

GCE Biology FAQs - Unit 3

Practical Skills Assessment

Q. Do I have to do the core practicals?

A. Yes - the core practicals are part of the specification. As such, the written examinations can contain questions which require knowledge of the background, method and results of these practicals. Not to cover these practicals would be equivalent to leaving out a section of the specification. In addition, the core practicals aim to develop the practical skills of your students.

Q. How do I record which core practicals my students have completed and which practical skills have been assessed?

A. Use the "Record Sheet for AS Biology", to be found on the Biology homepage of our website: <http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gce/gce08/biology/Pages/default.aspx>

Q. Do I have to use this Record Sheet?

A. All centres should use this Record Sheet and should not design their own.

Q. The Record Sheet only includes the nine core practicals. What if I have done other practical work whilst assessing the practical skills of my students?

A. The sheet was designed with only the core practicals in mind, but you may add any other practical experiments you have done, if necessary, to assess the practical skills. You can do this by adding extra practicals on the reverse of the sheet, by dividing a row into two or by attaching a supplementary sheet.

Q. Do I have to assess each of the six practical skills in every core practical?

A. No - indeed, it would probably not be possible! Some practicals lend themselves to the assessment of a particular skill e.g. *Daphnia* with the skill concerning the ethics of using organisms in experimental work. It is probably easiest to assess one or two skills in each core practical.

Q. What is the minimum requirement for practical skills?

A. The minimum requirement is one tick for each practical skill i.e. a total of six ticks, one in each column.

Q. Some practical skills are made up of more than one component. What happens if a student doesn't meet all the components of this skill on a core practical?

A. It is probably easiest to award a partial tick and supplement it with another partial tick (or ticks) in other core practicals when the other components are fulfilled.

Q. What happens if a student is absent for a core practical?

A. It may be possible for the student to repeat the practical on another occasion e.g. with another set, or in their own time. If this is not possible, teachers should ensure that the student is aware of the method and results of the core practical. This could be achieved by giving the student the relevant worksheet and ensuring that questions about the practical form part of a homework assignment. With nine core practicals, it should still be possible to fulfil all the practical skills, even if a student is absent for one or more of the core practicals.

Q. I don't think one of my students will match all six practical skills.

A. This should be a highly unusual occurrence: these skills are nothing out of the ordinary for Year 12 biologists! Remember that, if a student misses several core practicals, you can use other practical work to assess the practical skills. However, there may be circumstances where prolonged candidate illness interrupts the acquisition of practical skills. In these exceptional circumstances, please contact the Biology team at Edexcel for advice.

Q. How do the ticks on the Record Sheet convert into marks?

A. There are no marks for the practical skills - all the marks for Unit 3 (6BI03) are assigned to the Visit-Issue Report. However, one of the QCA requirements for GCE Biology is that the acquisition of practical skills should be recorded - this Record Sheet therefore ensures that our specification complies with the QCA requirements.

Q. If there are no marks, why are we keeping a record?

A. The acquisition of practical skills is a QCA requirement for GCE Biology and, as such, a record needs to be kept of teachers' assessment of their students.

Q. What do I do with the Record Sheet once it is completed?

A. Keep the record sheets for all your students and send them to Edexcel when you submit your Visit-Issue Reports. If you have submitted the Visit-Issue Report for moderation, the Record Sheets may come back to you; if you submit the Visit-Issue Reports for marking, the Record Sheets will not be sent back.

Q. I am submitting my Unit 3 sample for moderation electronically. How do I submit the Record Sheets?

A. You may find it easier to scan the Record Sheets and include them on the CD you are submitting for moderation. Otherwise, you can send a hard copy with your CD.

Q. Do I also send any practical work?

A: No. Your students will need the reports for core practicals to help with revision. Unless there are exceptional and unusual circumstances, such as the suspicion of malpractice, Edexcel does not need to see any evidence for the assessment of these practical skills.

Q. If a candidate is resitting, do I need to submit the Record Sheet again?

A. No: if a candidate resits Unit 3, he or she need only resubmit the Visit-Issue Report. So that we know that the candidate has already submitted the Practical Record Sheet, please tick the box on the Visit-Issue marking / authentication sheet.

Q. Is there any other requirement for assessing Practical Skills?

A. Please make sure that the Record Sheet is signed by the student and by the teacher.

Visit-Issue Reports

Q. Our centre used the SNAB specification prior to GCE 2008. Is the Visit-Issue Report for the new specification the same as the old one?

A. No - there are some major changes to the criteria and in the application of the mark scheme. Please consult the specification for details of the new criteria. There are also Tutor Support Materials on the Biology home page on the Edexcel website:

<http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gce/gce08/biology/Pages/default.aspx>

Q. Is there a word limit for the Report?

A. The word limit is no longer part of the marking criteria, but students should keep to the guide of 1500 - 2000 words for the Report. This includes all text, with the exception of the bibliography.

