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# **Examiner's Report**

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**Paper 2**  
**Business Communication**

## **General Comments**

There were three sections in this paper. Candidates had to attempt all sections. To pass this paper, candidates were expected to demonstrate that they possessed a basic understanding of the subject matter. In addition, this being a language-oriented subject, candidates needed an acceptable level of English competence to communicate properly for general workplace purposes.

Though the level, style and format of the question paper for this examination were consistent with those of previous years, candidates' performance was rather disappointing on the whole this time. One likely reason for this unsatisfactory result could be that since this examination was the last time that the present syllabus was used, this tempted a substantial number of less-prepared candidates to attempt it and try their luck.

Another apparent major reason for the low passing rate is the candidates' low language competence. In most of the failure cases, candidates obtained low marks in this paper because of their poor language proficiency.

### **Section A – 10 Multiple Choice Questions**

Questions in this section tested knowledge of the basic concepts of business communication. Less than half of the candidates passed this part.

To get higher marks in this section, candidates needed a clear understanding of concepts covered in the syllabus. While a good number of them could get 80% or more of the marks, several seemed to have been completely unprepared – and they put all their answers as “A” or all as “B”.

### **Section B – 4 Short Questions**

This section tested candidates' English reading competence. They were required to answer four short questions on an extract from a written reply by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury to a question by a member of the Legislative Council.

The questions assessed their vocabulary and ability to comprehend explicit and implicit information in the text and were pitched at the level of first/second year post-secondary Business English courses. The performance in this section revealed clearly that most of those who failed the course did not possess a reasonable language competence. As on previous occasions, many who appeared to be less proficient in English (as reflected in their language performance in Section C) did not attempt most of the questions in this part.

Question B1 required candidates to identify synonyms or antonyms of words from specified paragraphs in the given text. The words selected for this question are commonly used in businesses. Though a small number of candidates obtained full marks, many seemed to lack the general or basic lexical knowledge to answer questions on word meanings in this part.

Question B2 was the easiest. Only superficial comprehension sufficed and answers could be obtained directly from the given text. Most candidates could handle it.

The last two questions in this section, B3 and B4, required a deeper level of understanding and, to answer them, candidates needed to identify less explicit information from the text. Most did poorly in this one and many left the answers blank.

## **Section C – 4 Long Questions**

There were four long questions in this section. Candidates were allowed to answer any three out of the four. Each question was worth 20 marks. Those who answered all four had only the three highest marks counted towards their result.

### **Question C1**

This question was on basic communication theory. Candidates were expected to apply concepts and theory of the paper. There were two parts to it. Using a formal email as an example, part (a) asked candidates to analyse its communication components and offer suggestions for improvements. Part (b) tested the ability to use plain and natural language. They were asked to remove unnecessary jargons, clichés and wordy expressions from given sentences.

The question covered key theoretical concepts that are fundamental to effective business communication. Despite this, only two-third of the candidates attempted it. This suggested that in general many were not confident in their knowledge of communication theory. Less than one-third of the candidates who attempted this question passed it.

### **Question C2**

This question required students to point out problem areas in a given letter and to rewrite it. The task was highly authentic and close to real-life workplace situations, in which supervisors are often required to proofread documents written by their staff and to point out major problem areas. The attempt rate has been improving since December 2007. Some candidates seemed to have been better prepared for this type and performed well.

In this examination, most candidates appeared to have difficulty in understanding the requirements. In general, they performed poorly in this question. Only one-third of the candidates who attempted it passed.

### **Question C3**

This question required candidates to write a sales letter according to the given information. The performance was the best in Section C. The attempt rate was high, and nearly half of the candidates who attempted it passed it.

Despite the relatively satisfactory performance, many candidates' language proficiency was not satisfactory. Many slavishly copied given sentences and phrases from the question. Since sentences copied from the questions were not candidates' own writing, these were not given credit. The given information in the question was so written that it could hardly be copied directly and modifications by candidates were necessary. The more the candidates copied, the more it reflected their inability to communicate in their own words.

### **Question C4**

This question required candidates to write a memo report to a company's board of directors regarding the purchase of notebook computers for a sales team. This was the most unpopular question; more than half of the candidates attempted it and only a few of them passed it.

Like Question C3, to allow candidates sufficient room to demonstrate their relevant abilities, most of the given information for inclusion in the memo report was presented in bullet form and candidates had to transform the key words in the bullets into logical paragraphs. Unfortunately, many candidates overlooked basic grammatical structures during the transformation. For example, a large number of them used the present tense to report the procedures they had already completed. In addition, many lost marks again in this question because they copied sentences and phrases word-for-word unnecessarily from the question.

## **Final Remarks**

Starting from 2009, *Business Communication* in the Accounting Technician Examination will be integrated with *Organization and Management*. A new syllabus will be used for Paper 2. Though *Business Communication* will still be the major component of the paper, candidates would need to be fully aware of the change and prepare for the contents on *Organization and Management* as well. A satisfactory level of language proficiency is essential to all areas of accounting technicians' work. Candidates of the new syllabus are strongly encouraged to make sure that their language competence is adequate for the examination. They are also advised to read the new syllabus carefully and practice answering the pilot paper within the allowed exam time, so that they are aware of the knowledge and skills required to succeed in the paper.

**[ END OF EXAMINER'S REPORT ]**