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# Examiners' Report

## NEBOSH NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

### UNIT C: WORKPLACE AND WORK EQUIPMENT

**JULY 2019**

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# Introduction

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NEBOSH (The National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health) was formed in 1979 as an independent examining board and awarding body with charitable status. We offer a comprehensive range of globally-recognised, vocationally-related qualifications designed to meet the health, safety, environmental and risk management needs of all places of work in both the private and public sectors.

Courses leading to NEBOSH qualifications attract around 50,000 learners annually and are offered by over 600 Learning Partners, with examinations taken in over 120 countries around the world. Our qualifications are recognised by the relevant professional membership bodies including the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (IIRSM).

NEBOSH is an awarding body that applies best practice setting, assessment and marking and applies to Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Accreditation regulatory requirements.

This report provides guidance for learners and Learning Partners for use in preparation for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content and the application of assessment criteria.

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Any enquiries about this report publication should be addressed to:

NEBOSH  
Dominus Way  
Meridian Business Park  
Leicester  
LE19 1QW

tel: 0116 263 4700  
fax: 0116 282 4000  
email: [info@nebosh.org.uk](mailto:info@nebosh.org.uk)

## General comments

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Many learners are well prepared for this unit assessment and provide comprehensive and relevant answers in response to the demands of the question paper. This includes the ability to demonstrate understanding of knowledge by applying it to workplace situations.

There are other learners, however, who appear to be unprepared for the unit assessment and who show both a lack of knowledge of the syllabus content and a lack of understanding of how key concepts should be applied to workplace situations, which is an essential requirement at Diploma level.

This report has been prepared to provide feedback on the standard date examination sitting in July 2019.

Feedback is presented in these key areas: responses to questions, examination technique and command words and is designed to assist learners and Learning Partners prepare for future assessments in this unit.

Learners and Learning Partners will also benefit from use of the 'Guide to the NEBOSH National Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety' which is available via the NEBOSH website. In particular, the guide sets out in detail the syllabus content for Unit C and tutor reference documents for each Element.

Additional guidance on command words is provided in 'Guidance on command words used in learning outcomes and question papers' which is also available via the NEBOSH website.

## Unit C

### Workplace and work equipment

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**Question 1**      **Outline** what should be considered when planning a fire evacuation procedure for a multi-storey office building. **(10)**

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This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 3.6: Explain the purpose of, and essential requirements for, emergency evacuation procedures.

There were many good answers to this question with those learners who focused purely on the evacuation procedures achieving the higher marks.

Some learners included topics such as fire alarm systems, fire extinguishers, building construction and emergency lighting which would be valid for a wider fire risk assessment question, but were not required here and hence did not gain marks.

Topics that were expected to be covered included: action to be taken on hearing the alarm and consideration of vulnerable persons. Few learners mentioned security considerations such as door marshals which was also worthy of marks.

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**Question 2**      An assessment under the Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 2002 is being carried out for the use of a flammable solvent.

(a)      **Outline TWO zone classifications** for explosive atmospheres with a flammable solvent in air. **(4)**

(b)      **Outline control measures** to help reduce the risk of an explosion with a flammable solvent in air. **(6)**

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This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 4.2: Outline the main principles of the safe storage, handling and transport of dangerous substances; and 4.3: Outline the main principles of the design and use of electrical systems and equipment in adverse or hazardous environments.

For part (a) only a few learners gave a correct outline of the zone classifications, many had difficulty matching the zone numbers to the appropriate definition.

For part (b) learners gave better answers based on control measures with which they were familiar. Topics should have included measures to prevent a flammable atmosphere forming and the exclusion of sources of ignition. Inspection and maintenance was valid but rarely mentioned.

Learners found this question challenging with a wide spread of marks suggesting that, while there were some who were familiar with the topic, there were many who were not.

