



## Examination techniques A guide for students Contents



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#### 1.0 Introduction

Part 1 focuses on the examinations for the units within the qualifications at Levels 3 to 6. Part 2 focuses on the case study examination for the L6-03 supply chain management unit. Part 3 focuses on examinations for the units within the International Qualification, however it is important for candidates studying these units to read the guidance relating to examination technique in Part 1.

This guide has been written by experienced CIPS assessors to provide you with tips and hints on preparing for CIPS examinations. Comments are intended as a guide only, as it is appreciated that everyone works in different ways. We hope that you will find the guidance useful as you prepare for your examinations.

The guide focuses on the short-mini case studies that are contained within all CIPS examination papers, but also provides a short focus on how to approach the major case study for Supply Chain Management in Practice, which is the integrative unit for the CIPS Level 6 Graduate Diploma in Purchasing and Supply, which can be found on page 11, in Part 2.

#### 2.0 About the CIPS examination case studies

The case study is a brief overview of a business situation. The purpose of the case study is to allow you to demonstrate your ability to analyse a purchasing and supply situation under examination conditions. To do this effectively you need to know, understand and have experience of the application of the relevant theory. This is an active process, not a memory exercise, so practice on a range of past mini-case studies is essential.

You need to learn analysis and problem solving skills that you can use quickly and easily as you aim to analyse the short mini-case studies that are posed at the start of each examination paper. This needs active practice, not just passive reading revision. On analysing the case study you may need to make realistic assumptions – something that will be addressed later in the guidance. A good knowledge of current purchasing and supply practices and general business climate developments, demonstrated in the exam, will gain you marks.

All CIPS examination papers are written by assessors and peer reviewed by an Assessment Panel. The process is very thorough and concentrates on ensuring that the content is fit for purpose and that the case studies will aid students' success as they have a full and detailed basis for application of answers, thus being able

to demonstrate to an extent, purchasing in practice.

CIPS examination case studies are written scenarios about some aspect of business relevant to the unit content within each unit. Often the case studies are based on real companies, but renamed to retain anonymity, thus enhancing the real and relevant nature of the case studies. Other times the companies are fictitious but designed to test your application of knowledge.

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The case studies are used to test the candidates' knowledge and understanding of the unit content. It is a test also of how the candidates' knowledge is applied during the examination, for example, to an industry sector, an organisation, an individual within an organisation, a relationship between a number of organisations, a process, a principle or product context. Other information will be about the substantive key issues related to the unit content.

Case studies vary in word length by Level, as indicated in Table 1, so it is important that candidates are able to read and assimilate the case material within the suggested timeframe, indicated in the table below for each level.

| Qualfication<br>Level | Approx<br>word<br>count | Approx<br>number<br>pages | Recommended reading time |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 3                     | 400                     | 1                         | 30 minutes               |
| 4                     | 500                     | 1 1/2                     | 30 minutes               |
| 5                     | 700                     | 1½ -2                     | 30 minutes               |
| 6                     | 900                     | 2                         | 30 minutes               |

Table 1: Typical word count, approximate number of pages and recommended reading times for CIPS examinations by level of qualification

The case studies contain information that candidates will need to use in answering the case study questions. It is important that as a candidate, you realise that this case study must be used to answer questions from Section A. If the material from within the case study is not used, then it is likely that your answers will not be of the expected quality, as the answers will not be applied to the case study context. This will be reflected in the marks awarded, which are likely to be fewer than they would had the case study been used.

The case study questions may cover any aspect of the unit content for the examination you are taking.



Case studies are written so that candidates do not need to have any specific industry or sector knowledge in order to answer the questions. You may, however, be able to use your own knowledge about the specific case context but, if you do, take care there is no contradictory information in the case.

#### 3.0 Reviewing the case study

The time allocation for the examinations is quite generous, so you have plenty of opportunity to review the case, think about the information provided and make a few notes for use in answering the questions – but make sure you do not exceed the time you allocate for reviewing!

When reviewing the case, the following tips and hints may be useful:

- Read the case study and the case questions through quickly to start with, in order to get a general overview of what it is about, and to help you settle down to thinking. Remember you have approximately 30 minutes to review the case study information.
- Then, read the case study through again more carefully, this time with a pen at the ready to make a few notes and annotate the case study throughout. Often, taking a highlighter pen into the examination is a good idea to be able to highlight key areas as you read through.
- Firstly, identify the contextual information, that is, background data that sets the scene for the key issues. For example, if there is financial information, or information on trends, size of the business or purchasing spend, then it is useful to highlight these and consider their relevance to the case study. Often these issues are insightful in terms of the approaches you might take to the answer. Possible contexts might include:
  - B2C and /or
  - B2B and /or
  - Product and /or
  - Services and /or
  - International and /or
  - Not for profit / social
- Secondly, identify the key issues that are presented in the case and try to prioritise these, including any that appear to be peripheral to the main case. For example, if you were to undertake a SWOT analysis in Level 6 Strategic Supply Chain Management, you should first prioritise the weaknesses that need addressing and would have the most beneficial impact upon the organisation. In terms of threats to the organisation, identify the most viable threat

to the organisation that needs to be managed quickly and effectively to reduce the risk to the business. A further example in terms of Level 5 Risk Management and Supply Chain Vulnerability might be prioritising the risks by using a rating scale and thus be able to identify the highest risk to the organisation.

