



**nebosh**

**Student preparation for Certificate and  
Diploma written question papers**

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## 1. Introduction

Good preparation, as well as study, is often the key to succeeding in examination assessments. This guide is designed to aid students studying and preparing for NEBOSH Certificate and Diploma qualification assessments. The aim is to improve assessment performance and also to give students a helpful boost in confidence ahead of their examination sitting.

Students who utilise this document in conjunction with course study and their own private study for a NEBOSH Certificate or Diploma written assessment, should drastically improve their chances of being able to study effectively and ultimately be successful in the examination.

## 2. Assessment and revision

### 2.1 As a NEBOSH student, how will I be assessed?

One of the most important areas to cover early in the course of study is your understanding of the 'summative assessment'.

For the purposes of this guide, the 'summative assessment' is simply the final written assessment the Examiner will mark. This demonstrates your performance in terms of the learning outcomes for the syllabus that you are studying. The mark(s) you are awarded will contribute to your overall qualification.

The full syllabus guides are available for you to download from the NEBOSH [website](#) and these include an example question paper.

### 2.2 Course study

As part of your studies, your accredited course provider may include formative assessment to assess how you as students are progressing through the duration of your study. Internal formative assessments that are set by the accredited course provider can help students to learn and develop their preferred method of learning. Accredited course providers can give feedback on these so that students can focus on improving or maintaining specific content areas. Through this assessment process, students can develop the ability to self-assess their own work. This in turn encourages students to set their own goals and self-motivate to take responsibility for their own learning.

Other types of formative assessment can include group question and answer sessions during lessons, short tests and quizzes, simulations, projects and individual reviews.

Students who have opted for an e-learning or open and distance course will need to contact their accredited course provider to enquire if formative assessment and feedback is available. This can often be dependent on what is included in your course package. While your accredited course provider is responsible for teaching, you as the student are also responsible for your own learning and development; make the most of the knowledge and resources that your accredited course provider can provide.

## 2.3 Learning styles

Everyone learns in a different way. In other words, they have different learning styles.

Throughout your course and individual study, you should begin to concentrate on your own learning and recall style. Course tutors should where possible, help students to understand their own particular learning style.

As part of your study and revision, you should attempt to incorporate a variety of materials and learning methods in order to maintain concentration and motivation to study. This can also aid students who may require alternative learning methods in understanding specific subject content. There are many theories surrounding learning styles, but the most commonly referenced is the 'three modalities': visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. This suggests each of us has a preference for either learning through seeing, hearing or doing. Learners can develop the ability to learn in different ways but it can also be effective to study in a way that best suits you as a student.

### ***Visual learners***

These students learn most effectively when seeing and reading, and they tend to think in pictures, charts, and colour. Visual learners like the use of headings and patterns and will take notes in tuition sessions, often sitting at the front of the room in order to see the course tutor's body language and facial expressions.

### ***Auditory learners***

Auditory learners prefer learning through listening, speaking and discussions, debates, speeches and presentations. These learners will often be talkative and be confident speaking in front of class.

### ***Kinaesthetic learners***

Kinaesthetic learners enjoy touching and physically doing things. They will take notes in lectures, but often find it difficult to sit and listen for long periods of time. They tend to skim read before reading in detail.

Often, the most effective learners develop an ability to learn in various different ways.

## 2.4 Revision and examination technique

Learning how to perform in examinations is an essential skill. Success in examinations usually depends on two things:

- knowledge and ability (applying a good revision strategy);
- good examination technique.

Most courses should include sessions on revision, examination preparation and examination technique. Students on e-learning or open and distance courses should contact their accredited course provider to enquire if this is included.

## 2.5 Revision strategy

For you as a student, a successful revision plan is a critical success factor in being able to demonstrate your knowledge and ability in the examination.

The main purpose of revision is:

- to fully understand the subject content;
- to memorise and be able to recall what you have learnt;
- to practice planning and writing answers to examination questions.

Preparation is the key. Your revision must not be left too late and it must be carried out on a regular basis prior to the examination date to improve your recall. A well thought out, strategic revision plan will help to build up your knowledge and practice your reading skills and develop handwriting skills.