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**Question 3** A scaffolder is lowering scaffold poles from the third floor of a scaffold tower to a colleague below using a pulley wheel and rope. Next to the scaffold tower there is a shop entrance. The scaffolder on the ground floor places the scaffold poles horizontally onto the back of a vehicle parked on a busy road. The scaffolders have already received information, instruction, training and suitable supervision.

**Outline** additional control measures that could help reduce the risk of injury to those who may be affected by this activity. **(10)**

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This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 9.3: Explain the appropriate site control measures that should be adopted to protect employees and others during construction work; and 9.4: Outline the hazards and control measures associated with working at height from fixed work or temporary platforms.

For the given scenario learners were told that information, instruction, training and supervision had already been given, but many learners chose to include these topics in their answers. Areas that gained marks included control measures regarding traffic movement, prevention of falls and falling objects and consideration of adverse weather.

Learners who structured their answers into the above topics gained higher marks. Those who limited their answers to working at height were unable to gain the full marks available.

Answers to this question were reasonable with most learners gaining good marks.

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**Question 4** During a construction project, a number of different types of crane will be necessary to carry out mechanical lifting operations.

**Outline** what should be considered when selecting cranes that are suitable for the required lifting operations. **(10)**

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This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 7.2: Outline the main hazards and control measures associated with lifting equipment.

Marks achieved by learners for this question were on the whole quite reasonable. The question focused on assessing learners' knowledge and understanding of the capabilities of various types of cranes that may be available and how to select the most appropriate. Consideration should have been given to frequency of use, the reach and load capabilities of the crane, and site conditions such as space.

Some learners wrote about inspection and test under LOLER and aspects of CDM, which may have been relevant to the whole site operation but were not asked for here.

It may benefit some learners to witness these operations in a live, working environment in order to increase practical experience and supplement theoretical knowledge.

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**Question 5** A lone worker is using a pallet truck to move pallets of frozen food products in a low temperature store. The temperature of the store is controlled at -5° Celsius.

**Outline** control measures to help the worker escape if they are accidentally locked into this low temperature store. (10)

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This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1.5: Explain the hazards, risks and controls for lone working.

This question appeared challenging with learners generally not achieving high marks. Most learners appeared to have difficulty staying on the point of the question which was on 'escape if locked in'. Many mentioned heating up the cold store, perhaps by switching off the cooling (not understanding how long it would take to warm up), propping the door open and the use of warm clothing or PPE.

Better answers included communication systems and instructions to operators about actions if trapped. Few answers included maintenance and inspection of door opening mechanisms at regular intervals.

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**Question 6** A dental surgery uses a small steam steriliser to disinfect dental instruments. The steriliser is labelled with a CE mark, and has a written record with it in the form of a logbook.

(a) **Outline** why the steriliser would be considered a pressure system. (3)

(b) **Outline** the purpose of the CE mark. (2)

(c) **Outline** what records need to be contained in the logbook. (5)

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This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 5.5: Outline the maintenance and prevention strategies when working with pressure systems; and 6.1: Outline the principles of safety integration and the considerations required in a general workplace machinery risk assessment.

For part (a) the learner was expected to outline reasons for the system being a pressure vessel based on the definition given in the Pressure Systems Safety Regulations 2000. Those familiar with the definitions gave better answers.

Part (b) required learners to understand the purpose of the EU directive aimed at the free movement of products in the EU. Most learners had difficulty with this part of the question.

Part (c) asked for what would be typically recorded in the logbook with the system. This is effectively a record of what has taken place with the system since its installation and should include records of service, modification and examination. Many learners mistook this for the declaration of conformity supplied before installation and had difficulty gaining higher marks.

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<b>Question 7</b>	(a) <b>Outline</b> conditions that must be present for a <i>primary</i> dust explosion to occur.	<b>(5)</b>
	(b) <b>Outline</b> additional conditions necessary for <i>secondary</i> dust explosions to occur.	<b>(5)</b>
	(c) <b>Outline</b> design features that would minimise the risk of a dust explosion.	<b>(10)</b>

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This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 2.1: Outline the properties of flammable and explosive materials and the mechanisms by which they ignite; and 2.3: Outline the main principles and practices of prevention and protection against fire and explosion.

