

SBL Study support guide

■ Plan ■ Prepare ■ Pass

Strategic Business Leader

▪ Plan ▪ Prepare ▪ Pass

Welcome to your guide helping you to study for your Strategic Business Leader exam

Why use this guide?

- ✓ Structured approach to show you how to succeed
- ✓ Signposted resources and how to use them
- ✓ Tips for success to help you through your studies
- ✓ Interactive clickable checklists to keep you on track

This guide applies to exams for September and December 2018 and March and June 2019.

Sections

About Strategic Business Leader	03
Professional skills	10
Getting started	13
Learning phase	20
Revision phase	34
Final preparation	39
The exam	41
Appendix – Links	43

Stages of study



About Strategic Business Leader

ABOUT SBL

PROFESSIONAL
SKILLS

GETTING
STARTED

LEARNING
PHASE

REVISION
PHASE

FINAL
PREPARATION

THE EXAM

APPENDIX
- LINKS

About Strategic Business Leader

The Strategic Business Leader exam is designed to mirror the workplace and presents you with real world challenges. You will complete a number of tasks and must demonstrate that you have the right technical, ethical and professional skills to add value to the organisations you work in.

Being ACCA qualified tells the world that not only have you passed challenging exams, but that you are a highly competent professional, helping businesses and the people who work in them to realise their full potential.

The Strategic Business Leader exam (SBL):

- requires you to demonstrate a blend of technical and practical, professional skills
- tests your ability to function as an accountant in a simulated workplace.
- asks you to respond to requests from people in various roles.

It won't only be the technical quality of your answer that matters, but how **professional** your response is.

[This video](#) provides insight into the approach and style of the exam.

Support from ACCA

This guide refers you to specific SBL resources and new resources are being produced all the time. Regularly review the [SBL section of the study support resource finder on the ACCA website](#) to keep up to date.



About Strategic Business Leader

A different style of exam

- It is an **Integrated Case Study** exam; setting **work-based** tasks.
- Professional skills** are being examined. They carry 20 marks directly. Professional skills also open the door to earning the other 80 technical marks. For example, **effective communication** involves thinking about the reader of what you write, and this will help you to identify the most relevant points to make, which will in turn ensure that you are earning a strong mark for the technical content of your answer.
- Exhibits** are presented to you in the exam: analysis, report extracts or diagrams.
- There is **no 'preseen'** information about the workplace context before the day of your exam. You will be given the scenario or context of the exam on the day you sit the exam.
- It's **4 hours** not 3 and a quarter, but is still only 100 marks. The extra time is to give you breathing space to think about how you will demonstrate professional skills in your answers, and to ensure your answer is not only technically sound, but is appropriate for the organisation and intended audience.

Your approach needs to be different:

- You play a **role** – this role may change from task to task in the exam.
- You respond to **tasks** give to you from **different people** – it may be the whole board, the CEO, the head of finance, the head of human resources, a divisional director... or any other role.
- You need to display **professional skills** as well as your **technical skills**
- Different **formats** will be required from you – for example:
 - Board presentation
 - Letter
 - Report
 - Briefing paper
 - Business case
 - Any other business communication!
- Have a look at the **two specimen exams**.

About Strategic Business Leader

A different style of study

You'll need more than reading a textbook or listening to lectures

To study SBL you will need to **discuss ideas** and approaches with others. Interacting with fellow students, co-workers, and with a tutor, will help to build up your professional skills and your confidence.

You also need to be aware of how organisations work in the **real world** – you need commercial awareness and **practicality**.

You need to **practice questions** from day one. You will also need feedback on your practice answers.

A different style of tuition

As this is a different style of exam, **tuition** is going to be **different** and more **essential** than ever:

- the classroom is more about **applying** the syllabus, rather than learning the knowledge. You will be expected to learn more of the knowledge **independently**.
- you will be able to **discuss** and **develop** your ideas with fellow students and tutors.
- tutors will be able to help develop your **professional skills** – for example:
 - **Communication** can be strengthened in a *classroom environment* or through online discussions.
 - **Commercial acumen** can be developed through discussion, working through real life case studies and discussing current business news with your tutor.

- **Scepticism** will be developed by challenging ideas and suggestions in a *classroom environment*, whether face-to-face or online.

- Your **analytical** and **evaluation** skills can be developed by comparing your approach to others, and learning from others.

- you will get more one-to-one review of your particular answers – with feedback on style and a critique of your own answers.
- You may even have guest speakers from local organisations to enhance your real world knowledge and to see the application of the technical knowledge and skills in the real world.

If attending tuition face to face is not possible, online courses are available too, and other resources such as the [ACCA Learning Community](#).

Search **here** for SBL tuition near you.

About Strategic Business Leader – Tips for success



Tips for success

- ✓ Complete the [Ethics and Professional Skills module](#) **before** you start studying for SBL. It is designed to develop the complete range of skills that employers told us they need. By introducing you to the full spectrum of advanced ethical and professional skills and exposing you to realistic business situations, we're helping to make you really credible in the workplace – essential to pass the SBL exam.

In an interactive environment, the module supplements your technical knowledge by helping you develop the ethical and professional behaviours you'll need to successfully complete your Strategic Professional exams as well as preparing you for a successful career as a trusted and confident professional accountant.



- ✓ Plan how you are going to improve your practical, commercial acumen during your study period – for example, discussing current business news with others, speaking to colleagues in the workplace, or attending talks from local business leaders or watching them online.
- ✓ Decide how you are going to study, and **book a course**. ACCA has a [directory](#) to help you find a tuition provider near to you for face-to-face courses or online if face-to-face is not practical for you. Tuition has never been more important.
- ✓ **'Buddy up'** with one or more fellow SBL students to swap ideas and answers, and to discuss the exam and its real-world context. The [ACCA Learning Community](#) is a good way to connect with other students. You may not have had a 'study buddy' before – we would recommend having one for your SBL studies. SBL is about application of skills and concepts – and this is best done in a group.

About Strategic Business Leader – The syllabus

SBL integrates technical and professional skills. The five professional skills ‘wrap around’ the technical content. Not only are these examined in their own right, but they also open the door to the technical marks.



The [syllabus and study guide](#) and the [examiner's approach article](#) explain this in more detail.

