

**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**THE INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS**

**EXAMINATION COUNCIL**

**CERTIFICATE IN FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING**

**DECEMBER 2019 EXAMINATIONS**

**FA 1 BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**

**EXAMINER'S REPORT**

**Introduction**

The report provides an account of students performance in the whole paper as well as performance on individual questions, popularity of questions, common errors made by students, possible factors affecting students performance and recommendations.

**GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE PAPER AND STUDENTS PERFORMANCE**

**The paper**

This paper contained a total of six questions. The candidates were required to choose any four questions. The paper covered core areas of the business communication syllabus i.e. Communication Theory, Language Skills, Business Communication, Oral Communication, Organizational Communication and Electronic Communication. All the questions were based on the syllabus and were of the correct level. The paper covered basic Business Communication content.

**Candidates performance**

In general candidates demonstrated average understanding of the subject matter and properly followed instructions in answering questions. Performance was therefore slightly above average. Those who failed did not prepare well for the exam. Some failed because of misreading instructions and answered only three questions instead of four, thereby drastically reducing

chances of passing. Others failed because they misunderstood the questions or gross grammatical errors and difficulties to express themselves.

The general observation was that most candidates performed well in recall questions but performed poorly in questions that required application of knowledge and extended expression. This demonstrated that candidates had adequate knowledge of content but lacked skills to express themselves.

### **GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY OF THE PAPER COMPARED TO PREVIOUS DIET**

- The paper covered all areas of the communication syllabus to meet the aims and objectives as stipulated in the syllabus.
- It was a fair paper and of the right level of difficulty.

### **COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS**

#### **QUESTION 1**

- The question was on the communication theory.
- The learning outcome being addressed was “students should be able to explain the communication process”
- This was the most popular question and almost all candidates opted for it.
- The question had four parts as follows:

Part (a) the candidates were required to describe any 7 elements of the communication process using the example of communication between an accountant and an accounts clerk. Most candidates were able to explain the elements.

#### Common Problems

Some candidates were repeating the same terms they were supposed to define or explain e.g. Sender is the one who sends the message.

Other candidates transposed the meaning of encoding and decoding.  
Other candidates were giving the 7 C’s of Business Communication as elements.

Some candidates lost marks because they could not give examples in relation to the accountant and accounts clerk as demanded by the question

Part (b) required the candidates to describe the term “Noise” in relation to communication and give relevant examples.

Noise is anything that interferes with the communication e.g. music being played near a meeting room.

Most candidates got the question right especially on the description

Most candidates did not give specific examples but broad ones e.g. technical noise, physical noise, psychological noise.

Part (c) the question required the candidates to give the meaning and functions of NVC

NVC is Nonverbal Communication that does not use spoken or written word.

Most candidates got the definition right.

The second part of this question required the candidates to give the role of NVC and provide an example.

Many candidates did not do well because they were providing uses instead of functions. Some of the functions of NVC are substituting, complementing, emphasizing, regulating, repeating and contradicting. However the candidates were providing uses like to beckon, show happiness or agreement.

Some students lost marks because they did not provide examples.

Part (d) this question examined language skills, particularly sentence construction skills.

The candidates were expected to rewrite sentences by removing the redundancies.

Some students were able to identify the redundancies and rewrote the sentences correctly (without redundancies)

However, quite a few students failed to identify the redundancies which were: Proposed plan; each and every; grateful thanks.

The correct solution should remove proposed; each; grateful

## QUESTION 2

The core area for this question was oral communication. The outcome addressed by this question was “candidates should be able to describe the basic principles of oral communication”.

This was the second popular question. The question had 3 parts.

Part (a) required candidates to outline any five advantages and disadvantages of oral communication. The majority provided correct responses.

Part (b) the question asked the candidates first to define a press conference and second to state reasons why press conferences are used in organizations. From the wild responses one could note that most candidates had no idea of what a press conference was, let alone its use in the organization. “a press conference is a sizable gathering of representatives of organization and journalist to clarify an issue of concern about the organization. Most of the definitions lacked the word journalist, media or press, thereby losing marks. The second part required the candidates to give reasons for holding press conferences in organizations. This was well answered.

Part (c) this part required candidates to prepare a hand out entitled “purposes of meetings in our organization,” to be given to employees to encourage them to attend meetings. The response to this question was expected to define a “meeting” and give examples. Most candidates were able to define “meeting” and gave the required number of purposes. This showed that the candidates had adequate content to answer the question.

### Common Problems

Some candidates wrote a memo instead of a hand out and lost marks for this.

Others lost marks because they could not give the required examples.

## QUESTION 3

The question required the candidates to show understanding of oral communication and electronic communication.

The learning outcomes addressed by this question was that candidates should demonstrate knowledge of various types of communication media.

This was not very popular with the candidates.

The candidates who attempted it fared badly.

Part (a) this part asked the candidates to state situations in which it would be advisable to use written communication and give reasons. The answers were mixed. A few candidates totally missed the question as they just listed forms of written communication like letters, memos e.t.c. as answers and they failed to provide the justification or reasons as expected in the question. As a result they lost marks.