For part (a) answers based on the explosion pentagon gained the higher marks. Many learners were able to give good responses to this part of the question.

In part (b) learners were asked to consider the secondary explosion and, while there were a number of good responses, there were some learners who had difficulty outlining where the source of ignition might come from.

Most marks were available for part (c) where control measures based on design features were sought. An outline of the use of LEV, design of plant to withstand explosion and the use of explosion-protected equipment would have gained marks. The majority of learners were able to offer at least some of these points. The use of systems of work, maintenance procedures, housekeeping and PPE were offered by some learners, but these are not classed as design features, which was what the question asked for.

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<b>Question 8</b>	Telescopic materials handlers are commonly used for <i>off-road</i> applications in the agricultural, quarrying and construction industries.	
	(a) <b>Identify</b> <i>specific</i> hazards associated with telescopic materials handlers.	<b>(6)</b>
	(b) <b>Outline</b> characteristics of a <i>safe site</i> for telescopic materials handlers.	<b>(7)</b>
	(c) <b>Outline</b> characteristics of a <i>safe vehicle</i> for telescopic materials handlers.	<b>(7)</b>

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This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 10.1: Outline the factors to be considered in a workplace transport risk assessment and the controls available for managing workplace transport risk; and 7.1: Outline the main hazards and control measures associated with mobile work equipment.

Answers to this question often gained high marks.

Specific hazards for telescopic materials handlers might include visibility issues due to the boom, trapping between the boom and body of the vehicle, and possible contact with overhead cables. There were some generic answers to this which suggested a lack of familiarity with the particular vehicle although it is covered in the syllabus.

Part (b) was more generic in asking learners for characteristics of a safe site and this brought many good responses, although systems of work and risk assessments were mentioned which are not site characteristics. Typical answers could have included site conditions such as slopes, ground stability, obstructions, etc. There seemed to be confusion between this part which looked at the *site* and part (c) which looked at the *vehicle*. For part (c), the vehicle, such items as roll-over protection, occupant restraints, and guarding on engine parts gained marks.

This question was aimed specifically at telescopic materials handlers but produced too many generic transport responses from learners.

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<b>Question 9</b>	(a) <b>Outline</b> types of protection on electrical equipment that can reduce the risk of contact with live conductors. (3)
	(b) <b>Outline</b> types of protection on electrical equipment that can reduce the risk of electric shock under fault conditions. (7)
	(c) <b>Outline</b> precautions that should be considered, within a safe system of work, to help prevent injury when working live on a UK 230v electric circuit. (10)

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This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 8.2: Outline the hazards of electricity and static electricity; and 8.3: Outline the issues relevant to the installation, use, inspection and maintenance of electrical systems.

Part (a) looked at the basic methods of protection for electrical systems and for the general type of protection rather than specific examples. This included barriers around or in front of live systems. There was some confusion between part (a) and part (b) with some learners repeating answers given in (a).

Better answers to part (b) would have included the more common systems of protecting persons such as double insulation, earthing and automatic protection systems. There were many good answers to this part, reflecting that Learning Partners and textbooks covered this part well.

Part (c) was also well answered, those learners who gave a greater breadth to their answers and included a wide range of controls gained higher marks. The main points are highlighted in the HSE publication HSG85, which is referred to in the syllabus, and mentions correct circuit identification, space and lighting around the worker, instruments and emergency procedures as suitable topics.

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<b>Question 10</b>	A number of lights in a storage warehouse have failed and need replacing. The lights are at a height of 5 metres. <b>Outline</b> what should be taken into consideration when replacing the lights to help reduce the risk of work at height. (20)
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This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1.4: Explain the hazards, risks, and controls when working at height.