- Make notes about the main points in the case study as they relate to the unit content (for example, 'this section is about conflict management approaches in negotiation...').
   It might be useful to do this for sections or paragraphs of the case. Remember, it is your knowledge and understanding of the CIPS qualifications unit content that is being tested.
- Try to determine if the case study makes any
  assumptions that are not clearly stated.
  Business reports often include assumptions,
  and it is useful to identify them; often this
  demonstrates a mature approach to thinking
  more broadly and logically and is viewed as
  positive by the assessor. However, do not
  spend too much time on it either, as it can
  act as a distraction during the examination.
- When you have considered the case, you are ready to look in more detail at the questions
- When you begin writing your answers you are likely to want to go back to the case to re-read portions of it, so if you are making notes on the case itself, take care to keep the pages as clean as possible! It is beneficial to write any notes in your answer booklet (you can cross them out at the end). That way, if you run out of time, the assessor can read your notes which may give him or her an insight to you analysis.

#### 4.0 Reading the examination questions

With the exception of L3-05 purchasing in action and L6-03 supply chain management in practice, examination papers are divided into two sections: Section A questions are those that relate specifically to the case study; Section B questions are more general and will include questions related to any aspect of the unit content. L3-05 purchasing in action is the integrative unit for the Level 3 qualification. It comprises a case study and four compulsory questions based on the case study each worth 25 marks. L6-03 supply chain management in practice is the integrative unit for the Level 6 qualification and there are more details about the examination within Part 2 of this guide. Table 2 summarises the format of the examination papers.

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| Section | Selection                                                                    |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| А       | Answer the two compulsory questions,<br>worth 25 marks each                  |
| В       | Answer two questions from a choice of four. Each question is worth 25 marks. |

Table 2: Examination paper format for all units except L3-05 and L6-03

Tips and hints for reading questions:

- Spend 10 minutes to read the questions through at least twice – it is worth reading all questions on the paper so that you have an overall picture of what is being asked before you focus attention on Section A, which CIPS recommends you attempt first.
- At the first reading identify what is being asked of you, in general, for each question
  - Determine which part of the subject unit content the question relates to
  - Consider what key issues the question is asking you to write about
  - Number the tasks the question is asking you to answer so that you are sure you fully understand the demands of the question.
- At the second reading, identify the questions from Section B that you can answer best and then again when working on them, identify how many things the question demands of you. Format, context, task and outputs are very important.
- Next, highlight the command words in each question.
  - identify if it is asking you more than one thing
  - make sure you have not misread any part
    of the question if you have, be prepared
    to attempt a different question (although
    you only have a choice of questions in
    Section B).
- Be sure that, even if a question sounds familiar to one you may have practised, the wording is as you expect it to be – a difference in the command word may require a completely different type of answer. In essence, do not regurgitate answers you have already prepared previously and remembered, make sure you answer the specific question asked, using your knowledge and understanding.
- Remember to write down a few notes about the question, so that you can refer back to these when you begin to plan your answer

later on. Use your answer booklet to do this - notes should be crossed out towards the end of the exam; your assessor will not mark these.

 When selecting questions to answer (from Section B of the paper), pick those that you can write answers to all components, rather than only one component, even though you know you can do it well. This strategy clearly gives you a chance of gaining maximum marks.

#### 5.0 Understanding command words

When developing the unit content for the CIPS qualifications, much attention was paid to using a range of command words, appropriate to the level of qualifications being undertaken. These command words do cross the levels on occasion, but they often determine the demands of questions, and are therefore important. If you read the unit content carefully, you will see the words below linked very much to different learning outcomes and learning objectives. You should familiarise yourself with the demands of the words below, because it will aid your understanding of the question and its overall demands. CIPS exam questions may include any of the following command words, or others. Table 3 provides you with definitions of typical command words.

| <b>Command Word</b> | Definition                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Analyse             | Examine a topic together with thoughts and judgments about it, by dividing the topic into its separate parts and looking at each part in detail                 |
| Appraise            | Evaluate, judge or assess something                                                                                                                             |
| Argue               | Provide reasons for or against something, clearly and in proper order, using or citing evidence so that a case can be proved. Also, compare with <b>Discuss</b> |
| Assess              | Evaluate or judge the importance of something, referring to the special knowledge of experts where possible. This may involve quoting from other texts          |
| Comment on          | Write notes explaining your own criticism and observations of something                                                                                         |
| Compare             | Examine one thing in relation to another thing, so that points of similarity or difference become evident                                                       |
| Consider            | Take something in to account, or make allowance for something. Think carefully about something or reflect upon it                                               |