About Strategic Business Leader – Underpinning knowledge

The ACCA Applied Knowledge and Applied Skills exams all contain knowledge and skills that are potentially relevant to your SBL exam.

The **good** news is that this underpinning knowledge is examined in those applied knowledge and skills exams already. They are NOT re-examined in the same level of detail in SBL.

Do:

- prepare to bring in relevant knowledge and skills from your earlier exams
- refresh gaps in knowledge from those exams when you come across them in your SBL studies
- focus on SBL question practice and work back from gaps in fundamentals knowledge you find through that SBL question practice.

Do NOT:

- go back and re-study large parts of your Applied Knowledge and Applied Skills materials in detail
- spend time practicing questions from Applied Knowledge and Applied Skills exams.

We have written an [article](#) on how applied knowledge and skills apply to SBL to provide you with more information on how your earlier studies fit in to provide a foundation for SBL.



Professional Skills

ABOUT SBL

PROFESSIONAL
SKILLS

GETTING
STARTED

LEARNING
PHASE

REVISION
PHASE

FINAL
PREPARATION

THE EXAM

APPENDIX
- LINKS

Professional Skills

Right from the start of your studies it's important to understand the importance of the professional skills that are examined in SBL. You already know that they carry 20 marks, so you may be asking yourself 'does that mean that I can ignore them and aim to pass on the other 80 marks?'. It **doesn't** work like that; the tasks in the SBL exam require you to apply your technical understanding and professional skills in an **integrated** way.

- Communication
- Commercial acumen
- Analysis
- Scepticism
- Evaluation

In fact, the professional skills act as a gateway and help you to earn the technical marks.

For example, in a task that tests analysis skills, the better your analysis, the more you use and draw inferences from the information in the exhibits, the more relevant points you will find to help gain the technical marks too.

There is an [article](#) on the study support resource finder giving more detail about how professional skills are marked. This also explains the general professionalism that is expected in your answers.

In general, professionalism is demonstrated by:

- highlighting and prioritising the most important points
- showing a clear understanding of what the causes of issues are
- forming conclusions by integrating knowledge and issues from different sources
- not repeating points already made
- answering the question as it's written
- creatively presenting the answer to ensure effective communication

Professionalism is not about linguistic eloquence or perfect grammar. Many professionals, for example, communicate professionally in English even though English is not their first language. ACCA provides English language support if English is not your first language.

Professional Skills – Checklist for improving your professional skills

- Work through the [Ethics and Professional Skills module](#).

This module includes:

- ethics and professionalism
- personal effectiveness
- innovation and scepticism
- commercial awareness, analysis, evaluation and problem solving
- leadership and team-working
- communication skills

Each and every part of the ethics and professional skills module improves the skills you need to pass SBL.

- Read a newspaper or watch the business news, and discuss it with other SBL students.
- Attend local talks from business leaders, and/or watch some online.
- Discuss your current employer's business with colleagues in the workplace, and/or discuss with friends and relatives their workplace and explore the issues their employer faces.



Getting started

Your checklist

- ☐ Enter for your exam
- ☐ Complete the **Ethics and Professional Skills module**
- ☐ Consider booking tuition with an Approved Learning Partner
- ☐ Buy an Approved Content Provider study text and question and answer bank
- ☐ Draw up your study plan
- ☐ Get to know your exam

Getting started – Tips for success

We strongly recommend that you buy an SBL [Approved Content Provider](#) study text and question and answer bank to ensure exam success. These provide:

- the most up to date content and syllabus coverage.
- tests, quizzes and other support designed to help you prepare for your exam.
- a wide range of questions in exam style, from shorter questions incorporating professional skills right up to full length case studies in the style of the SBL exam, all reviewed by ACCA's examining team.

You may want to consider attending a face to face or online tuition course with one of [ACCA's Approved Learning Partners](#) for all or part of your studies.



Students who use approved content materials are more likely to pass than those who don't.



Tips for success

- ✓ The earlier you [enter for your exam](#) the less it costs! Use our [exam planner tool](#) to plan which exam(s) you want to sit and when.
- ✓ Work through the [Ethics and Professional Skills module](#) either before you start, or alongside your studies. This gives you insight into professional skills that you can apply in your exam and in the workplace.
- ✓ Use the [ACCA Learning Community](#) to link up with fellow students around the world studying the same exam as you – get tips, join discussions and share ideas and advice. You can also access live Q&A sessions and presentations.
- ✓ Spend some time familiarising yourself with the free resources available via the [study support resource finder](#) – we will provide you with specific guidance on when and how to use these resources during the relevant stages of study.
- ✓ Remember to personalise your edition of [Student Accountant](#) so you receive SBL specific information as you need it.
- ✓ If you think you could benefit from building your English language skills to help you succeed in your exam take a look at the [BPP English Language support for ACCA](#) which is a free online programme specifically designed to support you through your exams.

Getting started – Draw up your study plan

Study plan checklist

- Calculate the number of weeks from now until your exam date and draw up a plan – see the example to the left and a possible proforma for you to use on page 17
- You may need to add or take away weeks depending on your own circumstances and which exam sitting(s) you are focusing on
- Block out days/half days/evenings already committed to family/social events
- Plan study periods – evenings/half days/full days, aiming for roughly one evening/half day per chapter of your study text
- If possible leave a six week period for the revision and final preparation phases

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 1	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 2	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 3	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 4	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 5	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 6	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 7	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 8	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 9	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 10	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 11	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 12	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 13	REVISION						
Week 14	REVISION						
Week 15	REVISION						
Week 16	REVISION						
Week 17	REVISION						
Week 18	REVISION AND FINAL PREPARATION						

Evening study period
 Daytime study period
 Other commitments

Getting started – Draw up your study plan



Tips for success

When drawing up your study plan

- ✓ Be realistic and consider when you are best able to study – maybe early mornings work better for you or perhaps shorter, more frequent study periods.
- ✓ Also plan time for the [Ethics and Professional Skills module](#), question practice from the start, time with your study group or study buddy, reading the business news, reading company reports, attending talks by local business leaders, keeping up to date with the [SBL section of the study support resource finder on the ACCA website](#) and the [ACCA Learning Community](#).
- ✓ Once you have prepared your plan stick to it!
- ✓ Consider building in an extra study period after every few chapters to review and consolidate your learning.
- ✓ Take a 5-10 minute break every hour to help maintain your motivation and concentration.
- ✓ Use this plan whether you intend to self-study through all the phases or mix with some tuition from an [Approved Learning Partner](#).
- ✓ Sign up to relevant news feeds – so your phone will alert you when there's something fresh to read

You must attempt questions right from the start of your studies. SBL is a practical exam so you need to get used to doing the tasks, not just reading about them.



