

Engineering Council examinations

Advice note on self-assessment and time management

The following notes are aimed at providing prospective examination candidates with some advice and guidance on their preparation for and performance in any forthcoming timed written Engineering Council examination.

Candidates are reminded that the purpose of an examination is to demonstrate to the examiner an understanding of the subject matter.

In an examination context, **good time management implies the best use of the time available in which to attain the highest possible amount of marks**. More specifically, that means making the best use of the 3 hours available in which to score at least 40 marks (the 'pass' threshold) from the 100 marks total that is allotted to the paper.

Read the rubric - Read the rubric ('rubric' means the instructions) on the front cover of the question paper. This will tell you how many questions you have to answer, and whether you are only allowed to answer a specific amount from any section. It is very important that you understand and comply with the rubric: if you do not, the marks gained for some of your questions will not be counted.

Read the whole question paper first - The Examiners have built into the question paper what they consider to be adequate time for you to read and think about the questions **before** you start to answer them. Please use this time well. Read the whole paper and then choose the questions that you wish to answer wisely.

Make outlines and notes for answers - Plan your answer before you begin to write by making notes of points as you read through the question again. You must write these notes in your answer book and then cross through them (with a single diagonal line). The examiner will not mark them but could still refer to them if he or she is not clear on something in your answer.

Write legibly - Your answers must be capable of being read by the examiner. This does not mean simply that they should be written in clear and concise English, but also that the handwriting should be clear. If your answer cannot be read and understood, the examiner cannot award marks to it. Where diagrams are included in your answer, these should be clearly drawn and labelled.

Candidates should be prepared to work on the task of answering the questions that the examiner has asked. Ideally, that means

- being prepared for the correct subject (candidates have been known to get their examination dates mixed up)
- ensuring that you actually understand the question that is being asked **Answer the question set** - Ensure that you read the questions carefully so that you understand what it is the examiner is asking you to do. Candidates often fail to answer the question set but instead give a pre-prepared answer to a question that they had hoped would be set. Examiners will not reward material which is not relevant and candidates must not think that simply writing down everything they know will result in a pass. (strange as it may seem, some candidates provide an 'answer' that has nothing to do with what was asked)
- have all the appropriate 'tools' you require, and are permitted
- being fit, free from colds etc, not tired, and generally in a reasonably good state of health.

Over]

Do not go into an examination and attempt a question on a topic that you have never previously done any worked examples on. This is not the time to be breaking new ground and it never works out in your favour. OK, if you have exhausted all your efforts and are scratching around trying to pick up the odd mark here and there, you might attempt this. But you do not do it as a planned strategy.

Have a planned strategy for each examination. You must know what topics you understand and which ones you are weak on. If you don't, you haven't achieved a rigorous enough level of self-assessment and you probably shouldn't be there! If you are strong on them all, then you will assuredly pass. You will try to avoid those you are weak on and concentrate on those that you know you can do something with. Start with a question you are confident about – it doesn't have to be Q1.

What do we mean by self-assessment? It is a means whereby you can establish how good your knowledge of the syllabus is, and is best achieved by doing as many and varied worked examples as possible, either from the recommended text books or, better still, by going over old exam papers. And what you are really trying to establish in doing this, is an understanding of the principles and concepts that are embraced within the topics of the syllabus. Statistically, of course, the more examples you do in your preparation, then the greater is the probability that you will recognise something very similar to what you have already done when you meet the exam questions. There is really no other better substitute to this policy – not because it always guarantees that you will understand everything you do, but it should tell you what you don't understand, and that is the real key to self-assessment. As an example of self-assessment or rather the lack of it, in a recent Engineering Council examination 20% of the candidates scored less than 15% of the possible marks. It was abundantly clear to the examiner that not only were those candidates so poorly prepared that they should never have sat the examination, but also that they should have been aware of that long before they arrived at the examination centre.

Luck should not be a factor in passing an exam – particularly the good luck in only having to do those topics that you know about (or the bad luck if the reverse occurs). The strategy behind exam papers in which all questions require to be answered is partly to eliminate the so-called 'luck factor' which may occur when only a number of the questions making up the paper require to be answered. Of course, whether all or only a certain number of questions require to be attempted will not stop the candidate from simply doing what he or she is able to do.

Time your answers - This is very important. Candidates often penalise themselves by answering too few questions because they have not apportioned their time wisely. Make sure you know how many questions you will be expected to answer so that you can work out your time allocation per question in advance. Then you must pay close attention to the number of marks awarded to individual parts of questions. Spending too much time on a question worth two marks is a waste: you will not be awarded more than two marks however much you write. **Do not waste time writing on your script data that has already been provided** – a commonly bad habit when numerical analysis is required

Calculations - If a question requires a calculation, candidates should show all the intermediate steps taken to arrive at an answer so that it is clear to the examiner how the answer has been reached. This way, there is a greater chance that the examiner can award marks for the process, even if the result of the calculation is incorrect. If candidates realise that their answer is quite clearly wrong but lack the time to re-calculate it, then they should explain this to the examiner and say how they know it is wrong. Candidates that show this kind of awareness are far more likely to be rewarded than those that simply write down a blatantly wrong result.

Prepare yourself well - You can improve your examination technique by obtaining past question papers and working through them under timed conditions.