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UNIVERSITY *of* CAMBRIDGE
International Examinations

OFFICE ADMINISTRATION STANDARD LEVEL

> **Paper 5231**
> **Text Processing**

Overall comments

The overall performance of the candidates was varied; some of the work submitted was excellent, with accurate and well-presented work. However, some candidates submitted scripts which were very inaccurate and which showed little 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 35 wpm) within the error tolerance (six errors maximum are allowed) and within the time allowed (five minutes).

Some candidates were successful in the Speed Test but 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 "93 room" not corrected to "93 rooms" – 5231/A, **Task 4**).

- Apostrophe errors were not identified and corrected (such as "this years' Annual Conference" not corrected to "this year's Annual Conference" – 5231/A, **Task 2**).

- Abbreviations not expanded correctly (such as "org" ("organisation") – 5231/A, **Task 4**).

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

Although most of the candidates completed the task within the error tolerance, there were some candidates who did not complete all the text within the five minutes allowed. However, some candidates completed all the text but incurred more than the maximum six errors allowed.

Task 2

- Today's date was omitted.

Task 3

- The inset paragraph was not indented from the left margin the exact measurement instructed: 35 mm from the left margin – 5231/A).

- Underlining of text not carried out as indicated in the draft: "four miles of horse rides" – 5231/A.

Task 4

- The words "Our ref" were omitted.
- Today's date was omitted.
- Envelopes or labels not produced – some candidates used a sheet of A4 paper.

Task 5

- Many candidates produced excellently displayed tasks that were accurately typed.

Further general comments

Many candidates seemed to rely on spellcheckers and grammarcheckers as their only means of proofreading.

Task 1

Many of the candidates 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.

The candidates who passed **Task 1** (Speed Test) typed all the text within the five minutes allowed, thus achieving the required speed of 35 wpm, within the error tolerance – six errors maximum.

Task 2

Today's date is required, as is normal business practice. Omission of the date incurs three penalty errors (page 13 of the syllabus refers).

The subject heading should be keyed in as displayed in the draft, for example Initial Capitals and Underlining or ALL CAPITALS. Candidates are assessed on their ability to use a variety of styles as presented in the draft (such as may be required by a company's house style) – page 10 of the syllabus refers: bulleted point 3, NOTES section.

Errors of agreement may be subject/verb or quantity/noun. These will include errors such as "the office were" ("the office was") and "20 visitor" ("20 visitors").

Task 3

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.

Errors in apostrophes may be those which have been misplaced – e.g. "childs' school" ("child's school") or superfluous apostrophes – e.g. "large businesses' which" ("large businesses which").

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

Task 4

Letters must be produced on letterheaded paper – some candidates used plain A4 paper. The letterheading may be prepared as a template for the use of word processor operators, or may be pre-printed. Candidates must *not* key in the letterheading 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 – the full style is preferred, e.g. "31 December 2005".

The Special Mark (such as "FOR THE ATTENTION OF" – 5231/A) should be keyed in exactly as shown in the draft, including capitalisation.

Most of the candidates typed an envelope, using a typewriter, even though they had produced the remainder of the work on a word processor. It is recommended that candidates use their copy/cut/paste facilities to produce the envelope (or label) as this prevents further errors from occurring. Those candidates whose printers cannot produce envelopes may use an address label and any format and size of label is acceptable. Some candidates incurred penalties because they did not type the Special Mark on the envelope and omitted a clear line space between the Special Mark and the name and address. Others typed the details inaccurately. The majority of the errors had not occurred on the letter.

Task 5

This task was very accurately typed and excellently displayed by the majority of candidates, who were very inventive and used various methods of emphasis to great effect. There were very few keying in errors.

| Paper 5232 |
| Communication and Task Management |

General comments

It is pleasing to report that the scripts completed by candidates have again been of a better standard than 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 applying knowledge which would have been gained through 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 questions were either unsatisfactorily answered or not attempted.

It appeared that questions which were not straight knowledge recall questions were received favourably by all levels of candidates who had covered the syllabus.

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 few or no comments on those papers in this report.

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.

Centre administrators should ensure that candidates who sit both papers i.e. Communication/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. An additional problem this year has been Centres who were entering candidates for the same level of paper but had used more than one paper at a sitting i.e. Paper A and Paper B. The indication on the front of the envelope showed scripts from only one paper. This caused confusion and required further checking of entry and attendance sheets.

It needs to be reiterated that comments made on examination techniques have 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.

Some Centres are still using rote learning 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.

Further general comments

Once again most Centres had trained candidates very well and the scripts produced were of a very good standard.

Unsuccessful candidates were entered for Paper B and Paper C, the main problems for their failure appeared to be rote learning and an inability to understand the questions asked.