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| Command Word | Definition                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Contrast     | Emphasise the differences between two opposite or dissimilar things                                                                            |
| Criticise    | Give your judgments about the good<br>or bad qualities of theories or<br>opinions, supporting your decision<br>with evidence                   |
| Define       | Explain the exact meaning of a word or phrase                                                                                                  |
| Describe     | Give a full account or a detailed representation of something                                                                                  |
| Discuss      | Consider something by writing about it from different points of view. Compare with <b>Argue</b>                                                |
| Evaluate     | Calculate or judge the value of something; include your personal opinion in your evaluation together with appropriate reasons for your opinion |
| Explain      | Give reasons for, or account for something, so that it is clear or easy to understand                                                          |
| Identify     | Identify to state or briefly mention items of information                                                                                      |
| Illustrate   | Clarify or explain something by using examples or diagrams                                                                                     |
| Interpret    | Use your own ideas to explain the significance of something                                                                                    |
| Justify      | Show good reasons for decisions, recommendations or conclusions, perhaps by referring to other texts                                           |
| List         | Mention items separately in number order or by using bullet points                                                                             |
| Outline      | Give the main features, facts or the general idea of something, omitting minor details                                                         |
| Propose      | Put forward (for example a point of view, idea, argument, suggestion) for consideration or action                                              |
| Reconcile    | Show how two apparently conflicting things can appear similar or compatible                                                                    |
| Relate       | Establish a connection or association between things to show how they affect each other or how they are alike                                  |
| Review       | Examine and assess a subject critically                                                                                                        |

| Command Word | Definition                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Show         | Explain thoroughly or prove something, so that the truth can be established                                                                                                       |
| State        | Put something into words clearly and briefly                                                                                                                                      |
| Suggest      | This means that there may be more than one answer. You must give the most appropriate answer, or answers. and it is good practice to state why it is the most appropriate answer. |
| Summarise    | Give a brief, concise account of the main points of something, leaving out details and examples                                                                                   |

Table 3: Typical command words and their definitions

You must take special care with command words, so as not to confuse common terms and respond inappropriately. For example, candidates often confuse "explain", "evaluate", "criticise" instead choosing to "discuss".

#### 6.0 Allocating time

CIPS recommends you allocate time to answer each question using the marks available as a guide. All papers ask you to answer four questions, each worth a total 25 marks. The total time allocated to complete exam papers at all Levels is three hours.

Time has already been allocated for you to read the case study (30 minutes) and a further 10 minutes has been suggested as recommended question reading time. Hence, the time you have available to prepare and answer the four exam questions is around 2 hours and 20 minutes. This gives you 35 minutes to spend on each answer.

It may help you to break the time allocation down further, depending on how many marks and sub-components of questions have been allocated. Table 4 gives you a quick reference breakdown that you may find helpful.

| Marks | Suggested<br>time<br>allocation | Marks | Suggested<br>time<br>allocation |
|-------|---------------------------------|-------|---------------------------------|
| 25    | 35 minutes                      | 5     | 7 minutes                       |
| 20    | 28 minutes                      | 3     | 4 minutes                       |
| 15    | 21 minutes                      | 2     | 3 minutes                       |
| 10    | 14 minutes                      | 1     | 1½ minutes                      |

Table 4: Time allocations for questions and sub-component questions

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### 7.0 Planning, writing and reviewing answers to examination questions

The purpose of the CIPS examinations is for you to

- (a) demonstrate you have knowledge about the subject area, and
- (b) show that you can adhere to instructions when answering questions.

Thus, it is important to consider both these aspects when preparing for examinations. Figure 1 summarises a three-step approach to planning and writing examination answers.

Assessor experience, particularly on longer exam answers, highlights that most marks are awarded for the first half of a candidate's answer. This is usually because of a lack of focus and often some repetition in the second half, indicating poor planning in answering the question. Candidates should always plan a complete and balanced answer.

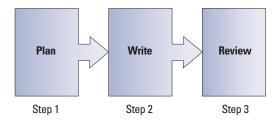


Figure 1: CIPS 3-Step approach to answering examination questions

It is obviously easier to write answers to short questions, worth relatively few marks. For longer answers, however, it is worthwhile taking time to plan your answer in order to organise your thoughts. It is also recommended that you allow time to review your written answers.

#### Step 1

- Plan by noting down any and all relevant points that come to mind. At this stage, do not worry about order or structure
- Once you have some notes, you can then begin to organise your thoughts. Use a coloured pen (easily distinguishable from your written notes) to identify which points can be drawn together for, say, a paragraph of your answer. Identify any models, theories or examples which will add value to your answer if appropriate.

#### Step 2

 Then, you can write to the plan you have made, making each substantive point clear

- and concise, and written in a way that answers the question.
- To ensure you draw the assessor's attention to points in your answer, you may wish to use signposting such as sub-headings and underlining of key points in your text, such as have been included in this section of the guide
- Unless you are otherwise asked to write to a specific structure, such as a report or memo, you do not need to include an introduction, preamble, summary or conclusions. These will not attract marks. Where an introduction is asked for, however, this may be used to specify the scope of the answer, or provide definitions.
- Show how you reach any conclusions you do make, for example, when answering numberbased questions.
- Remember also when writing to use the full page space for answers. Start each answer on a new page. This enables you to include a few words more on review of your answer should another aspect of the point you have made come to mind. Leaving space also makes it easier for the assessor to see the points you have made clearly when allocating marks.
- Make handwriting as legible as possible.
   Using a fountain pen or even a fibre tip pen
   helps this. Practice handwriting. In an age
   where increasingly we use IT, this is very
   important. Illegible handwriting does not
   bode well. Assessors can only mark what
   they can read and interpret fully.
- Stop writing the answer when your allocated time runs out! If you do not move on to the next question, you are certainly going to fail to gain marks overall. Clearly, it is important to attempt all sub-components of a question as this gives you the maximum chance of gaining marks. However, four partly answered questions will not bode well either. If you are struggling with completing your first and second answer in the time, then you need to review your plans for the other questions, in order to make sure you complete as many answers to questions as possible.

