

Read the mind of the P1 marker

- Common and recurring problems
 - Generic answers
 - Question verb
 - Time management
 - Answer the question set
- Detailed review of a recent exam script

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I will start this presentation with a short review of both common and recurring problems that markers encounter every exam sitting. It is particularly concerning that students' performance is no different to what it was nearly 10 years ago when the exam was first set, which I can attest as I have been marking over this whole period.

I will then provide an illustration from real exam scripts from students who sat the P1 exam in September or December of last year, and offer a detailed explanation of how the marker allocated the marks and how additional marks could have been earned. This should help you to offer guidance to students when you mark their course exams in preparation for forthcoming sittings of P1.

Generic answers

- Learn and churn
- Fail to appreciate the rigour of the Professional level
- Stylised approach
- Simplistic view
- Scatter attack

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- There is too much rote learning of text books and ALP courses material, which is then
 regurgitated back in an incoherent and often wholly inappropriate manner. This indicates the
 candidates do not have a good understanding of the P1 syllabus, and cannot apply their
 knowledge correctly.
- As this is paper P1, it is often the first exam students sit at the Professional level. However they often fail to appreciate that approach they had adopted in previous exams will not be sufficient to score highly in the exam. It is a quite a leap from Fundamentals to the Professional level, but it is one many students fail to make successfully.
- The style of answer sometimes also looks as if it has been pre-learned, with many stock phrases and examples used regularly between candidates and between sittings. This suggests that the students have been coached to produce a style of answer that does not always suit the question that has been set.
- Many answers are overly simplistic, merely providing relevant syllabus knowledge but failing
 to apply it carefully to the scenario information provided. This defeats the purpose of the
 exam, which is not a test of what the students knows but how they use their knowledge in
 different contexts.
- Finally, students often write everything they know about a particular topic area in the hope that something they have written will score them enough marks to pass the question. This

approach is destined to fail as it tends to only result in waffle, writers' cramp and a thoroughly unprofessional answer

Question verb

- Precise meaning
- Cognitive level
 - Level 1: Knowledge and comprehension
 - Level 2: Application and analysis
 - Level 3:Synthesis and evaluation
- Depth and breadth of answer
- Several in one requirement

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- There are a limited number of question verbs used in the P1 exam. If students work through past papers and suggested solutions they will be able to deduce their exact meaning, and so not produce incorrect answers. Although ACCA do not publish a prescribed list of acceptable question verbs and their meanings, any good on-line dictionary could easily clarify this. The verbs are all derived from the syllabus learning outcomes, so there is nothing too tricky – it just makes the requirements clear and unambiguous.
- ACCA has assigned the syllabus content to three cognitive levels of understanding:
 - Level 1: is basically the retention and recollection of knowledge, so not really appropriate for the P1 exam
 - Level 2: requires demonstration of the analysis of unfamiliar situations to solve problems using relevant concepts and theories, so clearly relevant to aspects of P1.
 - Level 3: involves the creation of new ideas from, or new insights into, existing knowledge using largely unstructured information as well as the assessment and evaluation of complex information in order to use reasoned arguments to make judgements and justify valid recommendations. This could best describe what the P1 exam aims to test, so most questions are set at this highest level.
- The question verb will therefore imply the level of depth of answer required, and the marks allocated to the requirement will infer the breadth of different points that need to be generated and covered to score highly.
- It should also be expected that more than one question verb may appear in one requirement. Therefore marks will have been allocated to all parts and it will be nigh on

impossible to pass the question without answering all parts to it well.

Time management

- Challenge: 3 hours and 15 minutes, 195 minutes to:
 - Analyse the requirements
 - Read the supporting scenario
 - Devise a planned structure
 - Produce a full answer
- Reality:
 - Poor time management
 - Incomplete answers

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- The exam has sufficient time to be completed in full and for the well prepared student to score a high mark. However to do so the 195 minutes will need to be used to:
 - Analyse the requirements, so that they understand precisely what is required
 - Read the supporting scenario, as this is the source of information that the answer must be applied to
 - Devise a planned structure, or they will undoubtedly waffle and go off the point
 - Produce a full answer, normally in the region of 15-20 sides.
- The reality is often very different, with many students displaying poor time management skills. They need to apportion their time to ensure that they attempt every part of every question because if they at least score half of the marks on each of these they cannot fail the exam. However many spend far too long on question one at the expense of the Section B optional questions, which end up rushed and incomplete.
- The student then has to hope that their answer to earlier questions are good enough to compensate for weaker performance later in the exam. If they are lucky then they secure a marginal pass, which many do, however for many students this is dangerous gamble that does not pay off and they fail!

