

January 2016

Examiners' Report

NEBOSH National Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety - Unit A



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NEBOSH NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

UNIT A: MANAGING HEALTH AND SAFETY

JANUARY 2016



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Introduction

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 candidates annually and are offered by over 600 course providers, 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) regulatory requirements.

This report provides guidance for candidates which it is hoped will be useful to candidates and tutors 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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General comments

Many candidates 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 candidates, 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 January 2016.

Feedback is presented in these key areas; examination technique, command words and learning outcomes and is designed to assist candidates and course providers prepare for future assessments in this unit.

Candidates and course providers 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 A 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.

Candidates and course providers should also make reference to the Unit A 'Example question paper and Examiners' feedback on expected answers' which provides example questions and details Examiners' expectations and typical areas of underperformance.

Unit A

Managing health and safety

Candidate performance

This report covers the examination sitting in January 2016.

Learning outcomes

Question 1

5.3 Explain the development, main features and operation of safe systems of work and permit-to-work systems

Candidates were expected to outline the main features of a safe system of work and in particular, to outline the information that you would expect to find in a written safe system of work.

There were many good answers to this question. However, some answers did not recognise the clear instruction in the question **not** to give details of specific control measures and did just that. This did not answer the question and so did not gain marks.

Some candidates confused safe systems of work with permits-to-work, while a few candidates knew very little about safe systems and wrote instead about safety management systems, possibly in the belief that 'safe systems' and 'safety management systems' were one and the same thing.

Course providers and candidates should work to ensure that the difference between a 'safe system of work' and a 'permit-to-work' is understood.

Question 2

1.3 Explain the principles and content of effective health and safety, quality, environmental and integrated management systems with reference to recognised models and standards

1.4 Outline the role and responsibilities of the health and safety practitioner

9.1 Explain the key requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

In order to answer this question, candidates needed to be able to demonstrate a sound knowledge of the legal requirements for appointing competent persons to assist in complying with health and safety law and the role that the health and safety practitioner plays in the design of a safety management system.

Many candidates confused 'safety practitioners' with 'safety representatives' and so gave inappropriate answers. Some candidates felt that a safety practitioner had to be a union-appointed safety representative. Given the nature of this course, this was a very concerning observation.

Few candidates seemed aware of the legal requirements set out in Regulation 7 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations and so provided only a general outline of the term '*competence*', which was not sufficient to address the question.

Responses also revealed that there is generally limited understanding of the role that the safety practitioner plays in designing safety management systems, with very few candidates appreciating the strategic nature of the role. In lieu of knowledge on this topic, several candidates gave an overview of general functions of a practitioner, which did not address the question.

It is important that candidates should take the time to acquaint themselves with the contents of legislation by reading it thoroughly and not just relying on summaries from course notes and/or text books.

Question 3

2.1 Explain theories of loss causation

2.4 Explain loss investigations; the requirements, benefits, the procedures, the documentation, and the involvement of and communication with relevant staff and representatives

Candidates need to show knowledge of the concepts of 'active and 'latent' failures, as well as knowledge of the benefits of conducting an accident investigation.

There were few very good answers to this question, a common error being a tendency to confuse 'active failures' with either 'latent failures' or, in some cases, 'routine violations'. It was noticeable that many candidates believe accident investigation to be an explicit requirement of RIDDOR, so put this down as a benefit of conducting an investigation.

A proportion of candidates focused unduly on the costs of accidents and so placed too much emphasis on the benefits of having no accidents rather than the benefits of conducting an investigation.

Candidates should ensure that they understand terms such as '*active*' and '*latent*' and how they apply in relation to failures. It is also advisable to understand the benefits of investigation so that this can be explained to employers in the future if needs be.

Question 4

3.2 Explain the need for, and the objectives and limitations of, health and safety monitoring systems

Candidates were expected to show a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of using accident rates as a measure of health and safety performance.