The hierarchy of working at height should have been applied by learners to help structure their answers, and those who tackled the question in this way gained the higher marks.



The first consideration should have been to avoid work at height by choosing long-life lamps or fittings that could be lowered. Prevention of falls could have included access scaffolds, etc and the mitigation of falls with soft landing systems, fall arrest, etc.

Other risks when working at height might have included contact with overhead services.

This was a well answered question, with those who focused on the phrase 'reduce the risk of work at height' gaining the higher marks.

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- Question 11** Workers at a furniture manufacturer use a bench-mounted circular saw to cut pieces of timber to length.
- (a) **Outline** *mechanical* hazards when carrying out this activity. (5)
  - (b) **Identify** *non-mechanical* hazards and corresponding risks when carrying out this activity. (5)
  - (c) **Outline** control measures that should be considered to help reduce risks to workers. (10)
- 

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 6.2: Outline the principal generic mechanical and non-mechanical hazards of general workplace machinery; and 6.3: Outline the main types of protective devices found on general workplace machinery.

Part (a) was looking for the range of *mechanical* hazards covered in the standards but with reference to their application to a circular saw for wood cutting. Hazards such as entanglement and ejection of materials were worthy of marks when addressed to the scenario.

For part (b) the *non-mechanical* hazards were asked for with their corresponding risks. This proved challenging for many learners with the main problems being confusion with the mechanical hazards in part (a) and not mentioning the corresponding risk. Hazards such as electricity, dust, etc and also identifying the accompanying risk arising from the particular hazard would have gained marks. This is where several learners had difficulty in gaining the higher marks available.

For part (c) there were some good answers, with learners covering guarding. Better answers also mentioned declaration of conformity and use of push sticks, etc. Those learners who had made themselves familiar with the specific machines and protective devices mentioned in the syllabus gained the higher marks.

## Examination technique

The following issues are consistently identified as the main areas in need of improvement for learners undertaking Diploma level qualifications:

### Learners misread/misinterpreted the question

NEBOSH questions are systematically and carefully prepared and are subject to a number of checks and balances prior to being authorised for use in question papers. These checks include ensuring that questions set for the Diploma level qualifications relate directly to the learning outcomes contained within the associated syllabus guides. The learning outcomes require learners to be sufficiently prepared to provide the relevant depth of answer across a broad range of topic areas. For example, a learner could be asked about the causes of stress, or could be asked about the effects of stress, a question could require a response relating to the principles of fire initiation, or a question could require a response relating to the spread of fire. Therefore, a learner should focus not only on the general topic area (eg stress, fire), but also the specific aspect of that topic to which the question relates.

Examiners suggest that while many learners do begin their answer satisfactorily and perhaps gain one or two marks, they then lose sight of the question and include irrelevant information. Although further points included in an answer can relate to the general topic area, these points are not focused on the specific learning outcome and marks cannot be awarded. However, some learners appear to misread or misinterpret several questions. This situation is more likely due to learners preparing for the examination with a number of stock answers obtained through rote-learning, that again can provide answers that are loosely associated with the topic matter but do not provide answers specific to the question. Such an approach is clearly evident to an Examiner and demonstrates little understanding of the topic matter and marks are not awarded.

Examiners noted a tendency on the part of many learners to write about things that were not asked for, despite the fact that guidance as to what to cover had been given in the question. An example is a question where learners were instructed that there was no need to make reference to specific control measures and yet did so. In another example learners wrote about selection of PPE when the question wording had clearly stated that this had already been undertaken. Another example was where learners wrote about barriers to rehabilitation without relating them to the bio-psychosocial model, even though the question specifically asked them to do this.

Some learners wrote large amounts of text on a single topic where only one mark could be awarded. Learners did not recognise that the amount of marks awarded to each section gives an indication of the depth of the answer required.