Getting started – Your study plan

Print out and write down when you will study, relax and revise!

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							
Week 5							
Week 6							
Week 7							
Week 8							
Week 9							
Week 10							
Week 11							
Week 12							
Week 13	REVISION						
Week 14	REVISION						
Week 15	REVISION						
Week 16	REVISION						
Week 17	REVISION						
Week 18	REVISION AND FINAL PREPARATION						

☐ Evening study period ☐ Daytime study period ☐ Other commitments

☐ Study group / buddy ☐ Real life research (news, read reports, listen to speakers...)

Colour boxes in your preferred highlighter colours.

Getting started – Get to know your exam

- | | |
|---|--|
| □ Review the syllabus and study guide | ➤ This gives you an understanding of the aims and objectives of the exam, learning outcomes and exam structure |
| □ Scan the 2 specimen exams for SBL | ➤ The specimen exams provide you with a clear picture of how SBL will be assessed and how the exam is structured as well as the likely style and range of questions that you could see in the real exam |
| □ Review the examining team's guidance | ➤ Using these resources at the start of your studies will help you understand the focus of the exam by concentrating on the exam structure, question style, exam technique and tips as well as pitfalls to avoid |
| □ Review the frequently asked questions section of the SBL section of the study support resource finder on the ACCA website | ➤ Common questions are posted with answers from us. This list is added to frequently so keep checking back. |
| □ Read the professional skills and effective communications articles for SBL | ➤ The articles will provide you with a head start in terms of knowing what to expect and how to approach exam standard questions |

Getting started – What the examining team has said about SBL



An extract from the examiner's approach article:

As a 4-hour exam with a single compulsory section, SBL uses an integrated case study model with a number of tasks and all requirements are to be related to the one scenario. To ensure that the tasks are realistic and that ACCA can examine the syllabus more widely, candidates may have to take on different leadership or management/consultant roles in different contexts, to demonstrate a wider set of leadership skills. The skills that are assessed tend to be more practical and analytical rather than technical or academic, and could include:

- Data analysis of spreadsheets and their interpretation
- Analysing visual aids such as heat maps, flowcharts, process maps, etc
- Problem identification and resolution
- Making supported recommendations
- Drafting reports, memos, letters, articles or another form of written business communication
- Drawing up some presentation slides with accompanying notes

This is certainly not an exhaustive list of tasks, but provides an idea of the range of disparate information sources that might be provided in the examination paper as well as the style and types of answers required from the students.



This exam seeks to test your ability to function in the workplace as a professional. It is a practical exam. Your answers need to be grounded and explained appropriately given the audience, so it's important to:

- Discuss practical solutions to business problems with others
- Keep up to date with the business news – this is a good way to improve your practical application of technical ideas



Learning phase

Your checklist

- ☐ Work through the control sheet which has been designed to give you a structured approach to your learning phase to ensure you:
 - gain the knowledge you need
 - understand all of the professional skills; and
 - learn how to apply your knowledge and skills to pass the exam
- ☐ Complete the 'professional skills reflections' pages to record your progress with the professional skills

Learning phase – Before you start on learning the technical material

- Complete the [Ethics and Professional Skills module](#) before starting on your learning phase. The examples you will work through in that module will give you a head start on the professional skills that you have to apply in SBL.
- Review the [specimen exams](#) to understand the nature of the exam.
- Consider the benefits of classroom study as part of your formal study. This will:
 - Allow you to practice your professional skills with others, and get feedback from a trained tutor on whether you are demonstrating those skills
 - Allows you to test out the application of technical knowledge – the focus of this exam rather than simply ‘learning’
 - Give you the opportunity for one-to-one feedback on your answers to questions attempted in the learning phase.
- Online courses are available as an alternative to face-to-face learning, although face-to-face has significant advantages in helping you to prepare for this exam.
- Find a study buddy through the [ACCA Learning Community](#) and coordinate your diary with them.
- Ensure you are planning to read business news regularly and to discuss what you read with others either in class, at work or with your study buddy.
- Ensure you are planning to regularly review the [SBL section of the study support finder on the ACCA website](#) as new material is added all the time.

Learning phase – Tips for success

For every element of technical content, consider **how it can be applied**, rather than just learning the knowledge. For example, Mendelow's stakeholder map – it's one thing to know what the dimensions on the diagram are, and what is written in each box. It's another matter entirely to understand how you would use it in practice, and some of the practical problems of doing so. It is more the latter that is examined in SBL. There are several ways to do this:

- Work through the illustrations provided in the learning material
- Discuss with your class, colleagues or the [ACCA Learning Community](#)
- Try applying the tools and techniques you learn about to issues you read about in the business news.



Tips for success

- ✓ Actively read the material – ask yourself 'do I understand this?' If not re-read and re-work examples – if you still struggle, ask a tutor, or a fellow student, or the [ACCA Learning Community](#)
- ✓ Scan headings before going into the detail to give you an idea of the content first and consider highlighting, underlining, making notes, drawing pictures or mind maps – whatever helps you to remember.
- ✓ Make sure you use the ACCA resources to help your understanding – these give you real insight to help you in your exam.
- ✓ If you find you are not covering all of the material in each study period, build some extra time into your study plan – everyone works at a different pace.
- ✓ Always work through the questions signposted – it is vital that you practise questions provided in the learning phase as this will ensure that you are applying your knowledge and skills as you progress. Your answers **will be different** from the model solutions. This is normal and is to be expected. It does not mean your answer is wrong. There are many different ways of answering these questions. You need to get feedback on your own answers – swap answers with classmates, your study buddy, or start discussions on the [ACCA Learning Community](#).
- ✓ Keep a learning diary from this phase of your studies, reflecting on:
 - Points forward to revision – including key issues you want to revisit.
 - Activities you will diarise to put the learning into practice, for example:
 - Discuss in class or with colleagues
 - Start or join a discussion on the [ACCA Learning Community](#)

Learning phase – Tips for success



Tips for success

- ✓ Keep an eye on [Student Accountant](#) for any relevant articles.
- ✓ There are [PER \(Practical Experience Requirement\) objectives](#) associated with specific syllabus areas and, if possible, you should try to gain experience in these alongside your studying as this will help you to put your studies into a workplace context and reinforce what you have learned.
- ✓ Read a good quality business journal or newspaper regularly and use this to help **bring your studies to life** by linking your learning into what you are reading.
- ✓ This exam emphasises the **practical application of knowledge and the demonstration of professional skills**. You need to practice exam standard questions as soon as possible. Many tuition providers provide **course exams** for the learning phase of your studies – use these if they are provided and submit them for marking.