#### Step 3

- Use time at the end to review your answers. CIPS recommends that you do not leave the examination room before the full time allocation.
- Check your answer against the question and the plan you made, so that you are sure all relevant points have been included, written correctly and the question has been answered appropriately.

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 Use the space you have left to add any last minute points - do not amend your answers substantively at this stage, it is too late for that, but you can add any points you have missed out easily.

Note: the time you allocate to planning an answer rather depends on how long it takes you to write answers, which depends on how planned your answers are (see Figure 2). So, when preparing for examinations in general, you should practice planning and writing answers to examination questions. This will give you a guide on the length of time you can spend on planning and writing.

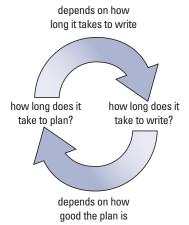


Figure 2: How long to spend planning and answering?

Assessors do not negatively mark, that is, they **do not take away marks** for any incorrect points or even poor structure unless it is a requirement of the question. However, the more clearly structured you present your answers, the easier it will be for an assessor to allocate marks to your correct points. Good structure requires planning.

#### 8.0 A note about CIPS answer formats

CIPS examination questions may ask you to write answers using a specific format, or from the perspective of different characters, such as a purchasing manager or a consultant. As previously mentioned, the use of formats is one way that assessors can test your ability to follow instructions. Up to 2 marks will be awarded for the correct use of an answer format. Therefore if you do not adhere to the instruction given you could fail to gain up to 2 marks.

Formats and features of those that assessors may use are in Table 5.

| Format                      | Key features                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Informal<br>report          | Report heading     Introduction     Sections with headings     Summary or conclusion     Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |
| Briefing notes              | Note format with appropriate<br>sub-headings<br>Bulleted or numbered lists under each<br>sub-heading within the notes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |  |
| Memo                        | <ul> <li>To and from</li> <li>Date</li> <li>Subject heading for each section of the memo</li> <li>Salutation (Dear xxxx)</li> <li>Paragraphed body text</li> <li>Signature</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |  |
| E-mail                      | <ul> <li>To and from</li> <li>Date</li> <li>Subject heading</li> <li>Salutation</li> <li>Paragraphed body text</li> <li>Signatory</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
| Power Point<br>Presentation | <ul> <li>A series of slides, usually no more than 10-15, but determined by the brief.</li> <li>Use appropriate structure, headings, bullet points and where possible graphics and inserts.</li> <li>Include notes and present the slides as note pages, so that assessors can understand the context of your presentation</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                  |  |
| Letter                      | Addressee information Date RE: Meeting Salutation (Dear Sir/Madam – Yours faithfully – Dear Mr or Mrs – Yours sincerely) Subject heading Paragraphed body text Signatory Using correct English and not text English will be important. Emails are formal documents and should not include any shorthand.  Signatory is important. You should always make sure your name, date and position/job title are included. Within emails in particular, full contact details should be included directly below the signatory. |  |

Table 5: CIPS guidance on answer formats

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#### 9.0 Using CIPS' materials for further guidance

Past examination papers and reports can be found in the study and qualify area of the CIPS website – www.cips.org. You should have a user name and password, which was allocated when you registered as a student member. These past papers are designed to give you a useful insight into the types of questions that will be asked in your examination, and can be used to practice as part of your examination preparation.

The reports also provide some answer guidance, that is, consideration of potential answers. However, do remember this is only guidance and not a specimen answer. Each answer provided by you will be assessed on its own merits and not on a framework of answer guidance.

#### 10.0 About the assessor

When you start answering your questions, you should give some thought to the assessor, who are they, what will they want to see, what do they expect?

A good way to think about an assessor is as a potential employer, almost as if you are in an interview situation and your job on the day is to convince the assessor that you know what you are talking about, and you know what you are doing. This is quite a useful approach to take.

Alternatively, you could think of an assessor as a key customer or even your boss. Think of them as somebody you need to impress in terms of your ability to apply knowledge and understanding of subject areas in practice, well time managed and well presented.

Assessors are selected because of their experience and knowledge of the subject area, and, therefore, they are very aware of what is needed to be able to complete a question effectively.

Remember, first impressions are important in an interview. It is equally important in an examination paper. If the assessor is put off in the beginning by poorly presented papers, poor handwriting and lack of knowledge or application, this is going to influence the way in which they perceive your answers. They mark very strictly to mark schemes, but even though, their views will be formulated.

#### 11.0 Useful sources and materials on examination technique

www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A520859 - offers reliable tips and hints on written examination technique, albeit aimed at secondary education students in the UK.

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Cottrell S (2003) The Study Skills Handbook, second ed, Palgrave Macmilan,

ISBN 1-4039-1135-5 – a useful text on study skills but covers more than just examination technique. Associated with the publisher of this text, there is a general skills website to be found at www.skills4study.com which is potentially useful. If you click on 'useful resources', you will find a number of links to different UK universities, all offering advice on examination and revision technique.

Tony Buzan has written various books on making better use of your brain capacity, including The Ultimate Book of Mind Maps. Mind maps are a potentially useful way to plan a question answer during an examination, but it's a technique that does not suit everyone. Information about his various techniques can be found at http://www.mind-mapping.co.uk and http://www.buzanworld.com where he discusses a full range of 'cortical skills' - word, image, number, logic, rhythm, colour and spatial awareness.