Q. What format can the Visit-Issue Report be in?

A. The majority of Reports are in the form of a written report and should be word-processed. However, some Reports can be submitted in other formats: we've had both posters and videos in the past.

Q. I've heard that Edexcel will mark our Reports for us. Is this true?

A. You have two options when submitting your Reports. You may mark your students' work and submit a sample, as requested, to Edexcel for moderation (Entry code = 6BI03/A) or you may submit your students' work to Edexcel and we will mark it for you (Entry code = 6BI03/B).

Q. Do you charge an extra fee for marking the work for us?

A. For June 2009, the entry fee is the same for both 6BI03/A and 6BI03/B i.e. there is no supplementary fee if we mark the work for you. It is possible that, in future series, this may change.

Q. I want to mark my own students' work, as I feel it will give me a better appreciation of how well they have done and tell me how I may improve the delivery of this Unit in the future. Is there any guidance available to me?

A. Yes: there are several examples of marked Reports in the Tutor Support Materials mentioned above. In addition, there are INSET courses available to help teachers assess this Unit. Some of these courses are face-to-face meetings with members of our senior examining team. As many teachers find coming out of school to INSET meetings difficult, there are also some web-based INSET sessions. Details of INSET courses appear on the Edexcel website.

Q. Can I have some feedback on my students' work before marking them?

A. Yes - we offer a free consultancy service where you can submit two or three Reports to one of our senior examiners for comments. Please look at the Visit-Issue Report Consultancy Service documents on the GCE Biology homepage.

Q. What is the deadline for submitting Visit-Issue Reports for moderation / marking?

A. The submission deadline is 15th May. The deadline is the same for work submitted for moderation and for work submitted for marking.

Q. Can I submit the work electronically?

A. If you are sending work to Edexcel to be moderated (6BI03/A), the work can be submitted electronically, or as hard copy. If you are sending work to Edexcel to be marked (6BI03/B), the work **MUST** be submitted as a hard copy, **NOT** electronically.

Q. Where do I send the Reports?

A. You should receive address labels along with the attendance registers / OPTEMS forms for this Unit. If there is any doubt, the name and address of your moderator / marker can be found using Edexcel Online.

Q. I have some students whose work is being submitted for moderation and other whose work is being submitted for marking. Do these both go to the same person?

A. It's unlikely: our examiners usually only do one job, either moderation or marking. If you're entering candidates under both routes, the work is likely to go to two separate people. Please take care to send the work to the correct person, otherwise there is a risk of work going missing in transit when redirected.

Q. Do I need to submit anything else with the Visit-Issue Reports?

A. The work of each candidate must be authenticated using the authentication form on the GCE Biology homepage. Don't forget to submit the Practical Skills Record sheets too!

Q. Will I get the Visit-Issue Reports back again after results?

A. Samples of work submitted to Edexcel for moderation (6BI03/A) will be returned to centres in the same way as any other piece of coursework. Samples of work submitted to Edexcel for marking (6BI03/B) will be retained by Edexcel in the same way as any other externally-marked examination.

Q. If I submitted Reports to you for marking, is there any way to get them back?

A. You need to submit an Access to Scripts request. Please note that there is a charge for this service. If you are submitting Reports to Edexcel for marking (6BI03/B), it might be a good idea to keep a copy of the Report at your centre.

Q. I'm not happy with the marks my students got. Can I get a remark?

A. If you submitted work for moderation (6BI03/A), then you cannot query individual students' results: you must ask for remoderation of the whole centre (like any other piece of coursework). If you submitted work to be marked (6BI03/B), then you may ask for a remark for one or more students individually (like any other externally-marked examination).

Q. Do I get any feedback on the marking of the Reports?

A. If your work was moderated, your centre will receive an E9 moderator's report. These are submitted by the moderator online and can be accessed using Edexcel Online. If your work was marked by Edexcel, we hope to be able to send a similar E9 report, but please note we cannot guarantee this. The Principal Examiner for this Unit will write a report covering aspects of the work noted across all centres: this will be published on the day results come out. There will also be feedback INSET events.

Q. One of my candidates wishes to resit this unit. Does the Report have to be done again from scratch?

A. Often, the reason the Report had a low mark was because the title did not allow access to a problem or the areas of applied Biology being tested. It is usually a good idea, therefore, for candidates to start on a new topic. However, a candidate who did a Visit may not be able to undertake a new Visit, so would have to rework the existing report. There is nothing to stop a candidate from revising and resubmitting a report: either Visit or Issue.