It would therefore appear that a sizeable number of learners misread some of the questions, to their disadvantage. This should be a relatively easy pitfall to overcome; learners should ensure that they make full use of the 10 minutes reading time to understand what each question requires. Learners are advised to allow sufficient time to read and re-read the question in order to determine the key requirements. Underlining or highlighting key words can assist in keeping focused and simple mind maps or answer plans can also be useful. An answer plan will often be helpful in ensuring that all aspects of the question are attended to; maps and plans should be kept simple so as not to use up too much examination time; if all aspects are not dealt with it will be difficult to gain a high mark. Learners should not assume when they see a question that it is exactly the same as one that they may have seen in the past; new questions are introduced and old questions are amended. It is therefore of the utmost importance that questions are read carefully and the instructions that they give are followed.

It may help if, when preparing for the examinations, learners write out their answers in full and ask a tutor or other knowledgeable third party to mark their work. In so doing, issues with understanding can be noted and remedial action taken.

Learning Partners and learners should note that various means are used to draw attention to keywords in examination questions. These means include emboldened and italicised text and the use of words in capitals. These means are intended to draw the learner's attention to these words and this emphasis should then be acted upon when making a response. These devices can often assist in giving guidance on how to set out an answer to maximise the marks gained. For example: **Identify THREE** things to be considered **AND** for **EACH**.....

Learners often have a reasonable body of knowledge and understanding on the topic covered by a question, but they have not been able to apply this to the examination question being asked. This could be because sufficient time has not been taken to read the question, noting the words being emphasised.

When preparing learners for examination, or offering advice on examination technique, Learning Partners should stress that understanding the question requirements and the sub-structure of the response to the question is the fundamental step to providing a correct answer. Rather than learning the 'ideal answer' to certain questions effort would be better spent in guided analysis on what a question requires. The rote learning of answers appears to close the learners' minds to the wider (and usually correct) possibilities.

### **Learners repeated the same point but in different ways**

There are instances where learners repeat very similar points in their answers, sometimes a number of times. This is easily done in the stressful environment of the examination. However, once a point has been successfully made and a mark awarded for it, that mark cannot be awarded again for similar points made later in the answer. In some cases, particularly where questions had more than one part, learners gave an answer to, say, part (b) of a question in part (a), meaning that they needed to repeat themselves in part (b) thus wasting time.

One possible reason for this might be that learners have relatively superficial knowledge of the topic - a view supported by the low marks evident in some answers. It appears that, faced with a certain number of marks to achieve and knowing that more needs to be written, but without detailed knowledge, learners appear to opt to rephrase that which they have already written in the hope that it may gain further marks. Another possible reason is a failure to properly plan answers, especially to the Section B questions - it would appear that learners sometimes become 'lost' in their answers, forgetting what has already been written. It may be due either to a lack of knowledge (so having no more to say) or to limited answer planning, or to a combination of the two. When a valid point has been made it will be credited, but repetition of that point will receive no further marks. Learners may have left the examination room feeling that they had written plenty when in fact they had repeated themselves on multiple occasions, therefore gaining fewer marks than they assumed.

Learners sometimes think they have written a lengthy answer to a question and are therefore deserving of a good proportion of the marks. Unfortunately, quantity is not necessarily an indicator of quality and sometimes learners make the same point several times in different ways. Examiners are not able to award this same mark in the mark scheme a second time. The chance of repetition increases when all marks for a question (eg 10 or 20) are available in one block. It can also happen when a significant proportion of the marks are allocated to one part of a question.

This issue is most frequently demonstrated by learners who did not impose a structure on their answers. Starting each new point on a new line would assist in preventing learners from repeating a basic concept previously covered, as well as helping them assess whether they have covered enough information for the available marks.