Answer the question set

- An obvious point you would think
- Rushing the exam
- No evidence of planning
- Failure of understanding

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- One would have thought that answering the precise question set is an obvious prerequisite
 for success in any exam, yet time after time students fail to do so. Instead they answer the
 question they either misinterpreted or would have preferred to have been set, either way
 they will not score any marks at this level.
- One reason could be impatience and the desire to rush to get something down on paper. However this is a false time economy, since even if an excellent answer to the wrong question is produced it will still score no marks. Students should be encouraged to take time to read and analyse the requirements before attempting any question.
- Although plans are not have to be submitted as part of the answer, and they rarely appear in
 the answer booklet, it is obvious to the marker when a student has not planned. This is
 because their answer tends to ramble all over the place and they repeat the same points
 several times. Planning does not have to take too long or be excessively detailed, but if the
 student produces a basic plan on the question paper based around the requirements, they
 have a good chance of producing the correct answer.
- Occasionally there is a total lack of understanding and the answers produced are in the main irrelevant. This is when a student sits the exam having only rudimentary syllabus knowledge and they have probably not practiced questions before entering the exam hall. Without exception these students fail badly, and have wasted time, effort and money entering the exam too early.

Read the mind of the P1 marker

- An article has been published, including an illustrative "student" answer to two questions in the sample exam published after the September/December 2017 sessions
- This shows exactly how a marker would award marks, and shows how additional marks could have been earned
- Essential reading for all P1 tutors and their students click <u>here</u>

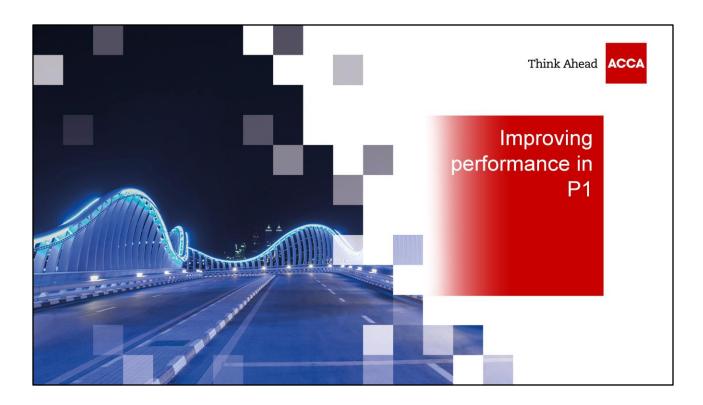
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This article should help you to offer guidance to students when you mark their course exams in preparation for forthcoming sittings of P1. Find it at the following link:

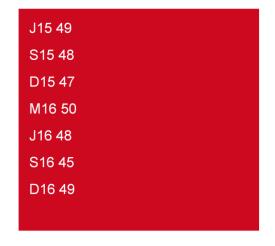
http://www.accaglobal.com/uk/en/student/exam-support-resources/professional-exams-study-resources/p1/technical-articles/p1-marker1.html





Today I want to use the feedback from examiners' reports and from markers and tutors, to highlight aspects of P1 that are giving students problems and identify ways in which students can improve their performance. The last sitting of P1 is in June 2018, and it would be great to finish on a high, with strong pass rates between now and then.

P1 pass rates



2007/14 Average 50.9% 2015/16 Average 48.0%

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These are the most recent pass rates. Two years ago we reported at the conference an average pass rate since P1 began of around 51%. The pass rate for last two years has been lower than this, with the average since December 2014 falling to 48%. However the range of pass rates continues to be small. P1 remains the exam with the lowest spread of pass rates in the last ten years. This indicates a number of things – consistency in exams set, consistency in student preparation and consistency in teaching.

