

Principal Examiners' Report

Summer 2010

GCE O Level

GCE O Level Computing (7105) Paper 02

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General Comments

The specification ends this year. This means that much of the advice that would normally be given for next year's candidates is redundant. However, candidates who will be taking alternative specifications with coursework, or who will be moving on to higher qualifications, with coursework, may still find parts of it useful.

Project Presentation

Contents pages and / or page numbers were sometimes a problem. Centres should give firm guidance on this, especially where candidates do not present their projects in the same order as in the specification. The page numbering should apply to all sections of the project, including appendices, separate manuals and any other material extra to the main write up. Page numbers should not be restarted for each section of the write up. Ideally, the project should be presented in the same order as is set out in the specification and coursework guide. Where references are made from work on one page to material on another, care should be taken to get this right.

Appendices continue to be a problem and should be avoided where possible. There are marks for having a clear layout and easy to follow accounts. Appendices may be appropriate for items such as raw material, original notes, and sets of filled questionnaires. Appendices are not appropriate for test results, implementation screenshots, or screen designs. These items should be included in the main write up.

Appendices should also not be used for Access code dumps or web site writer HTML dumps. This sort of material should not be included at all unless the candidate can demonstrate that they have made some worthwhile, non-trivial contribution. In which case only the parts written by the candidate should be submitted, with appropriate annotation.

As in previous years, a number of centres are providing their candidates with templates to follow. These templates generally fell into two categories, over detailed and incomplete.

Over detailed templates are ones that include not only the main five sections plus some paragraph headings, but also sub paragraphs and in some cases bullet points and content. Centres are reminded that templates should only cover items such as order of work, headings, sub headings and general guidance about style and presentation. Templates should not contain suggested text, blank flow charts, sample screens or any other 'stock' material. A number of candidates lost marks by including such material in their projects.

Incomplete templates are those which do not allow candidates to show their full ability. In too many cases, all the candidates in a centre had worked to a narrow template and had all missed out the same sections.

If supervisors wish to use templates in other specifications, they are urged to do two things. One, read the coursework guide carefully and two, ensure that the template addresses all the marking points.

Problem Description

The great majority of candidates were able to identify a suitable problem and develop it into a project. A number of the contexts were however somewhat unrealistic, e.g. computerising a large hotel or an airline. This is allowable but can lead to impossible objectives and success criteria, which in turn makes the project more difficult in its subsequent stages.

It is important that candidates get the right balance when explaining the context of the project. A page or two should be enough. There appeared to be more than the usual number of projects where the candidates had spent far too long in gathering information about a business, only to base their project on a small section of the whole.

Design

As in previous years, the great majority of candidates opted to do a project based on customising Access, although other packages were also used. In most cases, the candidates had obviously produced their final submission by working directly with the package and then had made their design afterwards. Frequently the designs were screen shots from the package and very often they included some of the data. Since the data should not have been entered until the Implementation stage, it made it difficult to award marks under Design in such cases. To compound the problem, candidates who produced this type of project tended to produce a test plan based on their already tested and working system, thus not showing any test and modify procedures.

Test plans should have been included in the design section, rather than being left until the project is completed.

As in previous years, many candidates did not provide enough evidence of their work. This causes problems in Design, Implement, and Evaluate. Candidates should be left in no doubt that marks can only be awarded for items that are included in the write up. Markers do not know the candidates and have not seen undocumented work or running software. If a candidate claims to have done something, it is up to them to prove it.

Testing

Candidates continue to perform poorly in Testing. In far too many cases, candidates only submitted evidence of validations, with no attempt made to demonstrate that the application met the original objectives or success criteria. When actual testing was considered and a test plan had been produced in the Design stage, this section was usually done well, but problems arose when the test plan was only considered after the project had been produced. In such cases, candidates usually only tested correct functioning. Candidates should be reminded that systems are rarely correct at the first attempt and that the process of testing and correcting should be described. Indeed, the correction process must be described in order to reach the higher mark bands.

Where tests had been done and evidence provided, there was too often no linkage between the tests and the evidence. Correct referencing is essential to gain full marks. Simply stating that the results are in appendix A is not enough.

Where both component and system / user testing is done, it should be clearly indicated. Many candidates simply combined such testing into one section and made little or no attempt to indicate which test applied to what.

Evaluation

Evaluation was as usual the weakest section. Very few candidates tried to relate their work to the specified outcomes and where they did, it was even rarer for them to produce any evidence to back up their conclusions. In many cases this was a consequence of generalised objectives in the Analysis stage. There must be clear evidence that the objectives given in Analyse has been met in order to gain marks in the higher bands.

Few candidates managed to gain full marks for evaluating the software or the man machine interface. Evidence needed to be provided to reach the higher band marks in each case.

Further development was also weak. Too many candidates decided that they would combine their database with a WAN / web site / e-commerce site. Such developments are difficult even for an experienced software engineer, they are almost certainly impossible for the candidate.

Statistics

Unit 1 (7105/01) & Unit 2 (7105/02) combined

Grade	A	B	C	D	E
Boundary	56	45	34	29	23

Grade boundaries may change from year to year and from subject to subject, depending on the demands of the question paper.

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