As with the previous area for improvement ('misreading the question') writing an answer plan where points can be ticked off when made, or structuring an answer so that each point made is clearly shown, for example by underlining key points, can be of great use. This technique aids learners and makes it much clearer in the stress of the examination for learners to see which points have been made and reduce the chances of the same point being made several times. Learning Partners are encouraged to set written work and to provide feedback on written answers, looking to see that learners are able to come up with a broad range of relevant and accurate points; they should point out to learners where the same point is being made more than once.

Learners are advised to read widely. This means reading beyond course notes in order to gain a fuller understanding of the topic being studied. In that way, learners will know more and be able to produce a broader and more detailed answer in the examination. Learners may also find it helpful to read through their answers as they write them in order to avoid repetition of points.

Learning Partners should provide examination technique pointers and practice as an integral part of the course exercises. Technique as much as knowledge uptake should be developed, particularly as many learners may not have taken formal examinations for some years.

### **Learners produced an incoherent answer**

Learners produced answers that lacked structure, digressed from the question asked and were often incoherent as a result. In many cases, there seemed to be a scatter gun approach to assembling an answer, which made that answer difficult to follow. Answers that lack structure and logic are inevitably more difficult to follow than those that are well structured and follow a logical approach. Those learners who prepare well for the unit examination and who therefore have a good and detailed knowledge commensurate with that expected at Diploma level, invariably supply structured, coherent answers that gain good marks; those learners who are less well prepared tend not to do so.

Having good written communication skills and the ability to articulate ideas and concepts clearly and concisely are important aspects of the health and safety practitioner's wider competence. Learners should be given as much opportunity as possible to practice their writing skills and are advised to practice writing out answers in full during the revision phase. This will enable them to develop their knowledge and to demonstrate it to better effect during the examination. It may help if learners ask a person with no health and safety knowledge to review their answers and to see whether the reviewer can understand the points being made.

### **Learners did not respond effectively to the command word**

A key indicator in an examination question will be the command word, which is always given in **bold** typeface. The command word will indicate the depth of answer that is expected by the learner.

Generally, there has been an improvement in response to command words, but a number of learners continue to produce answers that are little more than a list even when the command word requires a more detailed level of response, such as 'outline' or 'explain'. This is specifically addressed in the following section dealing with command words, most commonly failure to provide sufficient content to constitute an 'outline' was noted. Failure to respond to the relevant command word in context was also a frequent problem hence information inappropriate to the question was often given.

Course exercises should guide learners to assessing the relevant points in any given scenario such that they are able to apply the relevant syllabus elements within the command word remit.

### **Learner's handwriting was illegible**

It is unusual to have to comment on this aspect of learner answers, as experienced Examiners rarely have difficulties when reading examination scripts. However, Examiners have independently identified and commented on this as an area of concern. While it is understood that learners feel under pressure in an examination and are unlikely to produce examination scripts in a handwriting style that is representative of their usual written standards; it is still necessary for learners to produce a script that gives them the best chance of gaining marks. This means that the Examiners must be able to read all the written content.

Some simple things may help to overcome handwriting issues. Using answer planning and thinking time, writing double-line spaced, writing in larger text size than usual, using a suitable type of pen, perhaps trying out some different types of pens, prior to the examination. In addition, it is important to practise hand writing answers in the allocated time, as part of the examination preparation and revision. Today, few of us hand-write for extended periods of time on a regular basis, as electronic communication and keyboard skills are so widely used. Learning Partners should encourage and give opportunities for learners to practise this hand-writing skill throughout their course of study. They should identify at an early stage if inherent problems exist. These can sometimes be accommodated through reasonable adjustments, eg by the provision of a scribe or the use of a keyboard. Learners with poorly legible handwriting need to understand this constraint early in their course of studies in order for them to minimise the effect this may have.

NEBOSH recommends to Learning Partners that learners undertaking this qualification should reach a minimum standard of English equivalent to an International English Language Testing System score of 7.0 or higher in IELTS tests in order to be accepted onto a Diploma level programme.