Common problems

- Failing to revise the whole syllabus
- Not obeying the verb(s)
- Going beyond the question parameters
- Not using the case scenario information
- Managing time poorly

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I'm now going to look at issues with student performance that markers have found in recent exams. This is a very similar list to what has been discussed at previous conferences. Firstly failure to revise the whole syllabus remains a significant problem. Often markers see question parts missed out totally in scripts where the student does not appear to be in time trouble, indicating a failure to revise that part of the syllabus.

Secondly many answers do not provide what the verbs in the question requirements specify. A common problem, mentioned frequently before, is providing single line lists where more detailed description or explanation of each item is required. Also some requirements have two verbs in them. Often if there are two verbs, students provide a good answer to the first verb, but a poor answer to the second. Sometimes answers do not take account of the different requirements of the two verbs. A third, related, problem, is not taking account of the rest of the question requirement, which provides parameters within which students should be answering. Instead students see a trigger word and write down all they've learned about that term. For example if the question requirement is about conflicts between stakeholder claims, students just produce a Mendelow map because they've seen the word stakeholders rather than focusing

on where and why claims are coming into conflict.

Another problem, which has come up often in the past, is writing generic answers and failing to make proper use of (or even mention at all) information given in the scenario. There are a limited number of marks available for generic points, but they will never be enough to pass P1 or any other professional level exam.

The last problem to mention is time management. Markers still see plenty of scripts where the student has not answered every part of every question and has clearly rushed through the last question. Time management is related to other problems mentioned above. Some students ignore the mark scheme and write far too much for the marks available on particular question parts. Failing to stick to the parameters of the question and displaying their knowledge about the whole subject area means that students are wasting time making points that will not gain marks.

Preparation for exam

- Study the whole syllabus
- Answer questions and exams in full
- Understand the question verbs
- Recognise what to look for in scenarios
- Reflect on reasons for failure

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The list of problems therefore is a very familiar one, not just from P1 in the past but also for other professional level exams. What I want to look at in the remaining slides is ways in which students can improve their performance in P1. I'll cover preparing for the exam and answering questions during the exam.

Firstly preparation. Students must understand that each exam will range over the main areas of the syllabus. Corporate governance, risk and control and ethics will all be covered significantly in the exam. There are no guidelines as to what can come up in the compulsory and optional questions, so students cannot avoid any areas on the grounds that they will never be examined in the compulsory question.

Secondly answering questions and exams. That means writing full answers in 45 or 90 minutes, and not looking at the question for five minutes and then turning to the answer. It also means an honest assessment of the answers they have written against the model answers. This involves looking at the marking scheme to see how marks are awarded (and to see that marks will be restricted if they haven't focused on the scenario). Students should also be reflecting on what they've done, seeing if they are struggling to keep to time and having problems coming up with sufficient points to answer the question or say enough about each point. Practising full exams will give students necessary experience of writing for three hours. The best practice will obviously involve sticking to the time limits for each question, to practise their

time management and have three full answers that they can then analyse. I'll move onto separate slides to cover the next three points.

Understand the question verbs

- Level of detail
- Perspective
- Specific and tailored recommendations

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The first area to cover in more detail is the question verbs. There are lists available of what each verb means, both on ACCA's website and in Approved Content Providers' material. One big benefit of question practice will be developing understanding of what the common verbs require. This slide covers some general ideas that are important in understanding the differences between each verb. Firstly the level of detail required. An example is the difference between identify (making a point) and explain (giving more detail about that point so that it is clear why it is important). Secondly the perspective. Some higher level verbs require particular standpoints to be taken or opinions to be given. For example Discuss means providing coverage of both sides of a situation or argument. *Critically evaluate* means focusing on the problems and also giving an assessment of how significant the problems are. Lastly specific recommendations that relate to the organisation in the scenario's situation. This applies particularly to advise or recommend, where students often need to go beyond the framework that they have learned and ask the questions what or how – for example not just saying communication should be improved(what should management do to improve it?) or risk should be transferred (how and who to?)

