



General Certificate of Education

Health and Social Care 8621/8623

HC02 Effective Communication

Report on the Examination

June 2009

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HC02: Effective Communication

One of the key educational aims of this unit is to give candidates the opportunity to improve communication skills they are likely to need in health and social care. Speaking to small groups in formal or semi-formal situations, writing coherent reports, designing feedback materials and analysing data are all relevant skills. It was evident from candidates' work that there is a significant need for the development of these skills.

A positive feature of the portfolios submitted was that most candidates produced independent work. Some centres had clearly guided candidates in the requirements of the specification. However, in many centres the work produced by candidates did not fully meet the requirements. This might have been because candidates failed to follow the guidance provided, or it might have been that teachers did not focus closely enough on the requirements of this unit.

The main requirements of the report are:

- A brief introduction to the talk stating the client type and the intended audience. (The client must have problems in communication. Please refer to the comprehensive list of clients and care settings in the specification.)
- The text (a transcript) of a talk focussed on communication skills for use by a practitioner/informal carer when working with the specified client type. The candidates should be encouraged to indicate where PowerPoint slides were displayed if used.
- A blank copy of a questionnaire designed to measure the effectiveness of the talk – especially the candidate's use of communication skills
- Presentation of processed data from the questionnaire
- An evaluation section including the justification of design decisions, evaluation of own skills – based on feedback and suggested improvements
- An appendix including all completed questionnaires, sources used and evidence of teacher feedback

Section A

One common omission was the failure to provide the 'brief introduction' stating the client type and intended audience. Also, surprisingly common was the failure to provide the text (a transcript) of the actual talk – a clear and major requirement of the specification. Some candidates included only slides of a visual presentation. Others included material that was not required, for example, a description of the process of planning the talk, or an essay on generic communication skills.

Some candidates included talks that were not about, or not mostly about communication skills, i.e. concentrating on the medical condition of the client rather than how to communicate with him/her.

Sometimes candidates gave talks that were mainly descriptions of placement experiences, again ignoring communication within the placement.

Some candidates chose to give a talk on subjects such as obesity, smoking, etc. which did not fit in with the specification requirements.

Some candidates ignored the requirement to refer to communication barriers in the talk.

A common weakness in talks that did focus on communication was a tendency to give generic descriptions of communication skills, which might be applicable to almost any type of client,

rather than relating the skills to the client. Also evident was a tendency to rely too much on just one source of data, such as a visit or placement.

It is not necessary for candidates to make PowerPoint presentations. Some candidates evidently ran into problems with both software and hardware with this.

Candidates should not enclose videotapes or DVDs with the report.

There were some excellent talks which included a range of relevant communication skills related to their actual application with a specified client type, and usually illustrated by realistic concrete examples. Research for these talks combined some practical experience or observation (perhaps on a work-experience placement or visit) with thorough research of published sources. These talks did not follow any one pattern. For example, some used visual aids, while others did not, some featured audience participation, while others did not. It is likely that candidates whose talks worked best designed their talks in ways that played to their own individual strengths, rather than adopting any uniform style or pattern. To assess a good talk the question should be asked. *'After hearing that talk has the audience been given enough information to go and communicate effectively with that client?'*

Section B

Questionnaire design

As required, most candidates produced questionnaires that were clearly of their own devising. However many did not follow the instruction to include a blank copy of this at the start of Section B.

The most successful questionnaires were those that featured clear, unambiguous items and produced informative feedback. These also featured clear instructions to respondents.

Most candidates wrote questionnaires that used a variety of item types. However, there was a common tendency to write items which restricted the choice of responses. For example, a candidate might ask whether the speed of their speech was 'right' and give the options of 'Yes' or 'No' for respondents. This item is very poorly designed, in that it can yield very little useful information. For example, if someone answered 'No', this would not show whether they thought the speech was too fast or too slow. A better item would give the respondent these options.

Candidates also had difficulty in designing effective open question items. These were sometimes used to follow up previous closed questions, e.g. "If NO, why not?"

The use of Yes/No items tended to produce unanimous responses (with fellow students perhaps being reluctant to make negative responses). Such responses made it more difficult for candidates to evaluate their performance in Section C.

Some candidates collected data that did not seem relevant to the questionnaire's purpose, such as requiring the sex and age of respondents.

Some candidates focussed most of the items on the content of the talk or the quality of visual aids, while including few items about the actual delivery of the talk.

It would be useful for candidates to bear in mind that the purpose of designing the questionnaire is not merely to produce a questionnaire for assessment purposes, but also to collect the data that they will need to write an effective evaluation.

It should be noted that questionnaires completed by members of the audience should be anonymous, apart from the feedback provided by the teacher, which should be signed and dated. Some teachers provided useful and legitimate help for their candidates by giving feedback additional to the questionnaire. This is particularly helpful for candidates whose questionnaires fail to provide much useful information. Some staff did not include feedback, thus disadvantaging their candidates.

Data analysis

Data processing and presentation presented a range of problems for candidates. Many appeared to lose sight of the need to produce a clear and accurate summary of the data from the questionnaires. Lack of clarity resulted from a number of errors. One was to present graphs separately from the other information presented. Another was the failure to indicate what the item reported was about. The best way to do this is to state the item and then give the summarised responses.

Another omission was the failure to give collated data (the actual number of respondents who gave each particular response). Some candidates presented raw data in this section (for example, tally charts and verbatim lists of all responses to open items), and some included calculations. These should be put in an appendix.

Candidates should understand that unanimous responses do not require graphical illustration.

Some candidates produced very long data analysis sections – the length of which militated against their clarity.

Many candidates were unable to manage the software they used, omitting to alter the default setting and as a result they produced poorly-labelled graphs that had no meaning. It would be better to hand-draw graphs, rather than produce poorly-labelled printed graphs. Some candidates also failed to label the axes which makes the graph impossible to read.

Some candidates used a range of different graphical styles, when the consistent use of one style would have been clearer for the reader. Graphs that cannot be read for this type of information should not be used.

There was a tendency for many centres to over-credit the content of Section B. In some cases this might have been because of unfamiliarity with the skills required. A03 was over marked by some centres when there was no evidence of appropriate quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Section C

A positive feature of candidates' work for Section C was a tendency to be frank and open when evaluating their own communication skills.

Most candidates attempted to say something about design decisions, own communication skills and suggested improvements.

The need to justify design decisions was not always understood well. Candidates should make conscious decisions such as whether or not to use visual aids, how much to involve the audience, how to engage attention and how to make the talk interesting.

There is no requirement to evaluate the questionnaire.

Section D

Most candidates included all completed feedback forms. These are essential for assessors and moderators to check the accuracy of data analysis. Failure to include all feedback forms has an impact on A03 as there is no authentication of the data the candidate has presented.

When giving references to sources used, it is helpful if candidates give brief statements of what information they obtained from each one.

Grade boundaries

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the AQA website at www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html