For further information please see the latest version of the IELTS Handbook or consult the IELTS website: <https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/test-format>

Learners wishing to assess their own language expertise may consult the IELTS website for information on taking the test: <http://www.ielts.org>

Learning Partners are reminded that they must ensure that these standards are satisfied or additional tuition provided to ensure accessible and inclusive lifelong learning.

### **Learners did not answer all the questions**

It has been noted that a number of learners do not attempt all of the questions on the examination and of course where a learner does not provide an answer to a question, no marks can be awarded. Missing out whole questions immediately reduces the number of possible marks that can be gained and so immediately reduces the learner's opportunity for success. There can be several reasons for this issue: running out of the allocated time for the examination, a lack of sufficient knowledge necessary to address parts of some questions, or in other cases, some learners have a total lack of awareness that the topic covered in certain questions is even in the syllabus.

If learners have not fully studied the breadth of the syllabus they may find they are not then equipped to address some of the questions that are on a question paper. At that late stage there is little a learner can do to address this point. Responsibility for delivering and studying the full breadth of the syllabus rests with both the Learning Partner and the individual learners and both must play their part to ensure learners arrive at the examination with a range of knowledge across all areas of the syllabus.

### **Lack of technical knowledge required at Diploma level**

In Section A, learners must attempt all questions and it was clear that some struggled with those requiring more detailed and technical knowledge. For example, it is not acceptable that at Diploma level, learners have no knowledge of the principles of good practice that underpin COSHH. Unfortunately this was often found to be the case in responses to questions.

In Section B, where learners have a choice of questions, many sought to avoid those questions with a higher technical knowledge content. For example questions on radiation, lighting and vibration. Practitioners operating at Diploma level need to be confident with the technical content of the whole syllabus and this does require a significant amount of private study, particularly in these areas of the syllabus that are perhaps less familiar to them in their own workplace situations.

### **Learners provided rote-learned responses that did not fit the question**

It was apparent in those questions that were similar to those previously set, that the learners' thought processes were constrained by attachment to memorised answer schemes that addressed different question demands.

While knowledge of material forms a part of the study for a Diploma-level qualification, a key aspect being assessed is a learner's **understanding** of the topic and reciting a pre-prepared and memorised answer will not show a learner's understanding. In fact, if a learner gives a memorised answer to a question that may look similar, but actually is asking for a different aspect of a topic in the syllabus, it shows a lack of understanding of the topic and will inevitably result in low marks being awarded for that answer.

## Command words

Please note that the examples used here are for the purpose of explanation only.

The following command words are listed in the order identified as being the most challenging for learners:

### Explain

*Explain: To provide an understanding. To make an idea or relationship clear.*

This command word requires a demonstration of an understanding of the subject matter covered by the question. Superficial answers are frequently given, whereas this command word demands greater detail. For example, learners are occasionally able to outline a legal breach but do not always explain why it had been breached. A number of instances of learners simply providing a list of information suggests that while learners probably have the correct understanding, they cannot properly express it. Whether this is a reflection of the learner's language abilities, in clearly constructing a written explanation, or if it is an outcome of a limited understanding or recollection of their teaching, is unclear. It may be linked to a general societal decline in the ability to express clearly explained concepts in the written word, but this remains a skill that health and safety professionals are frequently required to demonstrate.

When responding to an 'explain' command word it is helpful to present the response as a logical sequence of steps. Learners must also be guided by the number of marks available. When asked to 'explain the purposes of a thorough examination and test of a local exhaust ventilation system' for 5 marks, this should indicate a degree of detail is required and there may be several parts to the explanation.

Learners are often unable to explain their answers in sufficient detail or appear to become confused about what they want to say as they write their answer. For example, in one question many learners explained the difference between the types of sign, explaining colours and shapes of signs without explaining how they could be used in the depot, as required by the question.