#### 12.0 Conclusion

In summary below, you will find a table setting out the key approaches you need to take to preparing for an examination.

Understanding of purchasing and supply theory and current issues Read and analyse the case study **Stakeholders** Purchasing Environmental Context B2B Internal and analysis and / or B2C etc external Macro / micro & internal Key issues What is the question? What is the theory being tested? In what context? What is the format: Report, letter, memo etc

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Good balanced answer earning high marks

Question plan [cover total question and time plan]

Finally, in the flow chart below, there are some final hints and tips on the advance preparations for the examination, not just what you are preparing to do on the day. Learn, understand and Read around the subject be able to apply and keep up with news purchasing and supply and developments theories Prepare a realistic balanced revision plan Revision is an active process - not only read - apply and do example case studies Check arrangements at examination centre - arrive in good time with all relevant items (calculator etc) Read and analyse case study Read questions Select questions Time plan Analyse selected question. What theory is being tested? In what context? What answer format is required? Write answer in required format, answering the actual question, with relevant theory and in case context Keep to examination time plan - complete answer on time Well balanced answers to each question to give a high mark earning answer

Good luck!

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# The Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply Part 2 Guidance on the CIPS open book examination Level 6 Supply chain management in practice

#### 1.0 Supply Chain Management in Practice – Level 6 integrative unit case study option preparation guidance for the CIPS open book examination

Much of what you have already read in Part 1 of this guidance document is relevant to this case study approach, in particular references to:

Section 4 - Reading the examination question

Section 5 - Understanding command words

Section 7 - Planning, writing and reviewing answers to examination questions

Section 10 - About the assessor

Section 11 - Useful sources and materials on examination techniques

If you have not read these sections, then it is particularly important that you should do so.

#### 2.0 Important things to consider

Firstly, the information given to you in the case study is the only information you will be required to work with. You do not need to gather any additional information for the purpose of the examination, it is complete.

Secondly, yes, you can take your examination preparation into the examination, so make it as user friendly as possible, well referenced, well sourced; if not, you are likely to lose time trying to find key aspects of your analysis. You must take your copy of the case study to the examination.

Thirdly, do not try and cram all of your analysis into the examination answers for the sake of it, or just because you have prepared it. Only use the information relevant to the examination questions set. Again, you will waste time and potentially fail to gain marks if you just pour analysis into your answers without any substance of application.

Fourthly and importantly, use analysis to form the basis of your answers, to give you back-up, support your recommendations and justifications, and ensure that it is articulated appropriately.

Remember, the purpose of this case study is to demonstrate:

- · Analysis and critical thinking
- Decision-making
- Judging between courses of action
- Handling assumptions and inferences
- Presenting a point of view
- · Listening to and understanding others
- Relating theory to practice.

In addition you will be expected to also demonstrate the following:

- use of relevant models for the sector in which the case study is based
- use of your own practical and business experience using any illustrative examples
- use of labelled and referenced diagrams if appropriate
- an awareness and application of strategic supply chain management ideas and solutions
- understanding of the topics within the unit content for the other compulsory core units within the CIPS Level 6 Graduate Diploma, namely Leading and Influencing in Purchasing and Strategic Supply Chain Management. Remember this is an integrative assessment and it is important to synthesise your ideas across the board, relating to the other two subject areas. Furthermore the content of the Level 5 care units is assumed to be underpinning knowledge.

The role of analysis

One of the purposes of the case study is to test your analysis of the situation that the company finds itself in. In doing this, you will need to apply many of the key concepts that you would have learnt in the other units. A case study has to be read several times before a clear idea of the key issues can be established. This enables you to establish a picture of the environment in which the company is operating, as well as the company's position within it. Eventually, based on this analysis, you will make a series of decisions to take the company forward into the future. A detailed and effective analysis of a case should include the following:

- The key historical events that have contributed to the development of the company
- A PESTLE analysis, which looks at Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental issues surrounding the case
- A SWOT analysis and its evaluation
- Product/service analyses and the links to strategic supply chain management linked to the purpose of the case study
- Analyses of a range of issues that pertain to the particular case study. Often, case studies are not straightforward and different types of analyses are required. These may be more contemporary in nature, including the identification of new and emerging themes
- Any constraints that the company faces from a resource point of view. These could be human, financial, technical or environmental
- Any structural features or control systems
- A list of key issues that emanate from the above.

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#### 3.0 The analyses

The key historical events that have contributed to the development of the company or sector

Cases often contain a history of the company. It is important to analyse this history and to list the key critical events that helped to shape the company's development. At the same time an analysis of the history will also offer insights into the evolution of a particular industry. Historical analysis and charting can help in understanding any supply chain management decisions that have been made by the company.

#### A PESTLE analysis

A PESTLE analysis looks at Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental issues surrounding the case.

Cases will contain some or all of the key PESTLE factors. This type of analysis allows you to understand the macro-environment facing the industry sector that the company is immersed in. The PESTLE factors also help to highlight key trends within the markets. Amongst others, these could be demographic profile trends, sociological issues, trends in different markets or ethics and sustainability issues. Some of the technological factors may show up, particularly because of the increasing emphasis on e-based initiatives such as e-procurement and e-tendering. Analysing each of these factors gives some idea of the opportunities and threats facing a company.

