’T** choose a question unless you are familiar with **ALL** of the **TERMS** used therein.

**TALK** through the **STEPS** you are taking to perform a task on a computer.

## Question 6

- (a) Your manager has asked you to set up a room for a panel of three people who will be conducting interviews. Describe five actions you will take, giving a reason for each of them. **(10 marks)**
- (b) Explain the steps that a manager can take to maintain good working relationships in an office, and to keep staff motivated. **(15 marks)**

### 1. Comments on learners' performance

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A very popular question and one that most candidates handled with commendable expertise. Candidates took it upon themselves to complete a wide range of tasks, everything from physically cleaning the room (unlikely) to setting out furniture, refreshments, stationery and equipment etc. The more thoughtful responses included removing possible distractions and displaying 'Do not disturb' signs. Interestingly, very few candidates deemed it necessary to ensure that a clock was in situ. Candidates who failed to maximize the marks here were probably guilty of failing to develop their answers in terms of explaining *why* their actions might enhance the interview experience for the participants.

Part (b) posed relatively few problems for candidates but again a lack of development penalized those who merely listed possible steps; in such cases, a maximum of 6 out of 15 marks could be awarded – a costly reminder that the word 'Explain' in the question implies that some elaboration is expected.

### 2. Mark scheme

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(a) 1 mark per action + 1 mark per good reason. Don't accept repetition.

(b) 1 mark per good suggestion, + up to 2 for elaboration, depending on detail. Minimum number of steps to gain fifteen marks is five. If only the steps are offered without development, max is 6.

### 3. Recommendations

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Not for the first time, we have a question in which the wording implies that development/elaboration is required in order to maximise the marks. Tutors should not allow students to merely enumerate actions or steps; rather they should insist that students justify taking a particular step and consider the implications for others.

#### Examiner's tips

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WHY are you doing something? WHAT are you hoping to achieve? HOW will you measure its effectiveness?

## Question 7

Explain the meaning of **any five** of the following terms:

- (i) Arbitration
- (ii) Bcc
- (iii) Chronological order
- (iv) EGM
- (v) Logo
- (vi) Paralanguage
- (vii) Peripheral device

**(25 marks)**

### 1. Comments on learners' performance

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So few candidates attempted this question that it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions except perhaps to surmise that candidates did not believe they had sufficient understanding of the terms to do themselves justice. Suffice it to say that the terms selected were usually explained to an acceptable standard.

### 2. Mark scheme

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Mark the first five answers only. Mark each of them according to these criteria:

- 5 – complete understanding, confident, thorough, accurate; tells me all I need to know;
- 4 – understands the term, though explanation is not complete;
- 3 – good understanding, but definitely incomplete;
- 2 – incomplete with some confusion;
- 1 – mostly confused, very limited awareness;
- 0 – completely wrong.

### 3. Recommendations

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Tutors should remind students to obey the rubric of a given question. If it asks for FIVE explanations, only FIVE answers will be accepted. Candidates merely penalise themselves timewise by ignoring a clear instruction. Like any academic discipline, Business Communication has its own specific and precise terminology and it behoves candidates to familiarise themselves with the relevant vocabulary. Tutors should use the appropriate terms in context at every opportunity. .

#### Examiner's tips

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**KNOW** your LIMIT!  
**LEARN** the LANGUAGE of the subject  
you are studying.



## Question 8

You are a secretary in a small company, and you come back from lunch one day to find the following message left on your voicemail.

Summarise this message and present all the important points in a properly-headed memo for your manager. The body of your message must be completed in a maximum of 80 words. **(25 marks)**

