



**Guidance for accredited course providers:
Preparing Students for Assessment
Certificate and Diploma written
question papers**

Version 2 (April 2017)

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1. Introduction

Good preparation, as well as study, is often the key to passing assessments leading to NEBOSH qualifications.

This guide is designed to assist tutors in preparing students for NEBOSH Certificate and Diploma written assessments. The aim is to improve assessment performance and also to give students a helpful boost in confidence ahead of their examination sitting.

2. Administration

2.1 How will the student be assessed?

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

For the purposes of this guide, the 'summative assessment' is simply the final written assessment the Examiner will mark. It 'summarises' how the student has performed in terms of the learning outcomes of the syllabus, and the mark assigned contributes to the outcome of the students' qualification.

The most important areas for preparing students in this context are ensuring that they fully understand:

- the precise details of the assessment, including the number and type of questions;
- the marking criteria for the assessment;
- the learning outcomes for the Unit being assessed, ie what are they expected to be able to demonstrate in order to pass.

This information is included in the NEBOSH syllabus guides that are produced for each qualification, available on the NEBOSH website.

2.2 Formative assessments

While 'summative assessments' take place following study, 'formative assessments' can be used to understand how the student is performing at various stages of learning.

Personalised learning depends on knowing the strengths and weaknesses of individual students and formative assessments can form a vital part of this process. Students should be given feedback and guided on how to improve or maintain their performance. In turn, this helps students take responsibility for their own learning - they can be set goals for improvement and become more motivated to learn.

Formative assessment should take place throughout learning and various formal and informal methods should be included within course delivery. For example, students should practice answering questions from written question paper assessments. This could be done in homework sessions followed by group feedback, or through a mock examination that can be marked and individual feedback provided.

Feedback should be given sensitively and be constructive, because any type of assessment can have an emotional impact. Students need to be motivated, but feedback must also be realistic to avoid any false sense of achievement. Ideally, students should improve and develop their capacity for self-assessment through this process, so that they can become reflective and self-managing.

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

2.3 Learning and learning styles

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

Learning styles incorporate the way in which each student begins to concentrate on, process and retain new and difficult information. It is generally accepted that teaching styles that are similar to the student's learning styles work best. Tutors therefore need to know their own learning style (as this will often dictate their teaching style) and also help students to understand their own particular learning style.

Inevitably, teaching should incorporate different learning styles, as a one-way-method may disadvantage some students. Also, teaching to one style may cause students to lose mental dexterity, in terms of thinking in different ways, so it is advisable that tutors incorporate enough materials and methods to address the needs of all students. In addition, if a student does not master a skill the first time, the tutor can try again by using a different way of teaching.

There are many theories surrounding learning styles, but the most commonly referenced is the 'three modalities': visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. This model suggests each of us has a preference for either learning through seeing, hearing or doing. Effective learners develop the ability to learn in different ways.

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 tutor's body language and facial expressions.

Auditory learners

Auditory learners prefer learning through listening and speaking and they enjoy 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 (applying a good revision strategy);
- good examination technique.

Courses need to include sessions on revision, examination preparation and examination technique. Most people have never been taught how to study or revise.

2.5 Revision strategy

Students need to understand the importance of revision. As with other aspects of their studies, they need to organise their time and plan their revision in advance.

The main purpose of revision is:

- to understand the subject for which you are sitting an examination;
- to commit what you have learnt and understood to memory;
- to practice planning and writing answers to questions.

2.6 Making a revision plan

Again, preparation is the key. Revision must not be left too late and it must be carried out regularly before an examination to improve recall. A well thought out revision plan will help to build up knowledge, practice reading skills and develop handwriting skills.

It can be difficult to advise students on the length of time required for studying and revision, as this tends to be very individual. The best advice is always to plan for more time than is needed and then reduce this if things are going well.

Student tips – making a revision plan

It may be worthwhile passing on the following list of tips to students.

- 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.

2.7 How to revise

Students will have revision material including course notes, their own notes from text books and other references, homework with tutor's feedback and other handouts. Remind them to have everything they need well in advance and to ensure they have a comfortable and suitable place to revise where they won't be disturbed.

Active revision techniques that involve reproducing material, eg writing index cards, annotating texts, mind mapping, repeating out loud, and practicing sample questions, are more effective than passive techniques, that involve taking in information without attempting to reproduce it, eg re-reading or copying out course notes. Often, the more creative the revision technique the more memorable the information will become.

Three key revision methods, along with further tips for students, are covered below:

- summarising notes;
- memorising;
- practising questions.

2.8 Summarising notes

Students should organise their notes, handouts, etc into a convenient and coherent set of materials in order to make them more memorable.