However, there were some candidates who were not at the level required to succeed in this examination and would have benefited from being entered for the Foundation Level. These candidates did not have the underpinning knowledge and/or work experience to understand the questions or to produce the level of answer needed to gain satisfactory marks.

Comments on specific papers

Paper 5232A

Task 2

Candidates were asked to prepare open and closed questions to be used when interviewing a junior administrator for disruptive behaviour. Many candidates gave only closed questions. This appears to be a part of the syllabus which has received little attention.

Paper 5232B

Task 1

Almost all candidates were unable to give a definition of an Agenda or to state the last two items to appear on an Agenda.

Task 2

Candidates were asked to compose a memorandum explaining the role of a team negotiator and giving the skills of such a person. The memorandum was well laid out but few candidates gained marks for the information which it contained.

Task 3

The question asked for guidelines for preparing, structuring and planning the style of a report. Many candidates had the same responses to all three parts of the question and there was little indication to show that candidates had had the experience of preparing and writing a report.

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:10px; display:inline-block;">

Paper 5233

Office Procedures

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General comments

The general standard of work in 2005 has continued to improve with many candidates obtaining distinctions.

Similar 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.

It needs to be reiterated that although there is evidence of good work 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. Several candidates omitted whole or parts of questions, or, did not give the requested number of points.

Once again it is endorsed 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.

Further general comments

Again candidates at this level produced mainly good papers and they are to be congratulated.

However, as in 2004, it was evident that some candidates had both insufficient practical and underpinning knowledge to answer all questions well and there were gaps in some scripts.

Some questions were not read properly which led to candidates misinterpreting what was required. Parts of questions were omitted which may have occurred because certain parts of the syllabus have not been covered by Centres. Mock examinations would have helped to make candidates aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

Comments on specific papers

Paper 5233A

Task 1

This question asked for advantages and disadvantages of the voicemail service. Many candidates related their answer to cost and appeared to have little knowledge of what this service could offer.

Task 4

This question asked about security. Candidates were knowledgeable on this question but some did not give *six* ways in which security could be improved.

Task 5

Candidates were asked to prepare a flow chart of business documents. Some candidates did not prepare a chart but gained marks for listing the order. Several candidates confused the order e.g. statement and payment the wrong way round.

Papers 5166 and 5168

Interpersonal Business Skills and

Customer Care

General comments

In general the quality of the assignments submitted during the past twelve months, 2005-2006, has been much better than previous years. The majority of candidates have worked hard and, with excellent teacher guidance and advice, have produced some excellent work. Assignments have been professionally produced and very business-like in their layout and presentation to the Examiner.

The use of the Assignment Cover Sheet for candidates is strongly recommended and has great benefits for the candidate, teacher and Examiner. It is a proper record and a check as to what should be found in the pages of the attached assignment. It helps to simplify a number of tasks and acts as a constant reminder to candidates as to what they need to include in their work. However, page references on these sheets must match the actual pages of the assignment submitted.

Centres are strongly advised to use the latest versions of the module booklets and not rely on older booklets. The latest versions contain the assignment cover sheets mentioned above. Candidates and teachers should check work against the Assessment Objectives and Competence Criteria for the year in which they are submitting work.

The requirement for all candidates to demonstrate and evidence all the objectives mentioned in the booklets under 'Criteria for Assessment' is very important. Candidates have been unsuccessful because objectives were omitted.

All Centres are reminded that they must constantly refer to the 'Assignment Guidelines' for each module in the syllabus booklet as these give general advice about how candidates should go about their research and analysis, how to present their assignments, when and to whom they should make presentations and other important matters.

Paper 5166

Assignments submitted under this module had some weaknesses including incomplete assignment cover sheets, some objectives not evidenced, no reference sources and SAR sheets missing or incomplete.

Agendas and minutes should be complete and accurate, with the use of proper business conventions for their layout.

A number of candidates struggled with the theory of 'assertiveness' and its use within business settings. This is an essential part of the module and a good understanding of this is required. Even if it is not appropriate to the research carried out, or for other cultural reasons, then this should be clearly stated in the assignment. An example of 'assertiveness' in the business world can always be given to indicate to the Examiner that the candidate has a complete understanding of this objective.

Paper 5168

Some candidates had not used the assignment cover sheets and these would have been helpful in checking that the assignments were complete and all objectives demonstrated or evidenced in the text of the candidates' work.

In one batch each of the assignments exceeded the maximum number of words for the module. This does not affect the marking process but Centres are advised to encourage candidates to keep within the parameters recommended for each module. In another batch there were some excellent computer generated diagrams and charts which added a good business-like dimension to the work. However, mixed font styles should be avoided as this gives a poor impression to the reader.

The findings/summary/conclusions in some candidates' work were brief and there was insufficient discussion on the research carried out.

An old syllabus (1999) was used by one Centre when it would have been more appropriate to use a recent version which includes details of the assignment cover sheet and the advantages of its use. Centres must refer to the syllabus for the year in which candidates are to submit work.