Part (b) this part required the candidates to state five skills necessary for effective oral communication, showing how important they would be in an oral presentation. Most candidates had the correct ideas of the oral communication skills required by the question. However, most candidates lost marks because they could not express themselves or explain the notion properly. Most candidates were giving one word answer e.g. instead of indicating a skill as “ability to analyse audience” they would just write “audience”, thereby losing marks.

Part (c) this part required the candidates to explain what they know about three oral electronic communication channels namely:

- Video conferencing
- PABX systems
- Skype

This part was poorly done by the majority of the candidates. They struggled to write something meaningful as it was so clear that the students did not know what these terms meant.

However, a few had some idea about video conferencing and skype but they failed to articulate their meaning/description well enough to be awarded all the marks.

#### **QUESTION 4**

The core area of this question was speech as a channel of communication.

The learning outcome addressed by this question was that candidates should demonstrate ability to make effective oral presentations

The question was another unpopular one and very few candidates attempted it. The question had three parts: speech, word processing and sentence construction

Part (a) the question required candidates to define a speech, explain steps in speech preparation, explain visual aids and outline their functions. Candidates had an idea of what speeches are but most struggled to provide the correct definition.

The question on five basic steps one would take to prepare for a speech to ensure effectiveness also gave the candidates a hard time.

The question on steps required that the steps be given in logical progression most students were not able to do this and lost marks.

The third aspect required students to explain the term “Visual Aids” as it relates to oral communication.

“Visual Aids are materials that a presenter uses to help the audience remember the information given in an oral presentation. e.g. pictures, charts, graphs maps, real objects. The key word in the definition is ‘help’

Some candidates performed well while others just gave examples of visual aids without explaining what they are thereby losing marks. The part on functions of visual aids to an oral presentation was done very well.

Part (b) the question asked candidates to identify words that were correctly spelt and construct sentences using these words. The correct words were: acquire, pretend, accommodate. Surprisingly some students who selected correctly spelled words failed to use them correctly in sentences. These lost marks as well. Most sentence construction mistakes were on subject – verb agreement.

e.g. Mary pretend to be sick,” instead of “Mary pretends to be sick.”

## **QUESTION 5**

The core area for this question was Business Communication in general and writing skills in particular.

The learning outcome being addressed was “Demonstrate understanding of the mechanics of letter/business writing”

This was a fairly popular question. Most candidates found the question fairly easy and provided correct answers.

The question had two parts.

Part (a) the question required the candidates to explain a memo, outline any 8 uses and distinguishing features.

The candidates demonstrated adequate knowledge of a memo and its uses in the organization. This was shown by them defining/explaining a memo correctly and providing the required number of its uses. The candidates were also able to provide distinctive features of a letter from a memo.

Part (b) this part asked the candidates to write a letter. They were provided with jumbled information and were required to organize it in logical or sequential order and use it as content for the letter. Since the ‘friend’ worked in another organization and had made a formal request for assistance, the letter would naturally take the business letter format with two addresses, the writer’s and the receiver’s. However most candidates used only one address. Secondly, some candidates ignored the part that required them to arrange the jumbled information into a logical sequence before using it as content for the letter. The jumbled information was as follows

Ensure letter is signed

Use correct format

Content should follow 7 C’s

Plan your letter

Make sure you address your letter to the right person properly and correctly

The correct order is as follows:

Plan your letter

Use correct format

Make sure you address your letter to the right person properly and correctly

Content should follow 7 C’s

Ensure the letter is signed

The majority of the candidates lost some marks in letter writing. Some common mistakes noted were:

Problem with grammar and expression

Some candidates did not use the business letter format of two addresses, no salutation, no complimentary close, no signature

Those who used the salutation did not match it with complimentary close e.g.

Dear Sir	-	Yours faithfully
Dear Mr Jones	-	Yours sincerely

Some candidates wrote the date in short form e.g.

10/12/2019 instead of 10<sup>th</sup> December 2019

Some letters had no subject heading, some had 2 line headings, others wrote headings in small letters instead of capitals and did not underline.

Some students wrote a totally different letter of advice not the one required by the question.

## **QUESTION 6**

The core area of the question was organizational communication.

The learning outcome addressed was:

“Demonstrate understanding of flow of networks of communication in the organization.”

This was a fairly popular question. It centred on the organizational chart, directional flow and barriers of communication and had 3 parts as follows:

Part (a) this part asked the candidates to define an organogram and state its basic features. Very few candidates gave correct answers. The majority had problems defining the terms let alone identify the required two features.

The correct answer was:



“An organogram/organizational chart is a diagrammatic representation of the various positions of employees in the organization. It shows lines of communication, flow of authority (line in command), relationship between individuals, units, sections and departments.

Part (b) the question required candidates to distinguish downward and upward communication and state their advantages and disadvantages the expected answers were:

“Downward communication is the flow of information from supervisors to subordinates in an organization. e.g. from accountant to accounts clerk, while upward communication is the flow of information from subordinates to superiors in an organization e.g. from the accounts clerk to the accountant”

Most candidates managed to provide this distinction but failed to give relevant examples.

