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Marking Report

May 17, 2020

Doing a practice exam is one of the most helpful ways to ensure a pass, especially on APM, one of the most challenging papers in ACCA. In this document, I will share the observations and feedback I collected from the mock exams in this batch that I marked.

Question 1: Rezillos

Done well

Professional marks

Almost all candidates got 2 marks from the report heading and introduction paragraph. This shows proper preparation and reading of past examiner reports.

Command of English

I was impressed with the level of English and writing. As a marker of real ACCA exams, I can say the level of English was on-par with what I see in the real exams.

Linking to the scenario

Many candidates followed the critical advice of linking all the points made to evidence from the scenario.

"Evaluating a report"

Most candidates did well on part A and got passing marks this part following the guidance form past examiners reports.

How to improve

Get one more professional mark: structure, signposting, group ideas together

Very few candidates used headings and subheadings throughout their answer. Even if this is not shown consistently in the model answers, it is vital to do so for two reasons: (a) planning and (b) structure. Use a heading structure that follows the answer plan you create. It also ensures you don't write too much or too little about the ideas you generate. It also forces you to group your ideas together.

Do this for one more professional mark if you only got 2.

Avoid unsupported assertions!!! EVERYWHERE IN EXAM

This is the number one thing to fix for many of you. I can't stress this enough. Don't just say:

"The report should have more narratives," or "The employees are risk-averse." or, "Measuring quality will improve performance." None of these statements are supported by logic or with evidence from the scenario. No marks for these kinds of statements.

To fix this, say "BECAUSE" and then continue with evidence from the scenario, and a linking word to develop your idea.

Do this instead:

"The report should have more narratives BECAUSE it's used by directors of the company at annual meetings. They will be making strategic decisions and will need some additional supporting information about the figures to give them a more complete picture." This is how you generate a mark in APM.

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Fine-tune your report evaluation

When this requirement comes up, make sure you evaluate against coverage of (a) each item in the mission, (b) any critical success factors that are apparent in the first two paragraphs (e.g., if Quality is essential to the company, make sure the report measures it and (c) the general best practice you see in the model solution.

(By the way, this was not an 'overloaded report—some of you said it was. For an example of an overloaded report, please see question Metis.)

Number of ideas vs. the number of marks

Make sure you use the number of marks as an indicator of the number of ideas you need to generate. This was an area of improvement for almost everyone, in many areas of the exam.

For example, part B "assess criticism…" is 9 marks. You won't get 9 marks with 3 short paragraphs talking about 3 things.

Embedded requirements and structure

Many candidates missed easy marks by not focusing on the EMBEDDED REQUIREMENTS.

The CEO wanted you to cover 3 areas: (a) method of calculation, (b) sampling, and (c) disclosures. Use these as headings, and then below each heading, two or three criticisms, each backed with evidence from the scenario. Very few candidates used a structured approach like this.

Avoid long, rambling paragraphs that mix many ideas together.

Transforming Data into Information

Many candidates did well on part Cii, but some people had trouble with this.

If you are asked to "evaluate performance" or "benchmark" with comparative figures from a table, it's not enough to say, "Utilization of L&D shows investment in people. Teeland is best." Develop your idea by linking metrics together and looking for cause-effect, or by linking to strategy and CSFs from the first paragraph. Try and avoid 1-sentence answers.

Question 2: Zones

Done well

Showing knowledge of performance pyramid

Most candidates showed a strong knowledge of this model. Good job studying the syllabus.

Evaluation

May candidates did thorough evaluations of the metrics in part B, showing good linking to the scenario.

How to improve

Avoid restating the scenario with no analysis--everywhere

Avoid re-writing parts of the scenario without adding any analysis. Use the scenario as evidence to support an argument. Just copying sentences from the scenario doesn't get marks. Some candidates had this issue in part A.

Structure

Please follow the advice above headings. In part A, Performance Pyramid, there are 5 areas under which you can build your answer: supporting all levels of the company, financial vs. non financial, Inter-related metrics, alignment with vision, Internal and external coverage.

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Give a heading for each and say why this area of the model will specifically help Zones. Many candidates spent too much time explaining what each part of the model means, without linking to the scenario or the big-picture idea of what this model achieves.

Six Sigma Knowledge

Part C was tricky and tested more in-depth knowledge of 6 Sigma than was examined in the past. Be ready for a difficult requirement, and don't let this deter you from passing. Focus easy marks first. Do the parts of the exam you know best, and come back to this last.

Make sure you study all areas of the syllabus is good advice to follow from past examiner's reports.

Part B: improve structure and make sure you EVALUATE

Very few candidates used headings and subheadings here—this is an example of where answer planning would have helped many get more marks. There are 3 Metrics—use three main headings. There are 4 operational levels of the pyramid—use these as potential subheadings. The verb is EVALUATE. Use the language of 'evaluation:' "This metric covers waste well because…." Then, use a linking work and a new paragraph to look at the same idea from a different perspective. "However, it can be improved because…"

Question 3: Sberry

Done well

Numerical work

Most people did very well on the calculations and got perfect marks here. But, very few people rounded off to the thousand, some people worked to 1 decimal point. This will consume a lot more time. Please consider the decision you are making with your calculations and the precision required. You can evaluate the profits and EV if the result is shown in thousands, so round-off to this and save time.

Technical knowledge

Many candidates showed good technical knowledge of this commonly examined topic—good job.

How to improve

Answering the question asked

Some candidates gave knowledge dumps on Mendelow because of the association of this model with stakeholders. No marks were available for this theory. Answer the question asked and use ideas from the model for assessing the stakeholders: what is their interest? How does this impact their attitude to risk?

Time management

Many candidates were running out of time at this question. Make sure you follow the rule of 1.8 minutes per mark, or 1.5 hours for question 1, and 45 minutes for Questions 2 and 3. Do the easy requirements first, like part C here.

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Exam technique checklist

If you got less than 50 (or, if you got more than 50 and want to add another 5 marks to your score) evaluate your script against this checklist of good APM exam technique:

- I use headings and subheadings throughout my script
- I evaluate the number of marks before I write and use that as a guide to the number of ideas I should generate
- The ideas I am writing are linked to the scenario
- I avoid copying parts of the scenario without adding any analysis
- When I evaluate or Assess something, I am using the correct language: something is positive, or negative BECAUSE….
- Before I write, I have an answer plan based on the specific requirement
- I look for the embedded requirements and use that as a starting place for structure
- I follow proper time management: 1.8 minutes per mark
- I get at least 3 professional marks with Intro paragraph, Report heading, and good grouping of ideas with headings and subheadings
- I use a simple, direct writing style
- I avoid writing big, academic definitions of theory
- I study the whole syllabus from a broad perspective
- I go for the easy requirements first, saving difficult ones for later in the exam
- I read the recent examiner's reports and am aware of common mistakes

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