Learning phase – Get the most out of your control sheet



Students who use ACCA's learning support resources achieve higher exam scores than those who don't.



Use the control sheet relevant to the Approved Content Provider's materials you have purchased:

- ✓ BPP Learning Media – page 25
- ✓ Kaplan Publishing – page 27

Tick the box **Content in the control sheet once you have:**

- ✓ Read through the introduction to the chapter
- ✓ Actively read and understood each chapter's content
- ✓ Noted any additional commentary and exam focus tips provided
- ✓ Worked through and understood illustrations of concepts given
- ✓ Noted the professional skills being applied in the various examples in that chapter

Tick the **Skills Checkpoint row when you have:**

- ✓ Completed the Skills Checkpoint in the workbook (BPP)

Tick the box **activities/TYU in the control sheet once you have:**

- ✓ Attempted the activities/'test your understanding' questions in each chapter – some of these you should do in full but others you can just draw up a plan for, depending on the time you have available
- ✓ Compared your answer, or plan, with the solution given and understood where you did well or not so well and why

Complete the **professional skills reflections sheets as you go:**

- ✓ Recording how you are improving your professional skills and further work required

Learning phase – Control sheet for BPP Professional Education

		Professional skills							ACCA related resources
Content	Activities	Communication	Commercial acumen	Analysis	Scepticism	Evaluation	Learning diary completed		
✓ tick the boxes below when complete									
STAGE 1: Effective leadership									
1	Strategy, leadership and culture								<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Strategic planning process parts 1 and 2• Culture and configuration
2	Stakeholders and social responsibility								<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All about stakeholders parts 1 and 2• The Integrated reporting framework
3	Impact of corporate governance on strategy								<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Corporate governance from the inside out• Diversifying the board – a step towards better governance• Independence as a concept in corporate governance• Public sector governance
SKILLS CHECKPOINT 1									
STAGE 2: Optimising Strategic Decisions									
4	The external environment								
5	Strategic capability								
6	Competitive advantage and strategic choice								
SKILLS CHECKPOINT 2									
STAGE 3: Assessing and Managing Risk and Ethical issues									
7	Assessing and managing risk								<ul style="list-style-type: none">• COSO Enterprise Risk management framework• Strategic and operational risks
8	Internal control systems								<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internal audit
9	Applying ethical principles								<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ethical decision making
SKILLS CHECKPOINT 3									

Learning phase – Control sheet for BPP Professional Education

	Content	Activities	Professional skills						ACCA related resources	
			Communication	Commercial acumen	Analysis	Scepticism	Evaluation	Learning diary completed		
STAGE 4: Evaluation and Enabling Strategic Change										
10 Financial analysis									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Appraisal • Performance indicators 	
11 Applications of IT									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big data 	
12 E-business									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-commerce 	
SKILLS CHECKPOINT 4										
STAGE 5: Implementing Strategic Change										
13 Enabling success and strategic change										
14 Process redesign									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job design 	
15 Project management										
SKILLS CHECKPOINT 5										

The [technical articles](#) are on the ACCA website.

Learning phase – Control sheet for Kaplan Publishing

Chapter	Content	TYUs	Additional questions in chapter 27	Professional skills						ACCA related resources	
				Communication	Commercial acumen	Analysis	Scepticism	Evaluation	Learning diary completed		
1 Introduction to the Strategic Business Leader exam											
2 Concepts of strategy										• The Strategic planning process parts 1 and 2	
3 Strategic analysis										• Culture and configuration	
4 Performance analysis										• Performance Appraisal • Performance indicators	
5 Strategic choice											
6 Methods of strategic development											
7 Governance general development										• Public sector governance • Corporate governance from the inside out	
8 Approaches to governance											
9 Stakeholders and corporate social responsibility										• All about stakeholders parts 1 and 2	
10 Effective Leadership											
11 The board of directors										• Diversifying the board – a step towards better governance	
12 Reporting to stakeholders										• The Integrated reporting framework	
13 Management internal control systems and reporting											
14 Audit and compliance										• Internal audit	
15 Identification, assessment and measurement of risk										• Strategic and operational risks	
16 Managing, monitoring and mitigating risk										• COSO Enterprise Risk management framework	

Learning phase – Control sheet for Kaplan Publishing

Chapter	Content	TYUs	Additional questions in chapter 27	Professional skills						ACCA related resources	
				Communication	Commercial acumen	Analysis	Scepticism	Evaluation	Learning diary completed		
17 Professionalism, ethical codes and the public interest										<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethical decision making Independence as a concept in corporate governance 	
18 Organising for success: structure and processes											
19 E-business										<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E-commerce 	
20 Using IT successfully										<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big data 	
21 E-marketing											
22 Project management										<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job design 	
23 Financial decision making											
24 Managing strategic change											
25 Practice case study – Question											
26 Practices case study – Answer											

The [technical articles](#) are on the ACCA website.

Professional skills – Reflections from the learning phase

These pages remind you of how the syllabus describes each skill. Keep notes here of how you have applied the skills in questions from your study materials, in classes, in online discussions or at work. Write brief reminders of what you have done well under each skill heading, and also note any areas where you can see that you need to improve.

Communication

Your reflections



Express yourself clearly and convincingly through the appropriate medium while being sensitive to the needs of the intended audience.



- A Inform** concisely, objectively, and unambiguously, while being sensitive to cultural differences, using appropriate media and technology.
- B Persuade** using compelling and logical arguments demonstrating the ability to counter argue when appropriate.
- C Clarify** and simplify complex issues to convey relevant information in a way that adopts an appropriate tone and is easily understood by the intended audience.