A large batch of assignments from a particular Centre demonstrated very good teaching and learning practice. Every candidate had selected a different business, company or organisation to carry out research on. This was an excellent idea resulting in a good variety of interesting projects.

It is important to label all sections of a report and in particular diagrams and charts; in the case of the latter a brief explanation or title is appropriate.

It is pleasing to note that all the assignments in one batch were of a very high quality. It was evident that candidates had received excellent teacher guidance and support as to what was expected of them, and what the module required them to do. All the work was thorough and business-like and the candidates had gone beyond the basic requirements of the scheme. The Centre and candidates are to be congratulated on the quality of the work submitted.

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Paper 5237
Organising Meetings and Events
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Overall comments

The overall performance of the candidates ranged from very good to quite poor. Some candidates were obviously well prepared and correctly organised *a meeting*, as required. They then produced reports detailing how they had organised their meetings and the documentation and methods of communication they had 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 their teachers.

Comments on the work of candidates

Most of the reports produced were legible and detailed. However, some candidates only included information on how a meeting *should* be organised and detailed the various aspects that make a meeting successful. However, there was often no specific information on what the candidates actually organised, how they did it, when and where, with whom they communicated and how they did so, etc.

Some candidates did not mention the communication methods they used. Copies of letters, emails, agenda, notice of meeting, minutes, chairperson's agenda and transcripts of telephone conversations were usually attached. There was often no detailed information of what communication methods were used and the factors that influenced their choice. (For example, a need to inform someone urgently of a meeting would most likely be dealt with by telephone. However, if the person was not available, a message could be left on the person's telephone answering machine and then an e-mail or a text message sent to ensure the person receives the information as quickly and efficiently as possible.)

Candidates are required to assess the planning, organising and monitoring methods they actually used. They should then state whether or not these methods were successful and what they would do differently when they organise their next meeting.

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

Occasionally, it was difficult to determine what event the candidates had actually organised. A brief introduction describing the event would be very helpful. However, a comprehensive description of the business for which the meeting is being organised is not required.

A number of candidates produced some documentation but did not include a work schedule or action plan.

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 teacher. Each candidate must submit a completed SAR with his/her assignment. Assignment Cover Sheets should also be completed and submitted by every candidate. These confirm that the Assignment is the candidate's own work and should indicate that work taken from another source is appropriately referenced and acknowledged. Assignment Cover Sheets have also been designed to enable candidates to check that their work is complete and has covered all the required competence criteria.

Candidates and teachers are advised to read the Assignment Guidelines given in the syllabus very carefully. The step-by-step approach to the final Assignment is highly recommended, as this will help candidates in the planning and undertaking of their Assignments.

It is also recommended that candidates discuss with their teachers the meeting they are able to organise. Some candidates were too ambitious and attempted to organise a large, complex meeting. They are advised to organise a small, informal meeting if at all possible. Once they have decided the meeting they intend to organise, they should then work out how this could be done. They 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 meeting may organise a simulated meeting. All the assessment requirements listed in the syllabus, however, should still be met.)

Candidates may choose to work on their own or may wish to work with a fellow student or work colleague. They should plan their duties and negotiate the allocation of these duties. However, each candidate must produce evidence *of his/her own* planning and work schedule. Copies of documentation such as agendas, minutes, notes, short reports, notices of meetings, chairperson's agendas, transcripts of telephone calls, etc. should be included in the report.

Candidates should consider:

- what type of meeting they will be organising

- the documentation which would be appropriate for that meeting

- the time, date and venue for the meeting

- how they propose to organise the meeting

- what facilities they have to help them in this task

- how to ensure everything required is organised – methodical working is essential

- production of clear documentation

- what communication methods would be appropriate and the factors that influenced their choice

- timescales involved.

The production of the report should be considered from the beginning, not left to the last minute. Candidates who made notes and who thought out the organisation of the meeting 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 meeting

- 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 – including a chairperson's agenda, if appropriate, and transcripts of telephone and face-to-face conversations

- a conclusion on the success of the meeting.

Paper 5191

Information and Communications Technology

The general standard of entries for this module was high, although there were a number of errors which included:

- Errors in sorting the data as specified in the question paper, particularly by sorting only the specified field and therefore failing to maintain the integrity of the data. Candidates who made this error were usually using a spreadsheet package rather than a database. Some candidates confused ascending and descending sorts.

- Errors in searching, either by trying to search using the results of a previous search rather than all the data, through errors in the search criteria, or in the selection of the data for the database extract.

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

- Some candidates could not correctly align text, especially when asked to fully justify the body text of a document.

- The failure to include a calculated control in the data manipulation report, or where a calculated control was included it was not the one specified on the question paper.

- 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.

- Widows and/or orphans were not removed by inserting page breaks.

- 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.