

January 2016

# Examiners' Report

NEBOSH National  
Diploma in  
Occupational Health  
and Safety - Unit C



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## NEBOSH NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

### UNIT C: WORKPLACE AND WORK EQUIPMENT

**JANUARY 2016**

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# Introduction

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

Courses leading to NEBOSH qualifications attract around 50,000 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

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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 C and tutor reference documents for each Element.

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

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

## Unit C

### Workplace and work equipment

#### Candidate performance

This report covers the examination sitting in January 2016.

#### Learning outcomes

##### Question 1

#### **4.3 Outline the main principles of the design and use of electrical systems and equipment in adverse or hazardous environments**

Candidates needed to demonstrate a good understanding of the need for effective earthing, bonding and selection of the right conductive materials for the operation, together with the need for vapour recovery and nitrogen blanketing.

Some candidates talked about control of ignition sources, electrical equipment classification, the need for bunding and well-labelled tanks - none of which were relevant to the question. Other candidates focused on human factors and procedural controls, eg training and PTW, not design features. Few candidates mentioned water contamination in pipes and only a limited number referred to controlling pump rates and the use of interlocks. Some candidates used vague terms such as 'appropriate materials', 'anti-static properties' without demonstrating that they had any understanding.

Some candidates did not demonstrate a clear understanding of the properties of insulators and conductors, or the need to bond items together and drain charges to earth safely to reduce the risks from static charges

Many candidates appeared not to understand the term '*design feature*' in the context of mitigation, while others could not picture the scenario given and course providers are advised to contextualise the practical issues around static electricity. It appeared that a number of candidates had revised previous questions on this subject. However, previous questions were not in the same context and the answers provided did not match the knowledge and application required.

##### Question 2

#### **2.2 Outline the behaviour of structural materials, buildings and building contents in a fire**

#### **2.3 Outline the main principles and practices of fire and explosion prevention and protection**

Knowledge of the properties and behaviour of wood, metal and plastic in a fire were required in this question. While many candidates appreciated that wood was the best material for the window frame, many were unable to construct their answers to consider the behaviour of the three materials in the scenario given, instead supplying rote definitions.

Those candidates who were less successful on this question appeared to lack relevant knowledge and a number provided two 'best' materials in part (b) in the hopes of gaining marks.

Again, understanding the syllabus in a practical context is key to demonstrating Diploma level qualification requirements are met.

### Question 3

- 5.2 Explain how risks to health and safety arising from the use of work equipment are controlled**
- 5.4 Explain the role of competence, training, information and supervision in the control of risks arising from the installation, operation, maintenance and use of work equipment**
- 7.1 Describe the main hazards and control measures associated with commonly encountered mobile work equipment**

This question required candidates to apply their knowledge of work equipment issues to a common item of agricultural equipment, the power take off.

This question attracted the most limited response in Section A, with few candidates achieving more than half marks. While some candidates referred to the need of guarding of the PTO shaft, very few referred to safety features of the tractor or the pump. Marks were mostly gained as a result of identifying manual handling, ground, environmental and drowning issues.

'Permit-to-work' was often mistakenly thought to refer to something electrical, while some answers were in many cases too general to attract marks.

Course providers need to impress upon their students the main requirement and practical application of Unit C and the constant need to bear this in mind when answering questions. Too much emphasis was put on welfare and biological issues rather than the explicit risks entailed in the operation. Concentration on job rotation, lone working, noise and vibration were extraneous to the question. Candidates discussing the theory of risk assessment wrote much for few marks.

### Question 4

#### **6.3 Describe protective devices found on general workplace machinery**

An understanding of the application of a fixed guard was required. While many candidates referred to the need for a special tool to remove, and infrequent access needs, and, gave a good example, few candidates mentioned that a fixed guard had no moving parts and was not connected to (the machine) controls.

Anthropometric considerations, noise and vibration issues, robustness and the need not to create additional hazards were well identified by many candidates.

A significant number of candidates were not able to describe a fixed guard accurately, with numerous references to interlocks and examples of items that were not guarded with fixed protection.

### Question 5

#### **3.6 Explain the purpose of, and essential requirements for, emergency evacuation procedures**

The content of an employee fire safety training syllabus was asked for in this question. A popular question, it was well answered in terms of range and breadth of responses. Most candidates gained greater than half marks.

No real limitations were noted, although some candidates answered with questions in discussion-style rather than offering assertive statements which sometimes do not indicate sufficient knowledge.

Some candidates missed out on marks by not providing a sufficient range of answers.

It is important that the teaching of this subject matter embraces a number of different work situations and that candidates are able to extrapolate their knowledge to unfamiliar situations.