The overall response to this question was fairly good in many cases, although a relatively narrow range of points were made. It was pleasing to see some good responses with a good level of insight on display.

Limited responses did not note that more than twice the amount of marks were available for part (b) when compared to part (a) and in fact gave more points in answer to part (a). In part (b) many candidates seemed to lack the theoretical knowledge to understand the weaknesses inherent in using accident statistics as a measure of health and safety performance.

Strengths of using accident rates seem to be better understood than the weaknesses and therefore course providers may wish to provide more focus on the latter in order to assist candidates to achieve a better result.

Question 5

4.3 Explain how to assess and evaluate risk and to implement a risk assessment programme

This question assessed candidates' knowledge of the criteria for a suitable and sufficient risk assessment and of the requirement to record the significant findings of an assessment and the requirements for review.

A high number of candidates confused risk assessment with safe systems of work. There was a limited understanding of what constitutes a suitable and sufficient risk assessment, with some candidates unable to give more than the '5 steps' to risk assessment.

For the 'significant findings', a good number of candidates gave a simple but accurate description as per legislative guidance, enabling full marks to be achieved for this part of the answer. Answers to the final part of the question were much stronger.

Course providers should direct their candidates to read the relevant HSE guidance as part of their studies of this important aspect of the syllabus.

Question 6

9.2 Explain the status of Approved Codes of Practice and guidance and the statutory procedure for making Approved Codes of Practice

Candidates were expected to be able to outline the status and role of ACOPs and to outline the statutory procedure for making them.

Some candidates are unaware of what an ACOP is and some candidates believe ACOPs to be legally binding.

Answers to part (b) were very limited, despite this part of the question being worded almost the same way as the associated learning outcome (see above). A high percentage of candidates showed a lack of understanding of the difference between a Regulation and an ACOP by indicating that the process for making an ACOP is the same as that for making either an Act or a Regulation.

Improvements may be made by ensuring a better understanding of the requirements of s16 HSWA.

Question 7

6.1 Explain the internal and external influences on health and safety in an organisation

6.4 Explain the role, influences on and procedures for formal and informal consultation with employees in the workplace

Candidates were expected to demonstrate knowledge of how union-appointed safety representatives might influence improvements in workplace safety standards and why, in practice, they might find it hard to influence improvements. There was also a requirement for candidates to recall the topics on which an employer is obliged to consult with representatives.

This was a very popular question. However, it was not answered well by most who attempted it. A widespread superficial knowledge was shown of how representatives might influence improvements and the practical challenges that they might face. Some candidates believed that unions can appoint representatives regardless of whether the union is recognised by the employer and some stated that the representative does not need to be an employee.

In part (a) candidates did not answer the question but instead listed general functions of representatives, perhaps in the hope that something might have gained marks. In some cases, candidates confused the role of the representative with that of the employer.

Candidates did identify a reasonable range of issues and articulated these quite well.

Answers to part (c) were limited and it seemed that candidates had difficulty with the law aspect of this topic.

Candidates must consider carefully the way in which representatives can use their position to exert influence on workplace safety standards. As with any question that features a 'legal' element, candidates must read about the law as this appears to be another area where improvement might usefully be made.

Question 8

8.3 Outline the influence and role of the European Union on UK health and safety legislation

9.1 Explain the key requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

Candidates need to be able to demonstrate a sound knowledge of basic principles of EU law, together with knowledge of UK legislation that has been introduced as a result of European Directives.

This was not a popular question. While some candidates were able to distinguish between Regulations and Directives, responses made it clear that knowledge of Articles 114 and 153 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union are not well understood. A lack of knowledge of the provisions contained within Regulations 16-18 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations was shown, with many answers being either inaccurate or incorrect.

Candidates would be well served by reading the law and acquainting themselves with its requirements. This should promote greater understanding, leading to better marks.

