Preparation for the electronic open assessment
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Preparing for the electronic open assessment starts with reviewing the syllabus. You will need to know how to carry out research and know where to find relevant information. Candidates must read the questions carefully, taking care to understand what's actually needed. Part B questions usually include ‘signposts’ which point the way to the kind of answer the examiners are looking for. Candidates need to be familiar with the format and requirements of both Parts of the electronic open assessment so that they can prepare a strategy for approaching the questions in a clear, logical and structured way.

However, good technique won’t make up for any gaps in knowledge or lack of understanding of syllabus material. The primary emphasis should therefore be on gaining the right knowledge and understanding, and on developing research methods that will help to fill any remaining knowledge gaps. This development can then be used for your CPD.

Approach to the electronic open assessment

For Part A of the examination, candidates should read the questions carefully, and indicate their responses, being mindful that there may be more than one correct option among those supplied. For Part B, the marks available for parts of the question will reflect the level of detail required — enough to show why the issue identified is relevant and that the principles are understood — but there are no further marks to be gained for extra information. Questions for both Parts of the examination can be drawn from any part of the syllabus. It’s unlikely that the Part B questions will match your direct experience. The expectation is that you will need to research your answers.

Approach to individual questions

For Part B, there is a limit of 700 words for each question. Before starting an answer, candidates should read the question carefully until they’re certain that they understand exactly what is being asked. Every word of the question is there for a reason, and much depends on taking note of the signposts. While answering Part B questions, candidates should return to the question to make sure that what they’re writing is still relevant. Under the stressful conditions of an examination, it’s quite easy to misunderstand a question or to wander off into more familiar territory. All too often, examiners are faced with what would have been an excellent answer if only a different question had been asked. The examiner can’t award marks for irrelevant material, however accurate it is.

Some Part B questions give specific instructions about the style of answer asked for — for instance, to draft a management brief or report. Credit will be given to answers that follow these instructions. In other questions, the candidate might be asked to set out the issues that would need to be addressed in such a report. It is important to read the question carefully to understand the style of answer that is being asked for.

Part B questions will by and large consist of the presentation of a scenario. It’s important to remember that the scenario contains signposts towards the required answer. A generalised answer that doesn’t refer to the situation described in the question will earn few marks. Candidates should try to picture the scene in their minds while planning their answer — this will help them to focus more clearly on the key issues.

Where Part B questions are divided into two or more parts, the marks available for each part are clearly shown. Candidates should use the allocation of marks to guide their efforts — they shouldn’t spend a disproportionate amount of time on a part that offers few marks when more marks are available elsewhere.

Part B answers that have a coherent structure tend to attract more marks than disjointed ones where points are jotted down as they come to mind. Once again, to produce a well-structured answer, candidates need to think about the question. Candidates may find an answer plan useful — it can help them to make sure they’ve covered all the relevant points in their answer. The style of answer plan is up to the individual candidate, but it needs to identify the key points in a way that makes sure they’re not forgotten as they develop their answer.

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Summary

The electronic open assessment requires more than just a general understanding of health and safety issues. It asks candidates to demonstrate technical competence and an insight into the subject that should be expected of a health and safety professional dealing with complex risk issues. Candidates may have to develop their techniques for demonstrating their level of research, knowledge and understanding. Examiners enjoy awarding marks and won’t hesitate to do so when they’re deserved. But it’s up to the candidate to make sure the examiner is able to do this. Although a good knowledge of the breadth and depth of the open assessment syllabus is vital, success ultimately depends on the candidate’s ability to demonstrate this knowledge in a logical, meaningful and clear way.