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OFFICE ADMINISTRATION ADVANCED LEVEL

> **Paper 5241**
>
> **Text Processing**

General comments

The overall performance of the candidates varied considerably. Some of the work submitted was of a high standard, with accurate work that was well presented. However, some candidates submitted scripts which were inaccurate and which showed little, if any, evidence of proofreading.

Some candidates did not succeed because they failed the Speed Test (**Task 1**). Candidates are required to key in all the text (to achieve the minimum speed of 50 wpm) within the error tolerance (six errors maximum) and within the time allowed (five minutes).

There were some candidates who were successful in the Speed Test but who then incurred too many errors in **Tasks 2 – 5**.

Errors occurring in **Tasks 2**, **3** and **4**:

- errors of agreement were not identified and corrected (such as "A range of drinks ... are" not corrected to "A range of drinks ... is" – 5241/A, **Task 3**)

- apostrophe errors were not identified and corrected (such as the superfluous apostrophe in "office's" not deleted – 5241/A, **Task 4**)

- abbreviations were not expanded (such as "appt" to "appointment" – 5241/A, **Task 2**)

- underlining not carried out as indicated in the draft (such as "at the same workstation" – 5241/A, **Task 3**)

- typing errors such as "you" instead of "your" and "form" instead of "from".

Many candidates seemed to rely on spellcheckers and grammar checkers as their only means of proofreading. There were errors such as "you"/"your" and "form"/"from", which the spellchecker would *not* identify as incorrect.

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

Although some candidates completed the task within the error tolerance, there were a few instances where candidates had not completed all the text. There were also instances where candidates had completed all the text but incurred more than the maximum six errors allowed.

Many of the candidates still do not seem to understand that they are allowed to proofread and correct errors *within the 5 minutes allowed*. Candidates should be advised that they are required to type the text once only and to spend any time remaining proofreading and correcting their work before printing.

Task 2

Today's date is required, as is normal business practice. Omission of the date incurs three penalty errors.

The subject heading should be keyed in as displayed in the draft, for example Initial Capitals and Underlining or ALL CAPITALS. This assesses candidates' ability to use a variety of styles as presented in the draft (such as may be required by a company's house style).

Errors of agreement may be subject/verb or quantity/noun. These will include more obvious errors such as "4 week" ("4 weeks") but also included will be less obvious examples such as "A special leaflet describing these are enclosed" ("A special leaflet describing these is enclosed").

Enclosure(s) should be indicated. Although the usual business convention is to use Enc for one enclosure and Encs for more than one, any indication will be accepted in the Assessment.

Task 3

The left and right margins should be changed from the default margins set by the word processor (usually 2.5 cm or 2.54 cm) to the measurements given in the draft (such as 30 mm – 5241/A). The measured space between the left margin and the left edge of the paper and the right margin and the right edge of the paper should each have measured exactly 30 mm (3 cm). Many candidates seem to have added the 3 cm (30 mm) measurement to the default margins, resulting in very wide margins and a very short line length.

Errors in apostrophes may be those which have been misplaced – such as "the childs' coat" ("the child's coat"), or omitted – such as "the secretarys computer" ("the secretary's computer") or superfluous apostrophes – such as "the offices' are being refurbished" ("the offices are being refurbished").

Page numbers should be inserted on continuation sheets – any style and font size is acceptable.

Paragraphing shown in the draft should be followed exactly. Instructions to create a new paragraph and to "run on" should be carried out as shown by the amendment signs.

Task 4

Letters must be produced on letter-headed paper – some candidates used plain A4 paper. The letter-heading may be prepared as a template for the use of word processor operators, or may be pre-printed. Candidates should *not* key in the letter-heading themselves. They are being assessed on their ability to produce letters in a realistic manner, as would be required in business.

Today's date is required and the full style is preferred, e.g. "1 January 2005".

The Special Mark (such as "URGENT" – 5241/B) should be typed exactly as shown in the draft, including capitalisation.

Two extra copies of the letter are required. The name of the person who is to receive one of these copies should be typed on both the extra copies. This ensures that the file copy shows all people who received the letter. Candidates who did produce the two extra copies did not always ensure the name of the person receiving a copy appeared on *both* extra copies.

Routing of the extra copies should also be carried out. Any indication of routing may be used, e.g. a tick, underlining, highlighting, etc. Some candidates who correctly produced the extra copies did not indicate any routing.

The words "Our ref" were omitted.

Task 5

The table was well displayed by the majority of candidates. However, some did not display the columns exactly as shown in the draft and did not follow the style of capitalisation of the headings. Lines of ruling may be included if desired.