### Describe

*Describe: To give a detailed written account of the distinctive features of a subject. The account should be factual without any attempt to explain.*

The command word 'describe' clearly requires a description of something. The NEBOSH guidance on command words says that 'describe' requires a detailed written account of the distinctive features of a subject such that another person would be able to visualise what was being described. Learners have a tendency to confuse 'describe' with 'outline'. This means that less detailed answers are given that inevitably lead to lower marks. This may indicate a significant lack of detailed knowledge and/or a lack of ability to articulate the course concepts clearly. Learners should aim to achieve a level of understanding that enables them to describe key concepts.

Some learners see the command word 'describe' as an opportunity to fill out an answer with irrelevant detail. If a person was asked to describe the chair they were sitting on, they would have little difficulty in doing so and would not give general unconnected information about chairs in general, fill a page with everything they know about chairs or explain why they were sitting on the chair. Learners should consider the general use of the command word when providing examination answers.

### Outline

*Outline: To indicate the principal features or different parts of.*

This is probably the most common command word but most learners treat it like 'identify' and provide little more than a bullet pointed list. As the NEBOSH guidance on command words makes clear, 'outline' is not the same as 'identify' so learners will be expected to give more detail in their answers. 'Outline' requires a learner to indicate *'the principal features or different parts of'* the subject of the question.

An outline is more than a simple list, but does not require an exhaustive description. Instead, the outline requires a brief summary of the major aspects of whatever is stated in the question. 'Outline' questions

usually require a range of features or points to be included and often 'outline' responses can lack sufficient breadth, so learners should also be guided by the number of marks available. Those learners who gain better marks in questions featuring this command word give brief summaries to indicate the principal features or different parts of whatever was being questioned. If a question asks for an outline of the precautions when maintaining an item of work equipment, reference to isolation, safe access and personal protective equipment would not be sufficient on their own to gain the marks available. A suitable outline would include the meaning of isolation, how to achieve safe access and the types of protective clothing required.

## **Identify**

*Identify: To give a reference to an item, which could be its name or title.*

Learners responding to identify questions usually provide a sufficient answer. Examiners will use the command word 'identify' when they require a brief response and in most cases, one or two words will be sufficient and further detail will not be required to gain the marks. If a question asks '**identify** typical symptoms of visual fatigue', then a response of 'eye irritation' is sufficient to gain 1 mark. If having been asked to identify something and further detail is needed, then a second command word may be used in the question.

However, in contrast to 'outline' answers being too brief, many learners feel obliged to expand 'identify' answers into too much detail, with the possible perception that more words equals more marks. This is not the case and Learning Partners should use the NEBOSH guidance on command words within their examination preparation sessions in order to prepare learners for the command words that may arise.

## **Give**

*Give: To provide short, factual answers.*

'Give' is usually in a question together with a further requirement, such as '**give** the meaning of' or '**give** an example in **EACH** case'. Learners tend to answer such questions satisfactorily, especially where a question might ask to 'identify' something and then 'give' an example. The learner who can answer the first part, invariably has little difficulty in giving the example.

## **Comment**

*Comment: To give opinions (with justification) on an issue or statement by considering the issues relevant to it.*

For example, if learners have already calculated two levels of the exposure to wood dust and are then asked to comment on this the issues would include the levels of exposure they had found, and learners would need to give their opinion on these, while considering what is relevant. The question guides on what may be relevant for example, did it meet the legal requirements, did it suggest controls were adequate, so based on that guidance, did exposure need to be reduced further or did anything else need to be measured or considered? If learners comment with justification on each of these areas they would gain good marks in that part of question.

Few learners are able to respond appropriately to this command word. At Diploma level, learners should be able to give a clear, reasoned opinion based on fact.

For additional guidance, please see NEBOSH's '*Guidance on command words used in learning outcomes and question papers*' document, which is available on our website: <https://www.nebosh.org.uk/i-am/a-learner/> - from this page the document can be found by clicking on the relevant Qualification link, then on the 'Resources' tab.