#### A SWOT analysis and its evaluation

In addition to the PESTLE analysis, a review of the company's strengths and weaknesses is required. This is an internal audit of the company, allowing you to examine each relevant business function in which the company is currently strong or weak. Companies could have a weakness in their supply chain or supply management strategies. Is a company in an overall strong position in supply markets? Can it operate profitably in its current market sectors? How can the company minimise the threats to its position and expand on its opportunities to more effectively improve its supply chain management practices? Can the company turn its weaknesses relating to its current business practice into strengths? A good SWOT analysis helps you to understand, in a clear and succinct manner, how the company is positioned.

### Any constraints that the company faces from a resource point of view

Companies face a variety of constraints when developing their strategies. These constraints could be supply market constraints (size and growth potential of a market), financial constraints (the ability to finance supply chain initiatives, or introduce supply chain strategies because of poor cash flow, ability to raise money, and so on) or indeed environmental constraints (these could be pollution management capability, or public concerns, something major manufacturing industries often face).

#### Any structural features or control systems

Analyses should include an understanding of the present structural pattern of the organisation and the way in which this contributes to or detracts from developing its strategies. For instance, is there a defined purchasing or supply chain management structure? Are there systems for monitoring supply chain effectiveness? Are the systems rigid or flexible?

#### **Key issues**

As a result of these analyses, you should be able to list a number of key issues which are facing the company described in the case study. These key issues form a valuable resource when answering the questions set in the examination.

These types of analyses can then be linked to any strategic plan that you may have considered developing.

A generalised approach to formulating strategies would probably contain the following:

 Statement of the problem - This will contain a situation analysis of the company, its problem areas and its general capability.

#### 2. Analysis of data

- (a) Industry This would cover an analysis of the growth potential in the various supply chain markets and the demands this places upon the organisation.
- (b) Product/Service analysis This would consider areas such as consideration of the supply markets the organisation services, and implications for purchasing and supply management delivery requirements, such as sourcing, buying and service delivery requirement.
- (c) Financial analysis The financial performance of a company gives guidelines on its profitability, return on investment, shareholder value, liquidity,

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inventory levels and possible resource requirements for growth (see section on Financial Analysis). However, it should be noted that not all of the Supply Chain Management in Practice case studies will have finance within them, but should they have sufficient information this is a very important aspect. Additionally, it is always helpful to suggest that financial assessments for initiatives are undertaken.

- (d) Management If organisation charts are available any gaps in the structure should be ascertained. Also, issues such as mission, values and objectives should be taken into account.
- Generation of options and an evaluation of these - In this section, the options regarding the development of supply chain strategies, inclusive of suggestions relating to Leading and Influencing in Purchasing and Strategic Supply Chain Management practices integrated into this unit, should be undertaken.
- 4. Recommendations (decisions) and supply chain strategies This should be the crucial element of any proposed supply chain management initiatives, encompassing key decisions that may be taken, giving reasons for choosing these, understanding the possible reactions to these all stakeholders involved in the process. The justifications for these must be fully detailed and of substance, as such recommendations form the strategic thrust of potential supply chain management strategies for the future. Resource implications also need to be considered. Clear and decisive objectives must be set.

Again, remember this is an integrative unit and you should be cognisant of the breadth and scope of the case study and its inclusion of Leading and Influencing in Purchasing and Strategic Supply Chain Management issues, ensuring they are appropriately addressed. When analysing a case study, it would be surprising if only one course of action was possible. Often there are several alternatives to a problem and a company has to weigh up the chances of success and pursue a particular course of action. As an examination candidate, you are expected to pursue courses of action which are possible, realistic and sustainable. The assessors are not looking for right or wrong answers; they are searching for solutions that will work within the given scenario of the case study.

#### 4.0 What can you take into the examination?

In addition to the usual pens, pencils, highlighters, ruler, calculator etc, you can take the following into the supply chain management in practice open-book examination:

- · Pre-prepared case analysis
- Relevant text books, but ensure that you
  mark them up clearly and do not spend too
  much time referencing them or else you will
  not finish the exam
- Any useful journals
- Your copy of the case study marked up and annotated for your use
- Any materials from Leading and Influencing in Purchasing or Strategic Supply Chain Management that you may also find useful.

Remember, you only have one desk and limited space, be prepared, do not rely on text books, you should know your stuff, take them just in case you need them.

#### 5.0 Final hints and tips

When working on the case study, and during the examination, do not repeat in summary form any large pieces of factual information from the case study, just reference it within your answer for example 'on page number 6 of the case study, figure one shows financial information......'. The assessors are fully aware of the case study. Avoid being descriptive when you should be being analytical.

You need to ensure the layout of your answers are carefully considered, using sections and subsections for your answers, which will aid the discussion flow from one section of your answer to the next.

Try and build on what has gone before and let your approach build. Taking a piecemeal approach to analysis results in fragmented answers and lacks coherence and then impacts upon the logic of the answer.

It is important to write in the required format, using clear English and provide clarity of approach. When using diagrams always label them and reference them, making sure they have a clear purpose.