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Paper 5242
Communication and Task Management
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General comments

The submission of work was much better than that produced by candidates in previous years. Most candidates demonstrated sound underpinning knowledge and/or relevant work experience but there were still a few candidates who produced answers which indicated insufficient knowledge and no evidence of work experience.

It must still be stressed that some Centres continue to focus on selected aspects of the syllabus resulting in gaps in candidate knowledge and thus an inability to answer questions well.

There are no comments for questions, or parts of a question, which were generally found to have been answered satisfactorily. Most of Papers B and C have not been used by Centres and therefore there will be no comments on those papers in this report.

It was pleasing to see the improvement in both presentation and legibility of scripts. At all times candidates should be encouraged to keep in mind that the assessment is concerned with good business practices and this should be reflected in the presentation of their assessment submissions.

The work presented by many advanced candidates was of a very high standard with answers keyed-in and organised in a way which would be expected of candidates taking a high level examination. Well done!

Centre administrators should ensure that candidates who sit both papers i.e. Communication and Task Management and Office Procedures in the same series have their documentation completed with the correct Paper Numbers – often these have been transposed e.g. 5242 instead of 5243 which could result in administration problems.

The comments in the previous reports concerning examination techniques have also been accepted by most Centres although it is still a concern that some candidates are omitting to answer parts of questions or are not providing the requested number of points in their answers. This could be because of limited knowledge but it could also be as a result of not reading the question, poor proofreading skills or not ticking off a question as it has been answered.

It is important that candidates be given the opportunity to use past assessment papers and to sit mock examinations under timed conditions. This not only assists candidates in their examination preparation but provides them with feedback and to know their individual weaknesses in parts of the syllabus.

There has been evidence in a number of Centres that rote learning is used for selected parts of the syllabus and, whilst this is sometimes useful, candidates often find it difficult to apply that knowledge to the questions being asked.

It also needs to be reiterated that some candidates who were entered for Standard and Advanced Level would have benefited from having completed Foundation Level initially. It is an introduction to the question types and wording used throughout the three levels as well as developing underpinning knowledge for topics which appear for all levels.

The standard at this level has greatly improved on previous years. Candidates were well trained and it was obvious that they had had relevant work experience which led to success at distinction level and they should be congratulated. However, as in the Standard Level there were several instances of candidates being entered for a level which was beyond their ability and they were unable to apply their limited theoretical knowledge to given situations.

Comments on specific tasks

5242A

Task 1

This question asked for ways in which you could react to unjustified criticism. Many candidates related their answer to what they would do after the criticism rather than how they would react when the criticism was made.

Task 2

Candidates were asked to suggest points to be considered when writing a report. This was well answered but some candidates misinterpreted the requirements and looked at research, terms of reference, style and planning.

Task 3

Weaker candidates misinterpreted this question. The question asked for guidelines to be given to a junior when asked to complete a task and ways of dealing effectively with the interruptions from an office junior.

For the first part candidates wrote about ability to deal with the task, working under pressure, problems of reading handwriting etc. which was not answering the question.

The second part was often related to what should be done about the interruptions e.g. training, passing the problem onto another member of staff and helping the person have an understanding of what has to be done, rather than answering the question asked.

Paper 5243

Office Procedures

General comments

The general standard of work in 2004 has improved greatly with many candidates obtaining distinctions.

The same comments apply as with the Communication and Task Management Examinations in that there is evidence to indicate that only selected areas of the syllabus had been covered by some Centres. Candidates must have underpinning knowledge and/or work experience to ensure full coverage of the syllabus.

Owing to the greater numbers of candidates achieving success when completing Paper A it has not been necessary to use Papers B and C in some of the levels and therefore there will be no comments on those papers in this report. No comments have been made for questions, or parts of a question, which were generally found to have been answered satisfactorily.

The report in 2003 stated that although evidence of excellent work had been seen, some candidates would benefit from guidance on how to read examination questions and how to ensure that every part of the question has been attempted. This still applies with candidates who took the examinations this year. Several candidates omitted whole or parts of questions or did not give the requested number of points.

Once again it is noted that candidates must also be given the opportunity to use past assessment papers and to complete mock examinations under timed conditions. This not only assists candidates in their examination preparation but provides them with feedback and to know their individual weaknesses in parts of the syllabus.

It has to be said that some Centres who entered candidates for Standard and even Advanced Levels would probably have benefited from having completed Foundation Level initially. It is an introduction to the question types and wording used throughout the levels and is helpful in identifying weak areas of the syllabus which are common to all three levels.

There were some excellent scripts resulting in more distinctions than in the past and candidates are to be congratulated.

It is expected at this level that candidates will have the ability and knowledge to consider the question carefully, plan an answer which is well constructed, and to present it in a way which is legible and easy to understand. The majority of candidates were able to do this indicating that they were well prepared for this high level examination.