Example:

If asked to explain to the head of human resources that they have a conflict of interest if they are planning to interview a close friend for a position at the company, particular care would need to be taken to demonstrate a clear and unambiguous communication of the issue whilst also being tactful – the head of human resources will be sensitive to any implied accusations of acting unethically.

Professional skills – Reflections from the learning phase

These pages remind you of how the syllabus describes each skill. Keep notes here of how you have applied the skills in questions from your study materials, in classes, in online discussions or at work. Write brief reminders of what you have done well under each skill heading, and also note any areas where you can see that you need to improve.

Commercial acumen

Your reflections



Show awareness of the wider business and external factors affecting business, using commercially sound judgement and insight to resolve issues and exploit opportunities.



- A Demonstrate awareness** of organisational and wider external factors affecting the work of an individual or a team in contributing to the wider organisational objectives.
- B Use judgement** to identify key issues in determining how to address or resolve problems and in proposing and recommending the solutions to be implemented.
- C Show insight** and perception in understanding work-related and organisational issues, including the management of conflict, demonstrating acumen in arriving at appropriate solutions or outcomes.

Example:

If asked to justify contributing company funds to a local charity, in addition to arguments concerning being a good corporate citizen, it helps to point out that it will also enhance the image of the company, hopefully attracting more customers in the future, and potentially even a wider pool of applicants for vacant positions within the company. The commercial and social responsibilities of the company can be complementary.

Professional skills – Reflections from the learning phase

These pages remind you of how the syllabus describes each skill. Keep notes here of how you have applied the skills in questions from your study materials, in classes, in online discussions or at work. Write brief reminders of what you have done well under each skill heading, and also note any areas where you can see that you need to improve.

Analysis

Your reflections



Thoroughly investigate and research information from a variety of sources and logically process it with a view to considering it for recommending appropriate action.



- A Investigate** relevant information from a wide range of sources, using a variety of analytical techniques to establish the reasons and causes of problems, or to identify opportunities or solutions.
- B Enquire** of individuals or analyse appropriate data sources to obtain suitable evidence to corroborate or dispute existing beliefs or opinion and come to appropriate conclusions.
- C Consider** information, evidence and findings carefully, reflecting on their implications and how they can be used in the interests of the department and wider organisational goals.

Example:

If asked to use financial statements to analyse company performance, simply calculating a range of ratios would be insufficient. You should tell the story the financial statements show, using ratio calculations along the way to provide evidence of your points. You should also use other exhibits, for example board minutes, to research and evidence the reasons behind any trends noted. The implications of the ratios should be explored, as well as highlighting any further information that would make your analysis more complete.

Professional skills – Reflections from the learning phase

These pages remind you of how the syllabus describes each skill. Keep notes here of how you have applied the skills in questions from your study materials, in classes, in online discussions or at work. Write brief reminders of what you have done well under each skill heading, and also note any areas where you can see that you need to improve.

Scepticism

Your reflections



Probe, question and challenge information and views presented to them, to fully understand business issues and to establish facts objectively, based on ethical and professional values.



- A Probe** deeply into the underlying reasons for issues and problems, beyond what is immediately apparent from the usual sources and opinions available.
- B Question** facts, opinions and assertions, by seeking justifications and obtaining sufficient evidence for their support and acceptance.
- C Challenge** information presented or decisions made, where this is clearly justified, in a professional and courteous manner; in the wider professional, ethical, organisational, or public interest.

Example:

If you were asked to advise the board of directors about a proposed acquisition based on some financial projections, it would be right to probe and question the assumptions underlying the projections. You would have to consider the source of the information that had been used as the basis of the projections in the context of all the available evidence, taking into account possible bias of the various parties involved. In all communications, professional courtesy would have to be maintained.

Professional skills – Reflections from the learning phase

These pages remind you of how the syllabus describes each skill. Keep notes here of how you have applied the skills in questions from your study materials, in classes, in online discussions or at work. Write brief reminders of what you have done well under each skill heading, and also note any areas where you can see that you need to improve.

Evaluation

Your reflections



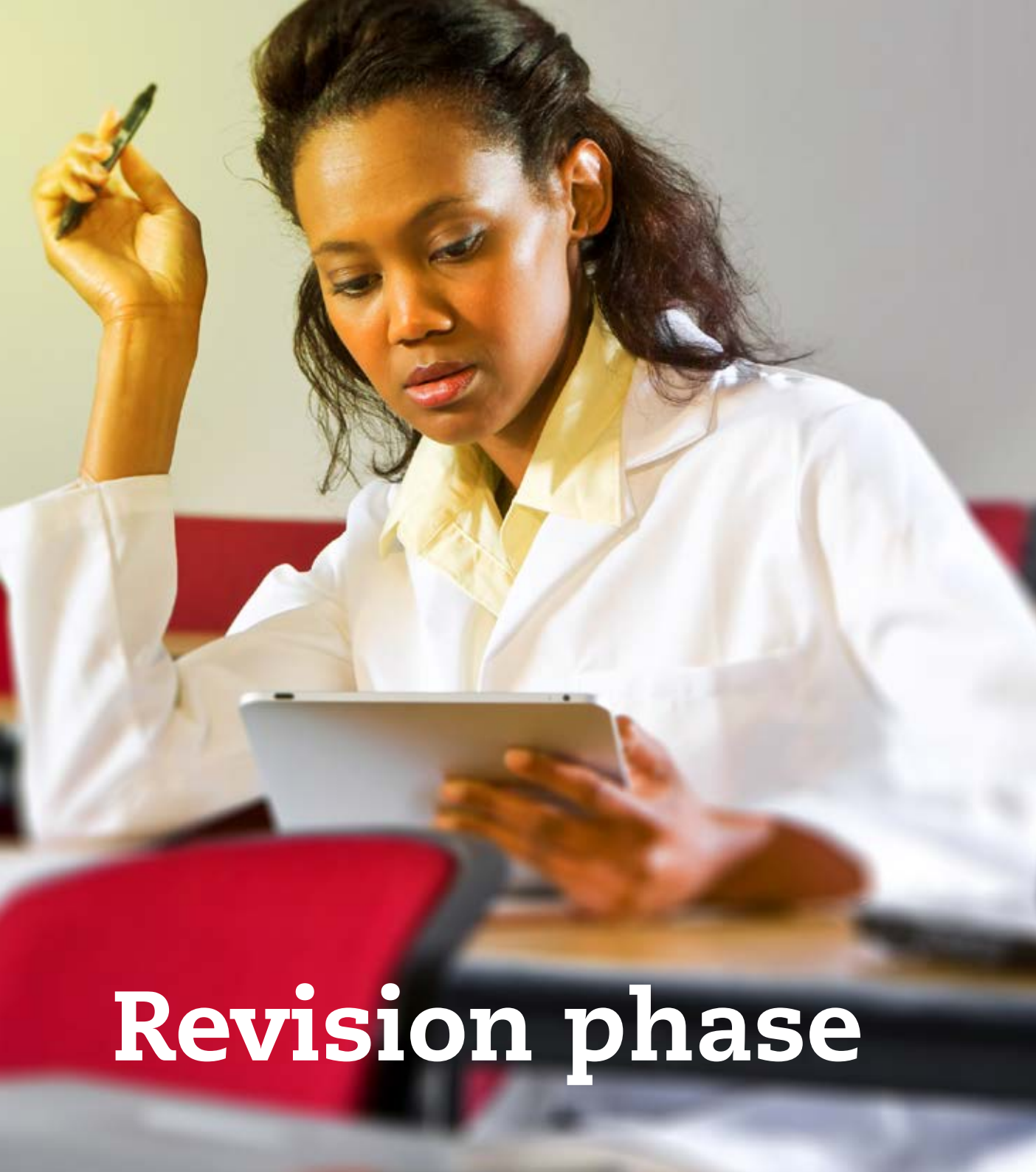
Carefully assess situations, proposals and arguments in a balanced way, using professional and ethical judgement to predict future outcomes and consequences as a basis for sound decision-making.