*“Good afternoon. Hello? Sorry, this line is bad. I think I heard you say on your answering machine that you are the secretary of Orlix Company. Good afternoon. It’s ten past one, so I’m guessing that you’re out at lunch. I’m sorry that I’ve missed you, but maybe you can help me. I’m calling from a company called Spamoval. Sounds a bit suspicious, doesn’t it? It’s meant to stand for “Spam Removal,” but I’m not the owner, so I didn’t create the company’s name. No, I’m the Regional Sales Manager, and I promise you, we’re a totally reputable company. We’ve been in business for five years in the capital, but we’re new in this area, so I’ll be frank with you, I’m trying to expand our business. Here’s what we do. We refurbish old computers. All types of computers - PCs, Macs, notebooks, netbooks, desktops, laptops, it doesn’t matter. If any of your computers are running slow, we can fix them. If any of your computers have a virus, we can get rid of it. No need to spend money on a new machine, eh? We can save you hundreds of pula. Just one hour’s work from us, and your computer’s as good as new. Guaranteed. Oh, I should have said before - my name is Jonny Kappa, that’s J-O-N-N-Y new word K-A-P-P-A. And the name of the company again is Spamoval. What I’d like to do, if you can help me, is to make an appointment with your manager so that I can visit Orlix and show you – with no obligation - all the things we can do for you. I only need half an hour of his time, or her time, and I promise you it’ll be worth your while. We have a special introductory offer for new customers – we’ll fix any one of your computers that has a problem totally free of charge, so that you can see for yourself the quality of our work, and the confidence we have in our engineers. I’m available all day next Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, if any of them are convenient. Can you get back to me today, please? My number is 09988776665. Thanks. Look forward to hearing from you. Bye.”*  
(371 words)

### 1. Comments on learners’ performance

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A long passage from which most candidates were able to sift the relevant information for their memos. The instruction to write a maximum of 80 words was occasionally ignored and some weaker candidates incorrectly wrote as Jonny Kappa throughout. The name of the Company was sometimes given as ‘Spam Removal’ rather than as the correct ‘Spamoval’, and the introductory offer to fix ONE computer ‘free of charge’ was quite frequently misinterpreted. By far the most disappointing feature was the inability to set out a memo accurately: the word ‘Memo’ rarely appeared as a heading, and ‘To’/‘From’ and a relevant date were frequently omitted. On a more positive note, it was pleasing to see that most candidates were well able to couch their responses in an appropriate tone for a memo.

### 2. Mark scheme

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**A:** Up to **5 marks** for memo heading: to (name); from (name) {if two titles are given, e.g. Manager/Secretary, award 1 mark; if Jonny Kappa is the sender, accept it here}; date; sensible short subject (max 6 words); proper layout. No memo heading means zero marks for this section.

**B:** Up to **12 marks** for content: time of call; caller’s name (must be correctly spelt); correct name of company; regional sales rep; what the company does; his offer; further specific detail; he’d like an appointment; brief OR for half an hour; the three named days; his correct phone number; would like a response today.

If caller’s name or company name or phone number are omitted or wrong, or if the answer contains a lot of copied material, max for this section is **5**. An answer that is almost entirely copied should score no more than **3**.

Count **ONLY** the first 80 words of the body, award no marks beyond that limit. Mark the 80<sup>th</sup> word with a double diagonal line. Most of the key details appear towards the end of the passage, and good candidates will recognise that. Accept correct abbreviations, if used.

**C:** Up to **8 marks** for style, focusing on the body of the memo. In this section, treat all details (name, co, phone no.) as if they are correct:

**0** - fell into all the traps; a rehash of the passage with no sense of the task.

**1-2** - Confusing. Does not fulfil the task. Manager will be bamboozled. (Fail) If the writer is Jonny Kappa instead of the secretary, this is the max style mark.

**3-4** - some originality, but inappropriate tone, includes irrelevancies, incomplete details. Manager may have to seek clarification. (Pass)

**5-6** – appropriate tone, almost no unnecessary details. Message easy to follow, and Manager will be clear about what to do. (Credit)

**7-8** - succinct, confident, well presented, avoids all irrelevancies. Task fulfilled. (Distinction)

Note the 3 separate marks as A+B+C.

### 3. Recommendations

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Knowing HOW to set out a formal or informal written communication is not a difficult skill to acquire; there are innumerable guides available and good examples should be studied and absorbed as a matter of course, not least because students should carry forward the knowledge gained as an important lifeskill. All too often the basics appear not to have been taught. Addresses in business letters appear in the wrong places, email addresses are omitted, 'Dear Sir' is followed by 'Yours sincerely' etc, etc. Not only will such errors and omissions penalise candidates in an exam, they may well prove disadvantageous in their personal and professional lives. The skills involved will always feature in these exam papers and tutors should prepare their students accordingly.

#### Examiner's tips

LEARN how to SET OUT written communications. Failing to do so may cost you more than just a good exam grade!