However, some Centres must ensure that the whole of the syllabus is covered and not take the chance that questions will not be set in certain areas. Candidates should have completed several mock examinations to give them the opportunity to become proficient in interpreting data and answering questions.

Comments on specific tasks

5243A

Task 1

This question asked for a *notice* about Mailroom Security and was well answered. Weaker candidates gained marks for giving the correct information but lost marks because they did not set the information out in the form of a notice.

The final part of this question asked for the reason why a telephone should not be used in the same area as a suspicious packet and several candidates omitted to answer this part of the question.

5243B

Task 1

There were some good answers relating to the planning of work but *ways* in which to monitor that work was answered very weakly. Candidates misinterpreted the question and discussed reviewing, analysing resource needs and why deviation from the planning occurred.

Task 4

This should have been a simple question for candidates at this level to answer, but in many instances this question was completely misinterpreted with candidates not giving *reference sources* and instead listing how to organise the travel.

Papers 5176 and 5178

Interpersonal Business Skills and

Customer Care

General comments

Centres need to be alert to the administration elements of this scheme. The use of the assignment cover sheets is strongly recommended and has benefits for the candidate, Tutor and Examiner. Centres should only submit candidates' work if they feel it meets all of the requirements of the scheme and is complete. SAR sheets must be fully completed and signed by the Tutor before submitting work to be examined. Care must be taken in completing the list of names of candidates being put forward together with their assignments.

'Assignment Guidelines' and 'Criteria for Assessment' sections of the syllabus are very important and must be acknowledged and understood by Tutors.

Centres should try to be consistent with the layout and presentation of candidates' work. The assignments submitted should always be set out in a logical way, embracing conventional styles such as title, page numbering, contents page, headed sections, appendices, bibliography, etc.

The modules require that the candidate makes a self-evaluation of his/her performance in addressing a group, undertaking some research or simply commenting on the assignment. Tutor guidance is important with this issue (see the final item in the assignment cover sheets).

It is suggested that Tutors read all the comments below for each of the modules, as there are many points which could be applied to the majority of the on-demand assignments.

Paper 5176

The majority of Centres submitting assignments under this module were successful. Some weaknesses were identified such as: poor self evaluation; no reference sources used; very little evidence about a 'small group meeting'; minutes were sometimes not business like; and in a few cases, minutes had not been recorded by the candidate.

The general points made in the reports for other levels can be applied to this module.

Paper 5178

If assignment cover sheets are not complete, then it is likely that the candidate's assignment is not complete; this serves as a double check for Tutor and candidate.

Centres are missing the requirement for candidate self-evaluation, yet this is listed on the assignment cover sheet. Blank assignment cover sheets have been sent in with candidates' work not indicating whether they have been used or not, and some Centres failed to include SARs with the work. Weaknesses have included no page numbering, weak reference sources, and no self evaluation. One assignment was written in the third person and did not reflect on the candidate's ability to write a report. Sometimes important documents, like a copy of the questionnaire used by the candidate, were missing from the assignment and a proper check of assignment content had been omitted.

Pure theoretical analysis of customer care is not sufficient for this module and candidates must demonstrate their ability to undertake research and analyse the data. The questionnaire has to be designed in a certain way to be successful, and guidance for this can be found in the syllabus. One Centre encouraged candidates to use the objectives in the form of headings for the assignment; this proved successful in making sure that all objectives were demonstrated and that the work was complete. The module SARs are not interchangeable, as one Centre thought, and each only relates to the module for which it was designed.

Paper 5247

Organising Meetings and Events

Overall comments

The candidates' overall performance ranged from very good to poor. Some candidates were well prepared and correctly organised an event, as required. They then produced reports detailing how they had organised their event, together with the documentation and methods of communication that had been used.

Some candidates did not submit completed Student Assessment Records and/or completed Assignment Cover Sheets. These should be completed and signed by all candidates and Tutors.

Comments on the work of candidates

Most of the candidates produced reports that were legible and detailed. However, some of the information contained within the reports appeared to have been produced from textbooks and explained how an event should be organised. Centres should note that a description of best practice is not sufficient evidence for success in this assignment.

Candidates often did not give specific information on what they actually organised, how they did it, when and where, with whom they communicated and how they did so, etc. Various documents had been produced but candidates' organising skills were not always apparent. Candidates, especially at this Advanced Level, should be using monitoring aids efficiently. These would include action plans, schedules and checklists. One or all of these aids should be used and copies submitted as part of the candidates' reports as clear evidence of how the event had been organised by the candidate.