- A Assess** and use professional judgement when considering organisational issues, problems or when making decisions; taking into account the implications of such decisions on the organisation and those affected.
- B Estimate** trends or make reasoned forecasts of the implications of external and internal factors on the organisation or of the outcomes of decisions available to the organisation.
- C Appraise** facts, opinions and findings objectively with a view to balancing the costs, risks, benefits and opportunities, before making or recommending solutions or decisions.

Example:

When being asked to evaluate a decision to close down a division, you would need to explore both the advantages and disadvantages, and give a conclusion that clearly states what you think on balance. The advantages and disadvantages should extend into the potential and/or likely consequences of the course of action. For example, depending on the case, closing down one division may affect the demand for products in other divisions if they are related, and impact negatively on the reputation and image of the whole organisation, damaging future sales.



Revision phase

Your checklist

- ☐ Consider booking revision tuition with an Approved Learning Partner
- ☐ Make sure you understand the format and nature of the exam
- ☐ Revisit areas you struggled with during the learning phase
- ☐ Ensure you are confident with the knowledge and skills needed to pass the exam
- ☐ Make sure you are able to apply that knowledge in questions

Revision phase – Question practice

- Exam-standard question practice is even more vital now
- Work through as many questions as possible and all mock exams included in the [Approved Content Provider](#) question and answer banks. Build your skills using shorter questions first, then build up to full length case studies. These have all been reviewed by the SBL examining team.
- You MUST obtain feedback on your specific answers. Your answers will be different from suggested solutions, so this feedback is an essential stage in ensuring you are on track to pass this exam. Sources of specific feedback may include:
 - Your tutor
 - Mock exams marked by an [Approved Content Provider](#) or [Approved Learning Partner](#)
 - Your study buddy and/or classmates
 - Colleagues
 - The [ACCA Learning Community](#)

You should also get into the habit of reviewing your **own** answers critically. Step into shoes of the marker and review how well the question has been answered both in terms of technical application, and professional skills. This is an exercise that gets easier with practice! The [examiner's approach article](#) will help guide you as to what the markers are looking for. You should also read the [Read the mind of an SBL marker](#) article.

- Work through the [specimen exams](#) – this will provide you with a clear picture of what the exam will look like making sure you know what to expect on the day



Students who read examiners' guidance are more likely to pass than those who don't.



Revision phase – Question practice



Tips for success

- ✓ Block time in your study plan for specific questions or mock exams to ensure you cover everything. Coordinate this with your study buddy and arrange to swap and discuss answers.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to attempt questions you have already done – especially the ones you found tricky first time round.
- ✓ It is really important that you do questions in full, to exam time – time management is often an issue and the more you prepare yourself the better you will perform in the exam. Also, remember the professional skills are being examined here, these can best be tested by attempting questions in full.
- ✓ Try not to look at the answers before really attempting the question – you won't be able to do this in the real exam!
- ✓ Work through the answers carefully – pay attention to areas you got wrong and understand where you went wrong – it is better to do a few questions well, than lots of questions badly. However, remember your answers WILL be different to suggested ones, so it's important to get that feedback from others on your answer.
- ✓ Don't forget to review the marking guide too – you need to understand how marks are allocated to ensure you know how to maximise your marks.
- ✓ It's important at revision stage to keep up your discussions with others. It's easy to become more 'introspective' at this stage, but this could damage the good work done to date on your professional skills.
- ✓ Practice as many mock exams as you can and get them marked if possible. ACCA's Approved Learning Partners offer a variety of mock exam days, and mock exams that you can sit at home and send in for marking. It's vital you have your answers marked or at least reviewed in detail by others – your tutor, classmates, study buddy, colleague or through the [ACCA Learning Community](#). Remember to focus not only on technical content, but the APPLICATION of technical content in the context of the case, and those all-important professional skills.
- ✓ Stick to the 4 hours' time when practicing your mock exams. SBL is longer than other ACCA exams to give you extra reading and planning time. **You should spend at least 40 minutes** reading and planning before you start writing any of your final answer. There is some great practical guidance on how to make the most effective use of the 4 hours in the [examining team guidance](#) article.