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Finally, you should undertake the following:

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- Exam practice, get used to writing in time constrained conditions
- Read and digest any assessor reports and guidance provided
- Ensure you are up to date with the latest thinking in strategic supply chain management, reading Supply Management and relevant press articles, journals and reference books
- If referencing authors in your answer, reference them properly, and perhaps discuss their views in loose terms. Poor quotations or incorrect quotations do not bode well for you in examinations
- Give your time and commitment to your preexam analysis and hopefully it will pay off on the day and remember, answer the questions asked, not the questions that can use your analysis!

Good luck!



## The Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply Part 3 Guidance on the International Cartificate and

## **Guidance on the International Certificate and International Advanced Certificate**



This section of the guidance seeks to outline how students should approach preparation for the CIPS International Certificate and International Advanced Certificate examinations, which in terms of format are different to the CIPS qualification, at Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6.

This guidance seeks to outline the format of the paper and key things that students should do in order to prepare effectively for the examination.

#### 1.1 Examination Format

The format of the International Certificate and Advanced Certificate examination papers is as follows:

The exam paper has three sections:

Section A - has 10 compulsory multiple-choice questions worth 2 marks each.

Section B - has six compulsory short-answer questions, worth 5 marks each.

Section C - has three compulsory longeranswer questions. Questions 17 and 18 are worth 15 marks each. Question 19 is worth 20 marks.

In Part 1 of this guidance, there is already some very useful and relevant information, which applies directly to this examination, including the following:

Section 4 - Reading the examination questions

Section 5 - Understanding command words

Section 7 - Planning, writing and reviewing answers to exam questions

Section 9 - Using CIPS materials for further guidance

Section 10 - About the assessor

Section 11 - Useful sources and materials on exam techniques.

In addition to this, CIPS feels it important to support you through revising and preparing for the International Certificate and Advanced Certificate examinations specifically and the next three sections take each type of exam question and consider useful approaches to completing the questions effectively.

### 2.0 Multiple-choice questions for Section A of the examination paper

There are 10 multiple-choice questions, and you must select one correct answer from a choice of four options for each question. You are advised to spend 30 minutes on this section of the paper. The temptation will, of course, be to rush through this part of the examination and, often, guess the answers.

However, given the time allocation, you should be able to do a much better job if you pace yourself and think carefully about the content of each of the possible answers.

When looking at multiple-choice questions do not try to find a pattern of answers or options in terms of your thinking because it does not work on this basis; rather observe the question and the answer options and identify the correct option.

In most multiple-choice questions there is often one answer that is obviously not correct, and which you should discount immediately and, through process of elimination, arrive at the right answer. Obviously, this type of question, therefore, requires you to have revised your subject area well and be able to identify the most appropriate answer.

A typical question would look like this:

### Q. Which of the following best defines the term 'quality'? (2 marks)

A. Easy to use

B. Guaranteed to operate for a long time

C. Supported by a warranty

D. Conformance to specification.

Process of elimination immediately tells you that option A is incorrect. You cannot necessarily equate quality to ease of use, in fact, sometimes to the contrary.

The next obvious option for elimination is C supported by a warranty. Just because something is supported by a warranty does not mean quality.

The next option for elimination of course is B because if something is of good quality it might last for a long time, but quality is something much greater than this.

Quality can be defined as 'conformance to specification'. If the builder/manufacturer of goods/products works to a specification and conforms to the specification at all stages, then it is likely that quality will be at the centre of the output. It allows for standardisation of the product and consistency of quality in the product build.

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## The Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply Guidance on the International Certificate and

## **Guidance on the International Certificate and International Advanced Certificate**

Let's take another example:

### Q. Which of the following is a key aspect of services? (2 marks)

- A. Services can be seen prior to purchase
- B. Services cannot be owned like a product can
- C. Services can be stored
- D. Services can be tangible

If you know about services you will immediately recognise that there is no way that you can see a service prior to purchase A because a service only happens at the time of delivery, not before, not after, and indeed never in the same way again. A service is completely intangible, which ultimately eliminates D. In other words, a service cannot be touched, will never be the same again, a bit like a haircut, or going to a concert. One night the band might be excellent, the next night they might all have sore throats.

As a result, we have eliminated the third option C services can be stored. Of course they cannot be stored, because we have already recognised that they can only be experienced at the point of delivery, again, not before nor after.

This process of elimination is very important in terms of multiple choice, so you must apply logic and sense, along with your knowledge of the subject, and if you use the allocated time, you should stand a much stronger chance of identifying the correct answer for each of the questions concerned. Remember 20 marks is a fifth of the total marks available for your exam paper, which is a considerable amount, so you should take your time in getting things right.

#### 3.0 Short-answer questions for Section B

This part of the examination paper requires you to answer six short-answer questions, and it is recommended you spend 60 minutes, that is, one hour to answer this section. This is 10 minutes per question and each of the questions is worth 5 marks. Because they are short-answer questions, this 10 minutes should be adequate, giving you time to think through your answers and to formulate them in a structured way.

A key point for you to consider is that a shortanswer question is not always a one line or one word answer, or a list of bullet points. Sometimes a question requires you to include some dialogue, perhaps even a couple of brief paragraphs.

You will note that in the main each question will ask you to complete a specific number of items. Do not include more items than the question

requires as the assessor will only mark the number specified. Examples:

### Q. Name FIVE of the stages used in a VE exercise.

This question essentially requires you to identify the name of the five stages.