Advantages and disadvantages of downward communication, most candidates failed to understand the difference between advantages and disadvantages, and the type of messages that go through. As a result they gave mixed answers of advantages, disadvantages and messages.

Part (c) the question listed five barriers to communication and requested candidates to state how the barriers can negatively affect communication.

Most candidates had knowledge about these barriers. The challenge was to express their provide answers.

## **MARKING GUIDE**

The marking guide attempted to cover all the possible solutions for the questions. However language and communication being a subjective subject it was not possible to be exhaustive in providing absolute solutions, hence only suggested solutions were given. Other possible solutions were added during standardization exercise. In addition markers were also given mandate to accept any other reasonable solutions but this had to be done after consultation and consensus with other members of the marking team.

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## **COMMON ERRORS/MISTAKES MADE BY STUDENTS**

Grammar continues to be a problem with many students. Most candidates lost marks because of poor sentence construction and wrong spellings. The majority also lack the skills to express themselves adequately in English.

Some candidates answered only 3 questions instead of the required 4.

Some candidates repeated responses or gave more responses than required to confuse the marker.

It was also observed that some candidates copied the whole question before answering it thereby wasting precious time which could be used in answering the questions.

Some candidates ignored the instruction to start a question on a new/fresh page.

Ignoring certain instructions within a question was also common and candidates lost marks. e.g.

Not providing examples where the question required examples

Providing examples when the question had not demanded them to do so.

Not indicating the question number on top of the page

Responding to parts of a question in a random manner e.g. Part (c) of question number 1 could be found together with answers to question number 4(b) e.t.c.

Failure to understand the demands of a question then giving answers that do not relate with the question at all.

## **POSSIBLE FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR STUDENT PERFORMANCE**

### **(a) Good performance**

The majority of students performed very well in question 1 and 2. This may be attributed to a number of factors.

(i) Questions were mostly taken from the first chapter of the manual. This is the introductory part of the course, as such every candidate is motivated to learn thereby grasping the content easily.

(ii) Recall question

The question asked candidates to recall various type of information they had learned e.g. elements of communication; define NVC; Noise; Press conference; meetings e.t.c. As such they were able to provide correct answers

(iii) **Revision of Past Papers**

The good performance could also be attributed to revision of past papers by the students, and mastering the examination content.

(b) **Poor Performance**

Most candidates appeared to have the content but struggled to communicate because of lack of skills of expression, grammar knowledge, sentence construction skills

- (i) Failure to understand the demands of the question - It has been observed that some candidates rush to provide solutions before understanding the requirements of the question.
- (ii) Sitting for the examinations without tuition - Marking of candidates papers revealed that some candidates sit the examinations without attending classes. This was evidenced by the wild guesses they gave to the questions.
- (iii) Failure to complete the syllabus – Some lecturers do not complete the syllabus leading to failure of students especially in questions whose topics come towards the end of the syllabus.

## **CONCLUSION**

In general the standard of the examination was good. It managed to examine the students on various areas of business communication syllabus. The paper revealed common errors in language which can be resolved early in the learning cycle if tutors take serious measures to correct these errors. In addition, there are some topics that candidates failed simply because those topics are not given adequate attention in classes. A good example of such topics are electronic communication where students learn ICT related concepts. If all the topics were adequately covered the pass rate and performance would be better. There is a serious need for colleges

offering this course to work on the language aspect as it is this aspect that clearly reflects the type of graduates that are produced by ICAM.

There is need to continue with the application and composition type of questions if the language aspect is to be checked. Tutors/lecturers also need to train candidates on how to approach examinations.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The following recommendations should be considered for improvement in the performance of students:

### **LEARNING INSTITUTIONS**

- Tutors should be advised to teach their students to differentiate questions which demand explanation, description and outlining from those that demand mentioning, stating, indicating and outlining.
- Institutions should pay special attention to improve students' skills in letter and memo writing especially on different types of letters/memos, date, referencing format of letter and elements of memos.
- Business communication lecturers should emphasize on the need for the students to give specific examples when answering examination questions. This will help students to score more marks.
- Lecturers to train students on word attack skills to aid understanding of the question.
- Tutors should set tasks that give students enough practice in using the language.
- The lecturers should coach the students on how to approach the examination questions. It was observed that candidates could start answering the questions without understanding what the questions demand. Other candidates were repeating the concept in the course of explaining them.
- Lectures should complete their Business Communication syllabus before the candidates go for final examination.

- The institutions should also focus on improving grammar for their students to increase chances of passing Business Communication.

## **CANDIDATES**

- Candidates should avoid rewriting the questions before responding to the question. Therefore they need to indicate the question number and paraphrase it.
- Candidates should read the instructions on both the question paper and answer book before they start writing the examination paper.
- Candidates should learn to start the answers to each question on a fresh page.
- The candidates should indicate question numbers on the top of the pages of every continuation sheet as required.
- The candidates must understand the demand of the questions before they start attempting them to avoid unnecessary errors which can cost them marks.
- Candidates should avoid sitting for the examinations without attending classes.
- Candidates should avoid providing more than the required points either intentionally (candidates repeat points with the aim of deceiving the marker to award more marks when the points are the same) or inadvertently.
- Candidates should respond to the questions logically and systematically.