Very few candidates mentioned the communication methods they used and the reasons they chose these particular methods. Copies of letters, emails, agendas, notices of meetings, minutes etc. (where meetings were held as part of the organisation of the event), invitations, various venue brochures, name cards, banners, notices and transcripts of telephone conversations had been submitted. However, no detail had been given of what communication methods were used and the factors that influenced their choice. (For example, a memo written to a colleague would use an informal approach and style of writing, whilst a memo to a senior manager would be more formal and take account of that person's role in the organisation.) Competence Criteria 1.1 and 2.1.

The selection and use of effective monitoring aids such as checklists, diaries, work schedules, etc. as a means of effective and efficient event planning should also have been highlighted. Candidates are required to assess the planning, organising and monitoring methods they actually used (Competence Criterion 2.2). They should then state whether or not these monitoring aids were successful and what they would do differently when they organise their next event.

Many candidates included lengthy descriptions of the secretarial and chairpersons' roles and procedures and lists of meeting terminology. Although these are not required, candidates were not penalised for including this information in their assignments.

Some assignments were rather muddled. Candidates appeared to have included mini assignments undertaken during study time. It was often very difficult to decipher which information was part of the class exercises and which was part of the work of the final assignment and it is recommended that the final assignment only is submitted for assessment.

General comments

A Student Assessment Record (SAR) should be completed when the candidate has achieved all objectives reliably, consistently and without help. The SAR should be signed **and dated by both candidate and Tutor**. Each candidate must submit a completed SAR with his/her assignment.

Candidates and Tutors are advised to read the Assignment Guidelines given in the syllabus very carefully. The step-by-step approach included in the Introduction is highly recommended, as this will help candidates to plan and carry out their assignments.

It is also recommended that candidates discuss with their Tutors the event they are able to organise. Some candidates have been rather ambitious and would be better advised to organise a small event. Once they have decided the actual event that they intend to organise, they should then work out how this could be done. Candidates should write a plan of how they intend to carry out the various tasks that will be required. (Those candidates who cannot organise an actual event may organise a simulated event but all the assessment requirements listed in the syllabus must still be met.)

Each candidate must produce evidence of his/her own planning and work schedule. Copies of documentation such as invitations, agendas and minutes of meetings (if appropriate), emails, notes, short reports, transcripts of telephone calls and face-to-face conversations, publicity for the event, etc. should be included in the report. Evidence can include video and/or tape cassette material but this should be authenticated by a Tutor's observation statement.

Candidates should consider:

- what type of event they can organise

- the documentation which would be appropriate for the event

- the time, date and venue for the event

- how they propose to organise the event

- what facilities they have to help them in this task

- how to ensure everything necessary is organised – methodical working is crucial

- production of documentation that is complete and clear

- what communication methods would be appropriate and also the effect work roles and relationships will have on the communication methods they choose

- timescales involved.

The production of the report should be considered right from the start of planning, not left to the last minute. Candidates who made notes and who thought out the organisation of the event and the report from the outset were often the most successful in their assignments.

Candidates may wish to note the following points for successful report writing:

- a brief introduction at the start of the report should describe exactly what the candidate has organised

- the actual planning and organisation of the event

- full details on the organising and monitoring methods that were used

- a brief statement as to whether or not the organising and monitoring methods were successful

- a short paragraph of what the candidate would do differently next time, if appropriate

- a brief paragraph giving the communication methods used by the candidate, together with an explanation of the factors that influenced the communications they used

- copies of all documentation and transcripts of telephone and face-to-face conversations

- a conclusion on the success of the event.

Tutors may wish to note that lists explaining the purposes of meetings, the secretary's role, the chairperson's role at a meeting, meeting terminology and explanations on the essentials of minuting are not required as part of the final assignment.

Finally, Centres should submit the candidate's assignment to CIE together with the Student Assessment Record (SAR) and Assignment Cover Sheets, making sure that these have been completed, signed and dated.

> **Paper 5201**
>
> **Information and Communications Technology**

The most common error was:

- The failure to submit all the required printouts, particularly the two different copies of the document.

Other errors included:

- Errors in page layout with the failure to set margins or column widths as specified.

- The failure to resize the imported graphic or to text wrap around this graphic.

- The failure to understand the generic terms serif and sans-serif. Many candidates tried to locate these as font styles rather than understanding that fonts such as Times New Roman contain short strokes or serifs on each letter, and that sans-serif fonts are without these.

- Charts that were inserted but were unreadable, either because of the scaling of the chart or because of errors in the data series (usually because too much data had been selected as it was created).

- Errors inserting new text into a numbered list and renumbering as specified in the question paper.

- Errors in searching and sorting the database extract (particularly in maintaining the data integrity).