Question 9

1.1 Explain the moral, legal and economic reasons for the effective management of health and safety

Candidates needed to be able to recognise and then outline potential costs arising from the given scenario. As the command word was 'outline' simple lists would not gain maximum marks. Candidates were also required to show knowledge of sources of data from within the UK that show the extent of ill-health caused, or made worse, by work.

Answers to part (a) were generally acceptable. Some candidates did not read the question carefully and gave random answers on general and special damages. Part (b) was less well answered, showing a lack of knowledge of UK data sources and their conclusions. Few candidates were able to progress beyond mentioning the HSE, Labour Force Survey and the NHS, with some suggesting such things as 'the television', 'the ten-yearly national census', 'the Internet' or even 'SHP magazine'. References to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) did not recognise that the question clearly asked for 'UK data sources'.

Candidates should ensure that they give a number of points equivalent to the number of marks available for the part of the question they are answering, while paying special attention to the command word. They should also acquaint themselves with a range of sources of national ill-health statistics; course providers could ensure that mention of such data sources is included in course materials. Improvements may also be made by reading and re-reading the question carefully and giving the information that is asked for.

Question 10

7.2 Explain the nature of perception of risk and its relationship to performance in the workplace

7.4 Explain appropriate methods of improving individual human reliability in the workplace

7.5 Explain how organisational factors could contribute to improving human reliability

Candidates were required to demonstrate knowledge of the Hale and Glendon model of individual behaviour in the face of danger and of methods for improving human reliability in the given scenario.

This was a fairly popular question but was not answered well. Candidates had a tendency to confuse the 'Hale and Glendon' model with the 'Hale and Hale' model, which resulted in entirely incorrect answers being given. Those candidates who did deal with Hale and Glendon as required by the question gave mostly superficial answers.

For part (b) generic answers with suggestions that were irrelevant to the scenario were given (eg incentives, medical assessments and even health surveillance), showing a lack of understanding of how the principles might apply in a real world situation.

Some candidates tried to compensate for a lack of knowledge of the Hale and Glendon model by giving extended commentary on breaches of legislation and case law, neither of which were required by the question and so did not attract marks.

Many candidates appear to have limited knowledge of the principles of human behaviour and human reliability. Course providers may therefore wish to encourage students to read publications such as HSG 48, which they will find to be of some assistance. As with other answers on this paper, candidates should address the question that was asked and not write about something else.

Question 11

9.1 Explain the key requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

10.1 Explain the duties owed at common law

This scenario-based question required candidates to demonstrate knowledge of both civil and criminal law (specifically the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the tort of negligence) and to be able to apply that knowledge to the situation described in the question.

Many candidates were able to correctly deal with the various relevant sections and subsections of the 1974 Act and could cite appropriate case law in support. However, despite the question clearly asking for breaches by the manufacturing organisation, many candidates seemed to give pre-prepared answers to similar questions and therefore gave irrelevant information on breaches that may have been committed by other parties. Some candidates did not deal with the possible breaches of the 1974 Act at all and instead gave irrelevant information on breaches of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations and the Occupiers Liability Act.

For part (b), many candidates did not recognise the significance of the date given in the question and so discussed the potential for an action in the tort of breach of statutory duty, which is no longer available for cases where, as in this case, injury was sustained on or after 1 October 2013. This shows a lack of current up-to-date knowledge. Notwithstanding this, a high number of candidates dealt reasonably well with the tort of negligence, although there were some answers that did not progress beyond recitation of the tests for negligence.

Candidates can improve by reading and re-reading the question and providing an answer that is relevant to what is being asked.

Examination technique

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

Candidates 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 candidates to be sufficiently prepared to provide the relevant depth of answer across a broad range of topic areas. For example, a candidate 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 candidate 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 candidates 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 candidates appear to misread or misinterpret several questions. This situation is more likely due to candidates 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 candidates 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 candidates were instructed that there was no need to make reference to specific control measures and yet did so. In another example candidates wrote about selection of PPE when the question wording had clearly stated that this had already been undertaken. Another example was where candidates wrote about barriers to rehabilitation without relating them to the bio-psychosocial model, even though the question specifically asked them to do this.