It may seem trivial to advise students to practice basic comprehension skills. However, this is important to ensure that you read the question fully and understand what you are being asked before you write your response. Likewise, many people use technology in their day-to-day life and this can impact on writing ability. It is vital to ensure your writing is legible so that Examiners can allocate marks where they are merited.

There are recommended study hours for each unit of a NEBOSH Certificate or Diploma qualification and you should try to follow this as far as you are able to. The amount of time spent revising is dependent on each individual, but the best advice is always to plan for more time than necessary and then you can reduce this if things are going well.

### ***Student Tips – making a revision plan***

- Revision starts as soon as your course starts.
- A good time to revise is on completion of each element to consolidate key concepts.
- Set targets and have a 'completed' column in your plan.
- Be realistic about the targets you set in the time you have available.
- Remember you also need to allow breaks.
- Allocate more time to weaker subjects (identified from formative assessment).
- Organise your work in a way that works for you – the secret of getting started is breaking tasks into smaller, manageable ones.
- Allocate subjects to days, and make sure you have enough time for everything you need to revise.
- Do not neglect subjects you find particularly easy or difficult.

## **2.6 How to revise**

Students will have their own revision material including course notes, notes from text books and other references. When planning your study time you should have everything you need well in advance and make sure you have somewhere quiet but comfortable to study.

## **2.7 Revision technique**

Most students will have their own methods of revision but you might find the below useful:

- Writing index cards.
- Annotating text.
- Mind mapping.
- Reading content out loud.
- Practicing sample questions.

These methods are often more effective than passive techniques, such as re-reading or copying out course notes, where you are less likely to memorise the information. Often, the more creative the revision technique the more memorable the information will become. This should develop your ability to recall the information during the examination.

Mind mapping is a useful skill for note taking and revision. During the examination, advantages can also include:

- writing points down quickly;
- easier flow of ideas;
- new ideas triggered easily;
- easy organisation of material;
- easy insertion of branches with new ideas.

For any examination, revising generally consists of three key areas: being able to summarise, memorise and practice. Please find some tips below on how this can be effective.

### ***Student Tips - summarising notes***

- Physically organise your notes so that they are clear, logically ordered and easy to find your way around.
- Read them through, underline key words, highlight different themes.
- Write out more and more concise versions of your notes, reducing the content to manageable proportions – even to one word or phrase that describes what you have learned.
- Aim to reduce each subject to an index card – summarising assists learning and makes material easy to refer back to.
- Devise your own colour coding system – associating different colours with different subjects or themes will help you to memorise and compartmentalise things in your mind.
- Use mind maps as a helpful way of summarising a lot of information onto a single page – they are also visually memorable.

### ***Student Tips - memorising***

- Recall improves after the first night's sleep as our mind absorbs the day's information, so revise the day after you learn something.
- Revise again and again as the memory deteriorates – a minimum of four or five times is usually required to permanently log the information.
- Predict a page of notes in your mind before you look at it. What you have forgotten will bring itself to your attention as you read.
- Using your summarised notes, focus on recalling information triggered by the key words and phrases.
- Mnemonics – use the letters of a word, or the initial letters of a phrase, to trigger associations.
- Diagrammatic notes, eg mind maps, are more visually stimulating and therefore more easily remembered than a list of points.
- Last-minute revision of notes, now reduced to minimal levels, is generally helpful. However, attempting to learn new material the day before an examination can be harmful, as it can displace the material you have already learned and lead to a sense of confusion and panic.

### **Student Tips - practice questions**

- Can be used as a formative assessment during the course – feedback may be provided. This helps recall of your course material and develops examination skills.
- Sample questions are available on the NEBOSH [website](#). These also include Examiner feedback on expected answers.
- This can help you as a student to understand the format of the question paper, the type of question that might appear on the question paper and how many questions you will have to answer.
- You can make up your own sample questions and write out the answer, this can help you to develop a broader understanding of the subject.
- Practice questions on a variety of topics, do not focus on areas you are better at; similarly do not ignore areas that you struggle with.
- You can enquire with your accredited course provider if they will facilitate a mock examination under examination conditions so that you can practice writing under the time constraints. You can also ask for feedback on this.