## Question 6

- 1.1 Explain the need for, and factors involved in, the provision and maintenance of a safe working environment, with specific reference to access and egress, pedestrians, and slips, trips and falls**
- 9.3 Explain the hazards associated with working at heights from fixed work or temporary platforms and the necessary precautions and safe working practices**

Again a popular and well answered question with most candidates asking the question of the need to undertake the proposed work in the first instance. Candidates correctly identified the work at height issues and controls, slipping, environmental factors and competence/fitness of the driver.

The only general weakness identified among candidates in this instance was a lack of ability to get the information down efficiently in a concise manner.

There were no pitfalls noted in response to this generally well understood area of the syllabus.

## Question 7

- 6.2 Describe, with examples, the principal generic mechanical and non-mechanical hazards of general workplace machinery**
- 11.1 Outline the principles of operation of liquefied gas storage; refrigeration systems; and heating systems**
- 11.3 Outline the key features and safety requirements for process pressure systems**
- 11.4 Outline, the likely causes of the failure of pressure systems, and the testing and prevention strategies that can be used**
- 5.3 Explain safe working procedures for the maintenance, inspection and testing of work equipment according to the risks posed**

This question covered a number of inter-related syllabus requirements applicable to fired boilers. An understanding of why the boiler was a pressure system allied to knowledge of the common modes of failure of such systems was asked for. The question then asked for candidates to demonstrate an understanding of the principals and application of gamma radiography in relation to boiler systems.

Very few candidates attempted the question. Some who did were able to identify steam as a relevant fluid, and were able to identify corrosion/thermal/mechanical fatigue and creep as types of failure, although with little description of what these meant in context. While gamma radiography principles were well outlined, most candidates were unable to identify specific parts of the pressure system for which the technique would be appropriate.

Most candidates who attempted this question did not demonstrate the necessary level of syllabus knowledge. This is a common concern also noted in the more technical questions contained in this question paper. Examiners are concerned that in an age of increasing technological sophistication candidates appear not to understand what general practitioner levels of understanding are.

## Question 8

- 1.3 Explain the assessment of risk and safe working practices associated with work in confined spaces**

A popular question and generally well answered. Candidates displayed a good knowledge of confined space work risks and control measures (although few appreciated the significance of 'leaded' (highly toxic) petrol). Candidates who did well first of all considered whether or not entry was necessary, with a number of candidates giving examples of how cleaning and inspection could be done externally.

However, the specific risks of the operation were not addressed by many of the candidates, the marks available for the generic content of the mark scheme usually being sufficient to gain good marks. There was a noticeable lack of detail in the limited answers, for example 'proper' this and 'correct' that, without supporting examples to complete an 'outline' level of response.

Again course providers and candidates must ensure the core knowledge of the syllabus requirement can be contextualised and specific question scenario issues addressed.

## **Question 9**

### **8.4 Outline the main principles for safe working in the vicinity of high voltage systems**

This question was regarding the use of electricity on construction sites. Although popular, it was not generally well answered.

Although candidates may not be construction site experienced, it is expected that they would be able to apply general electrical risk factors (such as weather environment; damage to equipment from the activity; trailing cables abrasion damage; poor earthing; live working) and control measures (such as PPE for working live; inspection and testing; reduced voltage; protection of equipment against damage) to that unfamiliar environment. However, this was not the case with many candidates.

Some candidates often included control measures/failures in part (a) of the question (such as 'lack of training/competence'; 'the need for use of RCD's'; 'contacting local authority for plans/maps of underground cables') but did not repeat this information in part (b) where the marks for the information was available. Many vague, unsupported statements, for example 'low quality of equipment' in part (a) and 'high standards of safety' were noticeable in a number of responses.

Question reading practice is required to ensure candidates can clearly identify where in their responses the appropriate information should be included.

## **Question 10**

### **10.1 Explain the hazards, risks and control measures for safe workplace transport operations**

A very popular question where nearly all candidates who answered it gained at least half marks by providing a good range of design and procedural measures. For some candidates the marks gained here compensated for marks missed on other questions. Examiners noted that perhaps this question may have been memorised by candidates in a rote manner and in some cases clearly lacked sufficient detail for a valid outline.

Many candidates answered with the statement 'fit for purpose', for example 'surfaces fit for purpose' rather than statements like 'smooth and stable surfaces'.

## **Question 11**

### **4.3 Outline the main principles of the design and use of electrical systems and equipment in adverse or hazardous environments**

Candidates were required to show an understanding of electrical zoning requirements for hazardous atmospheres and the selection of electrical equipment for use in such environments.

This was the least popular question on the paper, but of those candidates who attempted it were able to give reasonable answers to part (a), by successfully outlining the purpose and types of zone classification. There was less success with answers to part (b), with only outlines of 'intrinsically safe', 'flameproof' and 'pressurised protection' attracting good marks.

Due to the low sample it was difficult to determine whether candidates had misunderstood the question, were confused in their understanding or had not been taught well; possibly a combination of all three being the most likely explanation.



## 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](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](http://www.nebosh.org.uk/students/default.asp?cref=1345&ct=2).



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