Revision phase – Key resources

- Regularly review the [SBL section of the study support resource finder on the ACCA website](#) as this is frequently updated and expanded
- Re-read advice from [the examining team and the examiner](#)
- Review the [specimen exams](#), taking particular note of how the professional skills are examined, and review the marking guide to understand how to give the markers what they want
- Review the [technical articles](#) for additional revision resources and articles relating to SBL
- Check SBL [frequently asked questions](#) online for additional advice and tips



Tips for success

- ✓ Don't look at model solutions before attempting a question – it'll give you a false sense of security, and your answers won't look like the model ones anyway.
- ✓ Do plenty of question practice TO TIME, and IN FULL:
 - you need to produce an acceptable answer in the time. Taking a long time to produce an excellent answer is not going to practice this.
 - you also need to practice professional skills. This cannot easily be tested with an 'answer plans only' approach
- ✓ Don't give up easily – if you don't understand something, this is really something you can learn from. Seek advice from a tutor, a classmate, a colleague, your study buddy or the [ACCA Learning Community](#).
- ✓ Keep reading and discussing the business news – this strengthens your business acumen, and keeps you thinking laterally and practically.

Revision phase



An extract from the 'examining team guidance' article:

Assume that you are now ready and just about to start the Strategic Business Leader examination, and over your shoulder is a member of the examining team whispering guidance into your ear. Of course, we cannot do this for real as you would both be removed from the exam hall and reported to ACCA for engaging in unfair practice!

So, there you are sitting at your desk in a room full of anxious people, anticipating the start of the exam. You should be well rested and had a good meal; so the energy consumed earlier in the day will be released throughout the four hours, keeping you both physically and mentally alert.

Having fully prepared for the rigours of the Strategic Business Leader exam as a candidate, your mind now needs to focus on how you are actually going to spend the next four hours. Effective time management is going to be critical to you passing the examination, because although four hours is a long time – it will fly by. You must avoid the temptation to start the exam at a leisurely pace, but instead you should prepare a time plan and stick to it.

Finally, the invigilator starts the exam and it's time to put into action the techniques that you've practised many times before the big day.

Scan the entire exam, which is likely to be around 12 to 15 pages in length, focusing on the various requirements that you must complete in the allotted time. Although not exactly in an exam format you have experienced before, you will still be challenged by attempting several different but complementary tasks all based on the scenario information contained within the case study. As there is no predictable structure, it is important that time is carefully allocated at the start of the exam. You will have four hours, or 240 minutes, to read and analyse the case study and requirements, plan your approach to answering each of the tasks, and produce full answers to them all. So, assuming it takes 40 minutes to read through the whole of the case study – then you will have 200 minutes to plan out each of your answers and write them. In simpler terms, this gives you two minutes for every one of the 100 marks you are targeting, but as there are only 80 technical marks on the exam, this effectively increases to 2½ minutes per mark. This is because the 20 professional marks will be earned in the way you construct and present your answers, not for writing additional content. Of course, this is dependent on being able to read and understand the scenario and requirements fully within 40 minutes, and it's certainly advisable not to rush this exercise. So, if you need more time, take it but reallocate the remaining time proportionally over the 100 marks. However, with extensive practice you should be able to complete the reading within the target of 40 minutes.





Final preparation

Your checklist

- ☐ You are clear on the knowledge you need to pass the exam as well as how to apply that knowledge
- ☐ You are clear on the five professional skills and how to apply them, as well as presenting your answers in a generally professional manner
- ☐ You have the skills you need to pass the exam – eg time management

Ensure you are familiar with:

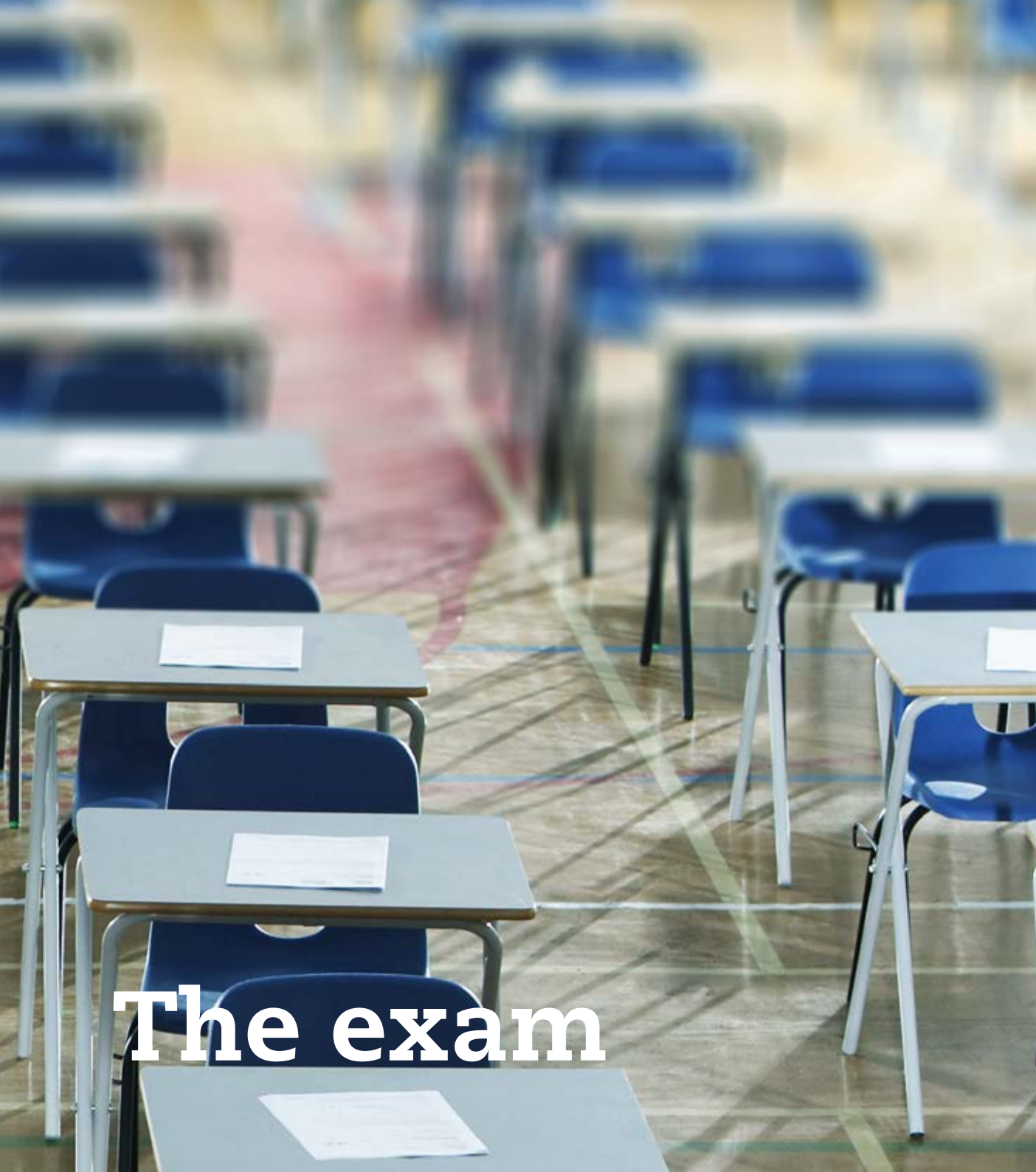
- ☐ the exam format
- ☐ the style of questions
- ☐ the way the marks are allocated