### **Revision tips for visual learners:**

- Reorganise notes using columns/categories.
- Use visual mnemonics.
- Draw or outline information you need to remember.
- Use mind maps.
- Rewrite facts/formulae on posters for visual review.
- Use highlighting, circling and underlining.
- Use index cards.

### **Revision tips for auditory learners:**

- Discuss new concepts/facts with others.
- Use voice recorder as well as notes.
- Use word association to remember facts.
- Repeat facts with eyes closed.
- Record lectures and watch videos.
- Set information to rhyme, rhythm or music to retain.
- Use aural mnemonics.

### **Revision tips for kinaesthetic learners:**

- Go on site visits.
- Use colour highlighting.
- Turn reading materials into posters and models.
- Skim read before reading in detail.
- Take frequent study breaks.

### 3. Examination technique

#### 3.1 Coping with examination stress

It is completely normal for students to begin to feel stressed or anxious as the examination date approaches. Some students will use the pressure as motivation to study and revise. Examination stress can be detrimental for some students and can affect your studies. If examination stress is hampering your revision, you might find it useful to talk to your course tutor as they will have substantial experience in helping students to deal with or overcome examination stress. Talking to friends and family can also help keep things in perspective.

#### ***Student Tips - how can I cope with examination stress?***

- Leave plenty of time to revise so that you do not get in to a situation of having to do last minute cramming. This approach will help to boost your confidence and reduce any pre-examination stress as you know you have prepared well.
- Develop a timetable so that you can track and monitor your progress. Make sure you allow time for fun and relaxation so that you avoid burning out. As soon as you notice your mind is losing concentration, take a short break. You will then come back to your revision refreshed.
- Experiment with several alternative revision techniques so that revision is more fun and your motivation to study is high.
- Do not try to be perfect – it is great to succeed but if you think that anything less than distinction is unacceptable then you are creating unnecessary stress for yourself – aim to do your best but recognise that none of us can be perfect all of the time.
- If you find you do not understand some of your course material, getting stressed out will not help – instead, take action to address the problem directly by seeing your course tutor.
- Confiding in someone you trust and who will be supportive is a great way of alleviating stress and worry.
- Do not drink too much coffee, tea and fizzy drinks – the caffeine will make your thinking less clear.
- Eat healthily and regularly – your brain will benefit from the nutrients.
- Regular moderate exercise will boost your energy, clear your mind and reduce any feelings of stress.
- Try out relaxation techniques. They will help to keep you feeling calm and balanced, improve your concentration levels and help you to sleep better.

#### 3.2 Before the examination

In order to help yourself on the day of the examination, there are a few things you can do beforehand to avoid any unnecessary stress:

- Ensure that you have all the required documents such as your examination entry confirmation and any identification you may have been asked to bring.
- Prepare all of your materials the night before: pens, pencils, water, etc. This gives you the chance to check and double check you have everything you need.
- If you are travelling on the day of the examination, get the full address of the venue from your accredited course provider well in advance. It is stressful to arrive at an incorrect venue and this can affect your mind set to take the examination. If you are travelling on public transport, try and plan ahead to avoid any planned maintenance, ongoing road works or potential delays.

- Check the correct date and time of the examination.
- Get a good night's sleep.

### **3.3 Examination day**

- Check you have relevant paperwork and identification.
- Have a good supply of pens, etc.
- Arrive at the examination venue in plenty of time. If you are unexpectedly delayed, inform your accredited course provider as soon as possible so that they can inform the Invigilator.
- Avoid contact with other students who are discussing the examination.
- Find the examination room.
- Follow examination and Invigilator rules.

#### **Once you are in the examination room and seated at your desk:**

- Make yourself comfortable.
- Set out your desk.
- If you feel anxious, close your eyes and take several long, slow deep breaths. Breathing in this way calms your whole nervous system.
- Once they have been distributed, check that you have been given the correct question paper and that your answer book has the correct name and student number. Notify the Invigilator immediately if any of the details on the question paper or answer book are incorrect.
- Try not to panic – it is natural to feel some examination nerves prior to starting the examination, but getting excessively nervous is counterproductive as you will not be able to think as clearly.
- Read the instructions (or 'rubric') on the question paper carefully, at least twice. If you do not understand something ask an Invigilator for help.