Some candidates wrote large amounts of text on a single topic where only one mark could be awarded. Candidates 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 candidates misread some of the questions, to their disadvantage. This should be a relatively easy pitfall to overcome; candidates should ensure that they make full use of the 10 minutes reading time to understand what each question requires. Candidates 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. Candidates 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, candidates 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.

Course providers and candidates 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 candidate'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**.....

Candidates 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 candidates for examination, or offering advice on examination technique, accredited course providers 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 candidates' minds to the wider (and usually correct) possibilities.

Candidates repeated the same point but in different ways

There are instances where candidates 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, candidates 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 candidates 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, candidates 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 candidates 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. Candidates 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.

Candidates 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 candidates 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 candidates who did not impose a structure on their answers. Starting each new point on a new line would assist in preventing candidates 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 candidates and makes it much clearer in the stress of the examination for candidates to see which points have been made and reduce the chances of the same point being made several times. Course providers are encouraged to set written work and to provide feedback on written answers, looking to see that candidates are able to come up with a broad range of relevant and accurate points; they should point out to candidates where the same point is being made more than once.

Candidates 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, candidates will know more and be able to produce a broader and more detailed answer in the examination. Candidates may also find it helpful to read through their answers as they write them in order to avoid repetition of points.

Course providers 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 candidates may not have taken formal examinations for some years.

Candidates produced an incoherent answer

Candidates 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 candidates 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 candidates 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. Candidates 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 candidates 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.

Candidates 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 candidate.

Generally, there has been an improvement in response to command words, but a number of candidates 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 candidates 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.

Candidate's handwriting was illegible

It is unusual to have to comment on this aspect of candidate 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 candidates 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 candidates 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. Accredited course providers should encourage and give opportunities for candidates 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. Candidates 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 accredited course providers that candidates 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: http://www.ielts.org/institutions/test_format_and_results.aspx

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

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

Candidates did not answer all the questions

It has been noted that a number of candidates do not attempt all of the questions on the examination and of course where a candidate 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 candidate'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 candidates have a total lack of awareness that the topic covered in certain questions is even in the syllabus.

If candidates 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 candidate can do to address this point. Responsibility for delivering and studying the full breadth of the syllabus rests with both the course provider and the individual candidates and both must play their part to ensure candidates 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, candidates 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, candidates 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 candidates 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.

Candidates 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 candidates' 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 candidate's **understanding** of the topic and reciting a pre-prepared and memorised answer will not show a candidate's understanding. In fact, if a candidate 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 candidates:

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, candidates are occasionally able to outline a legal breach but do not always explain why it had been breached. A number of instances of candidates simply providing a list of information suggested that while candidates probably have the correct understanding, they cannot properly express it. Whether this is a reflection of the candidate'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 which 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. Candidates 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.

Most candidates were unable to explain their answers in sufficient detail or appeared to become confused about what they wanted to say as they wrote their answer. For example in one question many candidates 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 topic. 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 topic such that another person would be able to visualise what was being described. Candidates 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. Candidates should aim to achieve a level of understanding that enables them to describe key concepts.

Some candidates 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. Candidates 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 candidates 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 candidates will be expected to give more detail in their answers. 'Outline' requires a candidate 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 candidates should also be guided by the number of marks available. Those candidates 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.

Candidates 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 candidates 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 course providers should use the NEBOSH guidance on command words within their examination preparation sessions in order to prepare candidates 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'. Candidates tend to answer such questions satisfactorily, especially where a question might ask to 'identify' something and then 'give' an example. The candidate 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 candidates 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 candidates 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 candidates comment with justification on each of these areas they would gain good marks in that part of question.

Few candidates are able to respond appropriately to this command word. At Diploma level, candidates 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: www.nebosh.org.uk/students/default.asp?cref=1345&ct=2.



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