

HERE TO HELP

TIPS FOR EXAM SUCCESS

Chris Ward, IBMS Head of Examinations, provides advice for those undertaking IBMS examinations and those supporting candidates this September.

It may be several years since you last sat an exam and day-to-day you probably use IT rather than writing with a pen. This means that you will probably not be used to writing for long periods of time. It is, therefore, a good idea to practise writing and one way of doing this would be to make use of the past exam papers that are available in the qualification resources section of the IBMS website. This will also help you understand the type of questions asked in the exam. The examiners will not be able to award you marks if they can't read your handwriting, so write legibly and in pen.

Pre-seen questions

For the Higher Specialist Diploma (HSD), where there are pre-seen questions, use the time from the release of these questions to the exam to prepare your answers to these questions, but remember that you cannot take your prepared answers into the exam room. When it comes to the exam, remember that these questions are worth the same amount of marks as the other questions on the paper, so whilst you are likely to write more on the pre-seen questions than you will on the others, make sure



you do answer the other questions on the paper.

Read the instructions

Recently there have been several incidences where candidates have been asked to answer one question from each of three sections but have instead answered two questions from one section and one other question from another section. Candidates who did this immediately lost a third of the marks available for the paper.

Normally, you will be able to answer the questions in any order, but for the HSD case study paper within each case it is important to answer the questions in the order they appear. This is because there may be occasions where you will be given a limited amount of information and be expected to give an answer based purely on those details. Later on in the study

there may be more information that then alters the perspective on the case.

Plan your answers

At the start of the exam, read all the questions that are on the paper and then select the order in which you are going to attempt the questions. This is much better than simply answering the first question that you like the look of. You may find that there is one you like even more later on in the paper.

Answer the question that is set – not the question you would hope would be set.

Candidates occasionally present an answer that shows a good degree of knowledge and understanding, but misses the point that the question is asking. You can't be awarded marks for an answer that is nothing to do with the question.

Look at the number of marks that are available for the question. There is no

point in writing a whole page for a question that only has five marks attached to it. Equally, if you only write two sentences for a question that is worth 20 marks, you are not going to achieve full marks for your answer.

You should look for key words and phrases in the question, such as outline, describe, compare and list, as these tell you the type of answer the examiners are expecting to see. If it specifically asks for an annotated diagram, bullet points or a table, make sure you do that.

Before you start writing your response for the essay questions, it is good practice to write a brief plan of your proposed answer. You will find it much easier to write an answer that says what you want it to say if you have made a plan first. In your answer avoid text-speak, jargon and acronyms, instead use appropriate


nomenclature and if you use abbreviations always define them when you first use them in your answer.

The day of the exam

When it comes to the day of the exam allow yourself plenty of time to get to the exam venue. It is better to be there early than late, and we all know what public transport can be like.

Once you are in the exam room, try to remain calm and do not panic. Remember there will be no “trick” questions. Focus on what is being asked and keep track of time in the exam so that you answer all the questions that you need to.

After the exam has finished do your best to forget about it. You can't change what you have written and the result will be what it will be.

Finally, good luck with your exams. 

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