#### ***Student Tips – what should I do when the examination starts?***

- Take at least 5 minutes to read the question paper fully before you start writing (for Diploma question papers 10 minutes additional reading time is provided).
- Decide the order you will answer the questions. Answer your 'best' question first to build your confidence. Try not to leave the hardest question until last as this may affect your performance towards the end of the examination if you are tired or running out of time. Read every word in the question – it is there for a reason.
- Re-read the question until you are certain you understand what is being asked.
- Do not be intimidated by students who start writing immediately.

#### ***Student Tips – choosing questions (Diploma question papers)***

- Take your time and choose carefully to ensure you are answering the questions where you are most able to demonstrate your ability.
- Take your time reading the questions to understand what each one is asking.
- Eliminate questions that you have limited recall of the subject area.
- For the remaining questions, ensure your knowledge of the subject area extends to the specific aspects addressed by the question, ie do not just choose a question with a 'familiar' subject area.

- Choose questions that you can structure your answer to, ie is the question better for you broken into parts?
- Once you have decided which questions you will answer, decide on the order.

### 3.4 Time management

You should practice time management as part of your study and revision to ensure you have sufficient time to answer every question. Plan how long you will spend on each question and stick to it.

The question papers will contain instructions on how long to spend on each section. From this you should be able to plan accordingly how long you should spend on each question. Students should ideally allow five minutes at the start of the examination reading through the questions and spend five minutes at the end of the examination to read through your answers.

**Top Tip: Most students will gain the most marks in the first third of their answer. Extensive responses to a question can result in repetition and fail to attract further marks.**

You might find it useful to judge your timing by using the clock that should be at the front of the examination room. Alternatively, take an analogue watch so that you can time yourself.

#### ***Student Tips - time management***

- Work out exactly what time you should finish each answer, and write the times down.
- Be disciplined – have the courage to stop and move on to the next question.
- If a question is split into parts, spend a proportionate amount of time on each part according to the marks allocated.
- Plan your answer and make sure everything in your plan is strictly relevant to the exact question asked.
- Do not waste time writing questions out, repeating yourself or being irrelevant.
- Use accepted abbreviations, eg RIDDOR, ILO.
- If you find yourself running out of time try and write some summary points or a mind map for the remaining questions – you will not be awarded full marks but you will be given some credit for correct responses.
- If your mind has a 'block' before the time allocated has ended, do not worry, move on to the next question and come back to the unfinished one if you have time at the end.
- Do not be afraid to take 'mini-breaks' – most students concentration will dip after about 40 minutes so a short break can help refocus.
- Ideally, you will have time towards the end of the examination to read through your answers to ensure you are happy with them. There may be time to add something to an earlier answer.

### 3.5 Planning your answers

Mind maps or answer plans are extremely useful when answering questions. They are particularly helpful when answering long answer questions, eg the 20-mark question on Certificate question papers.

### **Student Tips - plan your answers**

- Identify the subject of the question, breaking down the requirements of the question (key words are capitalised or italicised to give emphasis where appropriate).
- Note how many parts there are in the question and the marks available for each.
- Marks allocated indicate the weighting given to each part of the answer.
- Determine what is required by each part.
- Pay attention to the command words such as 'identify', 'outline' and 'explain'. These will be in '**bold**' type. See the definitions in NEBOSH's '*Guidance on command words used in learning outcomes and question papers*' available on the website [HERE](#).
- If you do not apply the command words you will put yourself at a disadvantage, eg giving a list when an outline is required cannot result in full marks being awarded – or if you are required to 'identify' and write an explanation you will be consuming valuable time that could be better spent elsewhere.
- Underline or highlight key words, and start to write an answer plan.
- Read through your plan and be prepared to revise it. Students tend to rush into writing as soon as possible, but it is better to check you are answering the question asked before you start writing your answer.
- Single part questions are often dismissed as complex and difficult but can often be split into distinct parts.
- Is there a scenario? If there is, your answer must relate to the scenario given and generalised answers will not attract full marks.
- Answer the question being asked – not one you may have seen on a previous question paper or one you have practiced during on your course.
- Draw a line underneath your answer plan.
- Remember the plan is a model for your answer and not a substitute – however, do not cross out your plan – if you run out of time and do not complete your answer, the Examiner may be able to award some credit.