Recognise what to look for in scenarios

- Corporate governance weaknesses
- Design and application of controls
- Control environment
- Most important risks (why)
- Ethical issues and attitudes

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Something else that question practice will help students understand is what information will be important in scenarios and therefore will need to be brought into the answers, or impact on how they answer the question if it's particularly significant. Obviously what's important will be determined by the requirements of the question. However different areas of the syllabus have common themes which often come up in questions. If students know to look out for these themes, they are more likely to engage with. and use, the scenario information. This slide includes some important examples.

For corporate governance, students should look out for obvious weaknesses or deviations from best practice as they will often have to recommend improvements. For control problems look out for obvious shortcomings in design and whether controls are working as intended. The control environment, in particular the tone at the top and the mechanisms for establishing the right ethos, is an important underlying theme of P1, so students should look out for information about the attitudes of management and communication between management and employees. For risks, students need to see what risks are important to the organisation and the factors that determine importance, for example the organisation's strategy, changes in the business environment or a recent major problem that the organisation has had. For ethics, students need to identify what the ethical issues are and what scenario details bear upon those issues. They also need to understand what attitudes the individuals in the scenarios have and the overall ethical framework within which they are operating.

Reflect on reasons for failure

- Lack of knowledge
- Poor exam technique

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The other element of preparation applies to students who have failed the exam. ACCA has a large amount of statistical information and the performance statistics for students who have failed indicate that too many are not learning their lessons and are failing again. There are useful resources for students who have failed on ACCA's website, an exam-specific retake guide and a video of advice for students who are retaking exams. One piece of advice to highlight here is for students to work out why they have failed – the two main reasons being lack of knowledge or exam technique. The greater the distance from 50, the more lack of knowledge is likely to be a problem. It will also be an issue for students who feel that they struggled to come up with sufficient points. A mark in the 40s may be an indicator of poor exam technique being the main reason for failing, also if students remember obvious problems such as not attempting all the questions or spending too long on one question.

Planning and reflection

- What does the verb require
- What EXACTLY should the answer cover
- How scenario detail links to each question part
- How to gain professional marks

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We'll now move onto the exam itself. The presentation has mentioned some general themes, such as time management, but it will now focus on the planning stage. The particular aspect of planning this presentation will cover is reflection—what students need to get clear in their minds before they start answering the question. There is different advice about whether students should look at the scenario at all before reading the requirements, but the general consensus is that students should not read the scenario in detail first. They should consider the requirements first, understanding what they have to produce (relating to the question verb), what is the specific scope of their answer (defined in the rest of the requirements) and how long to take (don't forget the marks). Understanding precisely what the requirements want should also help students avoid duplication of points in different question parts, which is a frequent weakness.

Having done this they should then review the scenario information in detail. A good tip that's often given is mark against each scenario paragraph the part of the question to which it relates. If students write a plan, they may mention specific details in the scenario. All this should help them keep referring to the scenario when writing their answers.

Lastly I'll mention professional skills. These are very important but they only apply to Question 1, whereas the rest of this presentation covers themes that apply across the exam. There is ample guidance on professional marks on ACCA's

website. Here though this presentation will mention what students need to think about when answering Question 1 and seeing how to gain the Professional marks. One aspect is format – how should the answer begin and end, how should the paragraphs be linked, whether it should be in the first or third person, how will it be presented - a statement that is to be read out should not contain bullet points for example. Another important aspect is tailoring the answer to the audience. Students need to consider what the recipient's level of technical knowledge, what do they know about the situation and what are their concerns likely to be. The concerns will need to be addressed. Students also need to consider what the communication is trying to achieve – is it to persuade someone to take a particular course of action, is it to reassure them?