### Q. Identify FIVE advantages for a buyer purchasing products that are made to an international standard.

This question requires you to provide a list of five advantages. We recommend that you clearly write a sentence on each of the advantages, and try to avoid just providing a list of one-word answers. Often if you can demonstrate some indepth understanding the assessor will view that favourably.

### Q. Outline TWO advantages for a buyer of using brand names when requesting quotations.

Again a brief sentence on each of these advantages is required and it might be useful to give an example. There are up to 2.5 marks per advantage, so you could include 'for example....'

You have one hour to complete this section, so use it, do not rush on to the next section, or you may not answer the questions successfully and affect your chances of achieving a pass grade. Importantly for you, this section is worth 30 marks of the entire paper. You are halfway through the examination when you complete section B and if you do well in this section you will strengthen the possibility of success.

#### 4.0 Long-answer questions for Section C

The principles applied to this section are very much the same principles as those outlined in Sections 4,5 and 7 of Part 1 of this guidance.

For many of you, this may be the first time you have undertaken time constrained examinations for a while, or you might be quite new to learning in a professional sense, and you will be unsure what is required. Well, the key to success is quite straightforward:

- 1. Read the question
- Answer the question posed using your knowledge and understanding gained through learning
- 3. Structure the answer well
- 4. Give examples to show a greater understanding
- Manage your time effectively.

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## Guidance on the International Certificate and International Advanced Certificate

In this final section you are advised to spend half an hour on each question, which gives you time to plan and think about how you might approach your answer.

The questions are generally structured in such a way that they give you a significant lead in terms of the way in which the marks are allocated within the question. For example:

- Q. Many disputes between a buyer and a seller occur because it is unclear which party's terms and conditions are applicable to the transaction. This can lead to the 'Battle of the Forms'
- (a) Identify the SIX typical documents used in the 'Battle of the Forms' and explain their legal relevance in this context.

(12 marks).

This question gives you a very clear steer in terms of what it expects:

- 1. It expects you to identify six documents
- It expects you to explain the legal relevance of each form; a short sentence for each of the six documents would be sufficient.

Essentially, you will be awarded 1 mark for identifying each of the six documents and 1 mark for an explanation on their legal relevance. This means that if you only list the six forms, you will only get half the marks, it is as simple as that. Many candidates in exam conditions, read only the first part of the question and not the whole, and as a result fail to gain necessary marks to pass the question. Reading the question and answering it accordingly is essential.

(b) Explain THREE ways in which a buyer can try to ensure the 'Battle of the Forms' does not occur.

This question is the second part of a two-part question, and requires you to give three 'explanations', not three bullet points nor a list, but an 'explanation'. This means either a sentence or a brief paragraph. This level of observation and interpretation, is therefore, essential.

A further example is

Q. Name and explain FIVE of the factors as stated by the CIPS Ethical Code

(10 marks)

As with the former question, it is clear that the question requires you to do a number of things:

- 1. It requires you to name FIVE factors
- 2. It requires you to explain the factors you have named.

Your question should therefore consist of five factors and five explanations. Again, the marking will be on the basis of 1 mark for each factor named and 1 mark fo each explanation. The explanation will again be either a sentence or a short paragraph.

If you give only a bullet-point list, you will only be awarded a maximum of 5 marks because you have now answered the entire question.

#### 4.1 Question 19 - Mini-case study and question

Finally, we need to tackle question 19, which is worth 20 marks. A number of key points to consider are:

- The case study is only very short, usually about four paragraphs maximum, giving you a scenario against which to apply your answers
- 2. This should not be considered a 20 mark question, but a section of the examination worth 20 marks. The question will usually constitute three to four shorter questions. In essence, it is very like the 15 mark questions in terms of the approach outlined above, so the same principles apply.

The only key difference is that you are given a description of a company and some background, and you should answer the questions with this in mind.

If you give a theoretical answer only, without relating it to the case study, then you will not gain full marks. However, if you answer within the context of the case study, then you will gain marks for application of your knowledge and understanding.

The questions again give you a clear steer in terms of what is expected and the marks allocated. For example:

Q. Outline SIX practices which would be ethically unacceptable in a potential supplier for XXX Clothing Limited.

First point here is that an 'outline' is much more than a bullet point list or one-word answers. It is at a minimum a sentence and at a maximum a brief paragraph for each of the six practices you are to determine.

You may find that the question requires you to do two things, make sure you identify them both.

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## **Guidance on the International Certificate and International Advanced Certificate**

When reading the question you could take the strategy of ringing the tasks or number the tasks required of each question and then tick them off as you have done them. Doing this you avoid leaving anything out.

#### 5.0 Last minute hints and tips

In closing, do not forget to read the sections in Part 1 of the guidance as outlined at the beginning of this section. Doing so will really help you understand the examination process.

Secondly, remember, use the full amount of time available to each section, do not rush, and read the questions carefully, identifying what each question requires you to do.

Do not automatically provide bullet points, but read the words in the question, such as 'identify', 'describe', 'explain'. All of these require more than just a bullet point or one-word answer. This is where so many students fall down.

Revise, make sure you are able to recall your knowledge at the right time, do not go in the exam room and work on a pure guess basis. The questions are designed to test knowledge and understanding, not exam tactics.

Good luck!

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