### **3.6 Writing your answers**

It is vital to stress the importance of answering the question in every sentence written. It is common for students to digress from the question asked, possibly because they have:

- misread the question;
- their knowledge is limited in the area of required response;
- they are tired or feel they have not written enough and need to fill up 'empty space'.

### **Student Tips - writing your answers**

- Make sure you answer the question. Keep referring back to the question and your answer plan as you write.
- Make sure that every word used is relevant to the question.
- It is the quality of the answer, not the quantity of information that matters.
- Pay attention to your handwriting, and the layout of your answers – marks are not deducted for poor presentation, grammar or handwriting but if the Examiner cannot read the answer marks cannot be awarded. Writing in short sentences and paragraphs can help and a new paragraph should be started for each new issue.
- Start a new page for each question.
- There is no need to write the question in your answer book.

- Clearly mark each part of your answer with the question number and part, eg (a) where relevant.
- When answering questions in 'parts' take care to ensure you respond correctly to each part and do not duplicate or mix up your answers.
- Determine what is required by each part and allocate their time accordingly.
- Marks allocated indicate the weighting given to each part of the answer.
- If you add additional responses when checking your answers and do not have space underneath your original answer, clearly sign the question number on a new page at the back of the answer book – the Examiner will check and mark the entire answer book.
- Conform to any instructions, eg answer three out of five questions – if you do answer more than the required number the Examiner will mark all responses and award the highest three marks.
- If you give more than the required number of correct points (eg the question asks for three reasons and you give five) all points are marked until maximum marks are awarded.
- Standard abbreviations are acceptable, eg RIDDOR, COSHH, ILO.
- Sections of Acts of Parliament and Regulation numbers in Statutory Instruments are not expected unless specifically stated as required in the question.
- If you cross out work but make no second attempt the Examiner will mark the crossed out work.
- If your mind goes blank – go back to the slow breathing for about one minute. If you still cannot remember the information then move on to another question and return to this question later.

### **3.7 Questions involving calculations**

If a question requires a calculation there may be a requirement for you to show your working. This is important, as there will be marks available for doing so.

If part of a question requires the use of a value calculated earlier, and where the value was calculated incorrectly, you will not be penalised further. The calculation will be considered as correct based on the earlier value.

### **3.8 Have I checked my answers?**

Once you think you have completed the examination, it is important to check your answer book if you have time:

- Have you answered all of the questions?
- Briefly check your answers and add anything you think may be worth additional marks.
- Are all questions and question parts shown correctly?
- Are your answers legible?

### **3.9 After the examination**

Once the Invigilator announces that the examination is over, stop writing straight away. All question papers and answer books will be collected from your desk before you are allowed to leave the examination room. Once all the papers have been collected from the other student(s) in your sitting, the Invigilator should announce that you are able to collect your

belongings and leave. Some students may still feel tense once the examination is over, here are some things you can do to help yourself:

- Avoid discussing the examination with fellow students. You cannot change your answers but discussing the questions and people's answers can affect your confidence.
- Do not spend endless time criticising yourself for where you think you went wrong. Often, our own self-assessment is far too harsh.
- If you have made mistakes in the examination, try to learn from them and apply what you have learnt to the next examination. Think about how to avoid making similar mistakes in the future. For example, if you found that you ran out of time, analyse which area you spent too long on – Did you spend too long writing out answer plans, or deciding which questions to do?
- Congratulate yourself for the things you did right, learn from the bits where you know you could have done better, and then move on.
- Do not convince yourself what marks you will be awarded: pass or refer. You will not know how you have performed until your results are declared.

**Students should initially direct any queries to their accredited course provider. However, should you have any questions, require further information, or simply wish to provide feedback on this guidance, please do not hesitate to contact NEBOSH Customer Services on 0116 263 4700.**

#### **4. Document control**

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