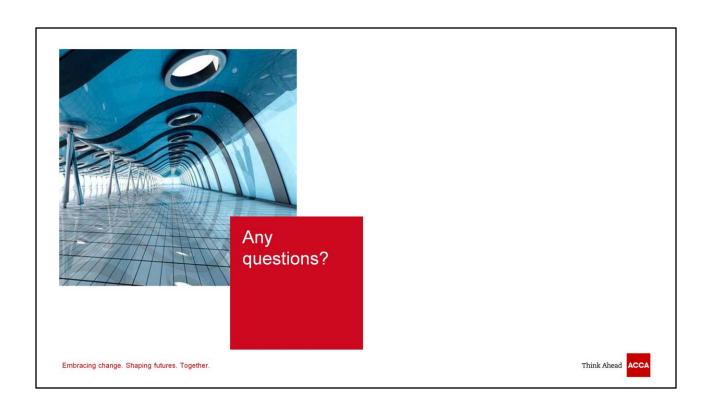
Conclusion - the four Musts

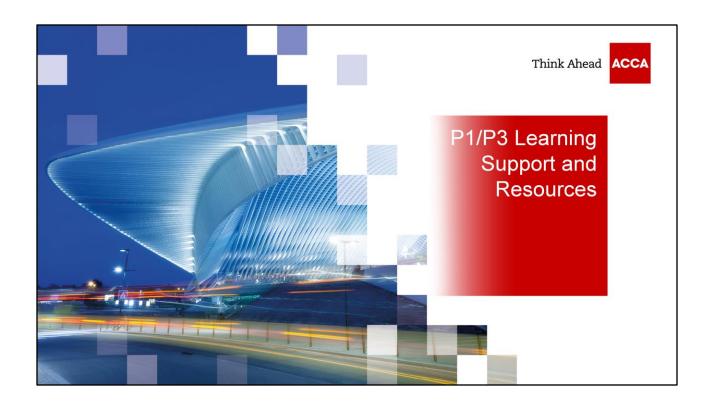
- Must revise the whole syllabus question spotters are usually wrong
- Must work through previous exams and study model answers
- Must obey the verb and provide right scope
- Must use case data if required by the requirement

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The best way to sum up this session is to repeat a summary produced for the 2015 conference of the four musts. Two relate to preparation – studying the syllabus and properly practising questions. The other two relate to the exam itself – providing what the requirement asks for and making the most of the content within the case. Students who focus on all of these should have a strong chance of passing.





This presentation is intended to highlight the key resources and support ACCA with its partners have available for P1 and P3 students and which it is essential for you to direct them towards and encourage them to use as essential preparation for the remaining examinations.



Now we will look at the timeline for future P1/P3 exam sessions and the transition rules which will apply

Remaining sessions and transition rules

- After this conference Only five more P1/P3 exam sessions
- June, Sept and Dec 17 and March and June 18
- First Strategic Business Leader (SBL) Exam in Sept 2018
- P1 and P3 must be successfully completed to gain a converted pass in SBL
- If P1 and/or P3 not successfully completed by Sept 18, students must take SBL
- Worst scenario being left holding a pass for P1 or P3, but still having to take SBL

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As there are only 5 more opportunities to pass P1 and P3 it is likely that many students will be keen to clear both exams at or before June 2018. For them, the scenario they wish to avoid is holding a pass for either P1 or P3 after June 18, but not both, meaning that the student would have to take SBL in the future.



The ACCA Global website contains a number of key resources to help teaching and learning for all exams. Encourage your students to click in the *students* tab and then select *exam support resources*, which includes the syllabus and study guide, past exams, FAQs and *examining team guidance*. This section includes the examiner reports and approach articles and a 5 minute video giving valuable advice.

It is this key list of resources which I will now focus on.

Learning and support resources

- Approved Content Provider materials (texts and revision question and answer banks)
- Examiners Reports and guides to examiner reports
- Technical articles
- Past examinations
- Videos
- English language resources (where English is a 2nd language)

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As we heard from the examining teams in their presentations, there are key recurring themes contained in the examiner's reports which highlight key and common failings demonstrated by the weaker students. Many of these failings are connected to exam tactics, but some of them are due to lack of preparedness. The list in this slide sets out the key resources we would encourage you as learning providers to focus on when directing your students to additional learning resources.

We will focus on these, one by one, in the following slides:

Approved study texts and revision question and answer banks

Using the up to date versions of the Approved Content Provider study texts and question and answer banks is highly recommended.