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, underlining key words, highlighting 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.

2.9 Memorising

There is no way around this task – to do well in examinations, students have to remember the course material. A systematic revision process will help most students develop their ability to recall, but ultimately they have to work out what works best for them.

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.

Mind mapping is a useful skill for note taking, revision and during an examination. Advantages include:

- speed in writing points down;
- more flow of ideas;
- new ideas triggered easily;
- easy organisation of material;
- easy insertion of branches with new ideas.

Helping students know their own learning style assists learning during the course but also during revision.

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.

2.10 Practising questions

Working out model answers to anticipated questions should be part of formative assessment and the revision process. This technique helps students remember their course material and develop examination skills. It will also help develop their handwriting skills, which for many students is something now rarely done.

Example question papers are available in the NEBOSH syllabus guides and in the 'Example question paper and Examiners' feedback on expected answers' reports which can be found on the website [HERE](#).

By looking at example question papers students can get an idea of the sorts of topics and questions that come up on the paper, as well as how many questions they have to answer. This will reduce the chances of being surprised by the real question paper on the day.

Try to think up your own questions. This should help you think more broadly about the course and think of common themes and ideas. It will help you get a feel for the type of questions that might be on the question paper. However, you should not believe that you can predict what will be on an actual question paper as the whole Unit syllabus is examinable.

It is also helpful to give your students mock examinations, under examination conditions. This will help them practice writing under time constraints.

3. Examination technique

3.1 Coping with examination stress

As the examination period approaches it is quite normal for students to feel some anxiety. Some students find that a bit of pressure motivates them to revise and prepare for the examination. However, if students continue to feel anxious they may find it helpful to talk to their tutor. Talking to friends and family can also help keep things in perspective.

Student tips for coping 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.

Student tips – before the examination

- Check the date, time and venue for your examination.
- Have a good night's sleep.

Student tips – the day of the examination

- Check you have relevant paperwork and identification.
- Have a good supply of pens, etc.
- Arrive at the examination venue in plenty of time.
- Avoid contact with other students who want to talk about the examination.
- Find the examination room.
- Follow examination and invigilator rules.
- Locate your seat.
- Prepare your desk and set out your writing equipment.
- Have a watch/locate clock – ideally with a clock face to help visualise the time more easily.

Student tips – in the examination room

- Check that you have been given the correct question paper.
- Get comfortable and stay positive and calm.
- 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.
- If you feel anxious, close your eyes and take several long, slow deep breaths. Breathing in this way calms your whole nervous system.
- 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 – read the questions

- Read through all the questions before you start writing.
- Take at least 5 minutes to read through the questions (for Diploma question papers 10 minutes additional reading time is provided).
- Reading the questions enables you to plan the order you will answer them in.
- 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.
- Start with your ‘best’ question first, as this will build your confidence and mentally warm you up for the questions you find more challenging (however, it may not be a good idea to leave the hardest to the last – by this time you are likely to be tired, and possibly short on time, which will make it even harder to answer satisfactorily).

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.

3.2 Time management

Students should learn how to apply strict time management during assessments to ensure there is time to answer all of the required questions. It is important to note the time available to answer each question on a question paper and stick to it.

For example, an IGC1 question paper must be completed in two hours. The question paper contains one 20-mark question and ten 8-mark questions. The instruction on the question paper advises candidates to spend 30 minutes answering question 1, the 20-mark question. Students should spend 5 minutes reading the questions and at least 5 minutes at the end of the examination to check their answers – this leaves 80 minutes for the remaining questions, ie 8 minutes a question. Once the time available has passed it is essential to move on to the next question to avoid running out of time.

Most students gain the most marks in the first third of their response to a question and continuing to write and add additional points often fails to attract further marks.

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. Look for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. There may be time to add something to an earlier answer.

3.3 Plan 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.

Taking the time to write down a plan or mind map in the answer book (however brief) for each answer before writing, is time well spent. It will help students structure their answers.

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.

3.4 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.

3.5 Questions involving calculations

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

If part of a question uses a value calculated earlier, any error in the former result is not penalised further. The student's previous result is taken as correct for the subsequent calculation.

Student tips – checking your answers

- Have you attempted all required questions?
- Check your answers and add additional points as appropriate.
- Are all questions and question parts shown correctly?
- Are any words illegible?

Student tips – after the Examination

- Avoid discussing the examination with fellow students. The examination is over and there is nothing you can do about it now.
- 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 you have failed – you only know your performance when you get your results.

Taking on board the information and advice contained in this guidance, should dramatically improve the chances of your students passing their written assessments for NEBOSH Certificate and Diploma qualifications.

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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