Final preparation – Tips for success



Tips for success

- ✓ 'Front load' this final stage as much as possible. You should be reducing the detailed work you do, and focussing on bigger picture issues – those professional skills for example:
 - You shouldn't focus on questions you can't do immediately before the real exam. These questions won't be asked in your exam and will reduce your confidence
 - You need to arrive at the exam fresh and alert. You will have to absorb and prioritise the scenario and exhibits in the exam time, and being tired will dramatically reduce your ability to do this.
- ✓ Focus on question practice, not learning by 'rote'. Practicing questions is a much more active process than simply reading notes. It is also more efficient – you should only go back to your notes when you need to this way.
- ✓ Make sure you have a structured approach in place for the exam day – including how long you will spend reading and planning. Go in with a 'process' to follow that works for you, and you know it works because you've practiced it.
- ✓ Make sure you understand how to present in the likely different formats. Examples may include: reports, letters, emails, briefing notes, a business case, presentation slides and accompanying notes.



The exam

Your checklist

- ☐ Make sure you are ready to walk into your exam

The Exam – Tips for success



Tips for success

Very few students enjoy taking exams but there are things you can do to make the experience less stressful!

- ✓ Identify where the exam hall is.
- ✓ Plan your route to the exam hall, considering the time of day you will be travelling and any potential issues.
- ✓ Have in place a back-up plan in case of traffic problems or public transport delays.
- ✓ Ensure you have all the equipment you need for the exam (black pens, calculator etc).
- ✓ Don't forget to take your exam docket with you as well as your student identification.
- ✓ Eat properly before you leave for the exam.
- ✓ Sleep properly – do not spend the night before doing last minute late night revision. This is a practical exam, so there's nothing to be gained by trying to memorise extra facts. You will gain far more by being alert and well-rested so you are able to think clearly about the case and exhibits presented to you.
- ✓ Try not to get into discussions with fellow students just before the exam about what might come up – again this will only cause you stress.
- ✓ This exam is testing your ability in the workplace – be cool, calm, professional, and sensitive to the needs of your intended audience.
- ✓ Be confident and quietly determined – you have worked hard to prepare for this exam, and you can do it.

Once the exam is over:

- ✓ Relax.
- ✓ Don't over analyse – you cannot change anything now!

Good
Luck!

Appendix – Links

Appendix – Links

PAGE	LINK	URL
04, 14, 16, 18, 21, 37	SBL section of the study support resource finder on the ACCA website	http://www.accaglobal.com/uk/en/student/exam-support-resources/professional-exams-study-resources/strategic-business-leader.html
04	SBL video	http://future.accaglobal.com/changes-to-the-qualification/the-qualification-journey/strategic-professional/strategic-business-leader
05, 26, 28, 37	Technical articles	http://www.accaglobal.com/uk/en/student/exam-support-resources/professional-exams-study-resources/strategic-business-leader/technical-articles.html
05, 18, 21, 35, 37	Specimen exams	http://www.accaglobal.com/uk/en/student/exam-support-resources/professional-exams-study-resources/strategic-business-leader/specimen-exams.html
06	SBL tuition near you	https://learningcommunity.accaglobal.com/#discover/1
06, 07, 14, 16, 21, 22, 35, 36, 37	ACCA Learning Community	https://learningcommunity.accaglobal.com
07, 12, 13, 14, 16, 21	Ethics and Professional Skills module	http://www.accaglobal.com/uk/en/student/ethics.html
07, 14, 16, 35	Approved Learning Partner	https://learningcommunity.accaglobal.com/#discover/1
08, 19, 35	Examiner's approach article	http://www.accaglobal.com/uk/en/student/exam-support-resources/professional-exams-study-resources/strategic-business-leader/examiners-reports.html
08, 09, 18	Syllabus and study guide	http://www.accaglobal.com/uk/en/student/exam-support-resources/professional-exams-study-resources/strategic-business-leader/syllabus-study-guide.html
11	Strategic Business Leader – Professional Skills marking guide	http://www.accaglobal.com/content/dam/acca/global/PDF-students/acca/SBL/SBL-Professional-Skills-Marking-Guide.pdf
14	Plan and book exams	http://www.accaglobal.com/gb/en/student/exam-entry-and-administration/enter-an-exam.html
14, 23	Student Accountant	http://www.accaglobal.com/gb/en/employer/supporting-trainees/sa-direct.html
14, 35	Approved Content Provider	http://www.accaglobal.com/uk/en/student/your-study-options/alp-content.html
14	BPP English Language support for ACCA	http://www.accaglobal.com/gb/en/student/exam-support-resources/bpp-english-language-course.html
14	Exam planner tool	http://www.accaglobal.com/gb/en/student/exam-entry-and-administration/enter-an-exam/exam-planner.html
18	Professional skills and effective communications articles	http://www.accaglobal.com/uk/en/student/exam-support-resources/professional-exams-study-resources/strategic-business-leader/technical-articles.html

Appendix – Links

PAGE	LINK	URL
18, 36, 37, 38	Examining team guidance	http://www.accaglobal.com/uk/en/student/exam-support-resources/professional-exams-study-resources/strategic-business-leader/examiners-reports.html
18, 37	Frequently asked questions	http://www.accaglobal.com/uk/en/student/exam-support-resources/professional-exams-study-resources/strategic-business-leader/faqs.html
23	PER (Practical Experience Requirement) objectives	http://www.accaglobal.com/gb/en/student/practical-experience/performance-objectives.html
35	Read the mind of an SBL marker	http://www.accaglobal.com/content/dam/ACCA_Global/Students/prof/sbl/5154-Articles-SBL-Read-the-mind-of-SBL-marker.pdf