- Ensure students pre-read relevant chapters as preparation before classes
- Direct students to specific material and activities within study texts to read and work on after classes to consolidate learning
- Use question and answer banks intensively during the practice and revision phase to simulate exam taking
- Set at least 2 mock exams

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You may want to encourage your student to cover the reading material before the lectures associated with that material – this gives students a context and some background before they apply their learning in class and for homework.

Direct students to specific aspects of the texts during faceto-face if the material directly supports the learning being undertaken.

Use question and answer banks as part of the practice and revision phase of learning – to give students as much exam style practice as is possible

Give them mock exams to practice sitting an exam in timed exam conditions.

Examiner's Reports – more than just ACCA administration

Examiner's Reports:

'The highlights and lowlights of candidate performance'

Examiner's Reports are vital to appreciate lessons learned from past mistakes and failings and to highlight good practice.

- Ensure students read the last four reports
- Ask them to summarise the key recurring issues in those reports, both positive and negative.
- Ask students to recommend revision and exam tactics and strategies to maximise their chances of success.

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It is surprising to hear that many candidates do not read examiner's reports. Perhaps by their title they might be perceived as boring or an administration requirement of ACCA. They are far more than that. The examiner reports give the student an insight into the mind and concerns of the examiner – what delights and what frustrates them and the marking team.

It is well worth encouraging your students to read and summarise these reports and by doing so it will become obvious to them what the key things are that they should do and avoid doing in examinations. Following the examiner's advice based on the evidence of the team marking thousands of scripts is a great insight into student behaviours (both good and bad).

Two of the key things that almost all examiner reports in most examinations not just P1 and P3 advise and which candidates tend to repeatedly ignore are:

- Answering the question asked, not just 'dumping' information triggered by key words in the requirement – to avoid needless waffle
- Writing only as many points as the marks available would indicate was necessary to gain full marks – to help manage time

Guide to using the Examiner Reports:



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ACCA produced these guides to using examiner reports initially to help self-study students, but you can help your students to make the best of all of the constructive guidance in the examiner's reports by directing them to these guides which are in the support resources for each exam on the ACCA website. The guide includes getting started and then goes through three key steps in using the reports in a productive and helpful way.

These can be found on the ACCA website at the following links:

P1-

http://www.accaglobal.com/content/dam/ACCA_Global/Lea rning%20Providers/exam-reflection/Reflections-1st-P1-Governance-Risk-and-Ethics-FORM.PDF

P3 -

http://www.accaglobal.com/content/dam/ACCA_Global/Lea rning%20Providers/exam-reflection/Reflections-1st-P3-Business-Analysis-FORM.PDF

Retake Guide: Guide for re-sitting exams



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Also available, mainly for self study students are these retake guides. But again, you will find useful advice in these to pass on to any retake students in your classes. These are useful resources for those students who failed the exam and are planning for resits. They provide tips for how they can successfully pass the exam this time round and signpost them to the other resources available for the exam.

Links:

P1 -

http://www.accaglobal.com/content/dam/ACCA_Global/Lea rning%20Providers/retakeguides/4923_Study_Guide_Retakes_P1_interactive_AW.p

df

P3 -

http://www.accaglobal.com/content/dam/ACCA_Global/Lea rning%20Providers/retakeguides/4923_Study_Guide_Retakes_P3_interactive AW.p df

Read all technical articles

Technical articles

Technical articles supplement the knowledge from texts and kits.

- Ensure students read ALL technical articles
- If an article is still there it is useful. Don't read recently added articles only.

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It is essential that all your students take time to read the technical articles and make their own notes of what each article is about so as to consolidate their learning.

Tutors should point students to the existing articles listed on the website for each exam, as and when they cover relevant areas in their

face-to-face learning. This helps students gain a greater insight and understanding of these areas as they progress through their studies

There is evidence of only looking at most recent articles. The list of technical articles builds up over time and the older articles are as just as important as the new ones.

P1 technical articles

- 'Corporate governance from the inside out'
- Public sector governance parts 1 and 2 (Also available as podcasts on iTunes)
- CSR strategy and strategic CSR
- The Integrated Report framework
- Diversifying the board a step towards better governance
- Environmental accounting and reporting
- COSO's enterprise risk management framework
- Internal audit

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A particularly comprehensive one is the first in this slide on governance which is an overview of the whole of Section A and well worth reading to understand how all the themes within the governance section fit together.

P1 technical articles (continued)

- Independence as a concept in corporate governance
- 'Non-corporate' corporate governance
- Corporate governance external and internal actors
- Risk and environmental auditing
- Strategic and operational risks
- Rules, principles and Sarbanes-Oxley
- Ethical decision making
- All about stakeholders parts 1 and 2

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P3 technical articles

- Costing for decision making
- Big data
- Performance indicators
- Information technology.
- Job design.
- Integrated reporting
- The learning organisation
- Value chains, value networks and supply chain management
- The strategic planning process parts 1 and 2.

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There is a long list of technical articles for P3. Again, don't only look at the most recently added articles as the older ones are still relevant and questions can be asked based on them.

P3 technical articles (continued)

- Culture and configuration.
- Benchmarking
 Strategic planning in an age of turbulence .
- Communicating core values and mission
- Knowledge management
- Outsourcing
- Strategic planning
- Strategy and people
- Business strategy and pricing

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Practice past exams

Past Exams

Reading and practicing the more recent past examinations is an essential part of effective practice and revision.

- Ensure students access the most recent exams and practice specific questions
- Use the answers as tutorial aids not as model answers
- Give the students time constrained practice apportioning the time (including reading time to the marks allocated)

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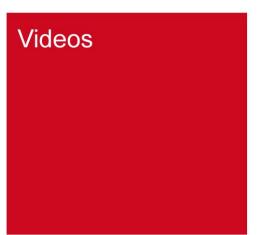
Past exams are published on the ACCA website under the students/exam resources section relating to each exam. Approved content providers also have the rights to publish the most recent exams. But all past exams are useful to review.

It is important that students practice the relevant questions as they are learning about the subject areas concerned and are not given access to the answers before they attempt them. This helps consolidate their learning in a way in which they will have to demonstrate this in the exam.

Please use the answers to de-brief candidates or as part of teaching or learning, but do emphasise that these answers are far more comprehensive than the answers, even the best candidates, would ever be able to produce.

If students attempt questions as part of formal tuition they should be time constrained. A good guide to organising this is to allow the students so much per minute to attempt the question so tackling a 25 mark question from Section B of a past P1/P3 exam should take $(195/100) \times 25 = \text{approximately } 50 \text{ minutes}$, including the reading time that would be allocated.

Other useful resources



Listening to and following the advice of experienced teaching practitioners for P1/P3 is invaluable to gaining insights into effective examination performance.

- Ensure students access all relevant videos relating to P1 or P3
- Ask students to summarise the main themes in these resources to consolidate key messages

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ACCA spends a lot of time and resources in commissioning experts from the field of accountancy tuition and learning to share their wisdom from years of successful experience as teachers.

Encourage your students to listen to them carefully.

To ensure this is done it may be worth asking them to listen to a video and ask them to summarise the key points that are being made by the tutor.

This way the learning and most important issues are highlighted in the mind of the student – hopefully to prepare them better for the forthcoming exam



For students who do not have English as their first language, P1 and P3 can be quite challenging and any deficiency in English language skills will reduce the potential of an otherwise able candidate to perform well. They are also helpful even for English speaking students, for example how to structure a report. This can help in gaining professional marks.

With this in mind ACCA, working with BPP University, have designed English language resources, including a diagnostic test to understand at what level to begin any English instruction.

They are designed to support students through each stage of the ACCA Qualification.

There are 70 one hour modules, covering aspects specific to each exam in the ACCA Qulalification and they are online to access at any time on any device - so very flexible.

Free, online learning provided by BPP University, designed specifically for ACCA students



English language training modules available for P1:

- Writing introductions
- Writing conclusions
- Writing press releases
- Proofreading your work

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Free, online learning provided by BPP University, designed specifically for ACCA students

P3

English language training modules available for P3:

- Briefing papers
- Case studies one
- Formal language
- Proofreading two

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You could also advise students to also look at some of the modules in other exams for example training modules in P5 includes Organising a report, Organising writing - problem/solution, Supporting an argument and Writing an evaluation, all skills needed in P1 and P3

