



Preparing for *Paper-Based* *Exams*

Constructed Response



Level 4 Diploma in Procurement and Supply

Level 5 Advanced Diploma in Procurement and Supply

Level 6 Professional Diploma in Procurement and Supply

cips.org/student-zone



How to improve your exam technique for Constructed Response Exams (CR)

In a CR exam you are required to ‘construct’ a response to the questions

Did you know that developing your writing techniques when answering exam questions can be the difference between pass or fail. This exam guide has been developed with this in mind and is filled with useful writing techniques for you to practice, top tips to try out and help with recalling information.

Key point

When constructing an answer always demonstrate what you know all throughout your answers. The person marking your exam does not know you, so treat it like a job interview and showcase your knowledge. The examiner(s) must be able to recognise that you know your material, if you don't, they can't make allowances for what you missed out.



Important notice

Paper-based exams known as PBEs are available in May and November only in some countries. To find out if we hold PBEs in your area please go to our online exam finder. <http://bit.ly/2RCPvTS>

“ We’ve produced lots of helpful advice to help you prepare for CIPS exam success. Whatever exam format you encounter you are required to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of a subject and show that you can follow instructions when answering questions. Good luck with your future study and exam. ”

JOHN MORETON FCIPS CHARTERED, CIPS CHIEF EXAMINER

Memory aids to improve your recall

1. Do you have a bad memory? Many people think this, but often the problem is that they don't give the information sufficient attention to commit it to their memory in the first place. If the information never made it to your memory, then you have no hope of getting it out again. So the most important aid to memory is to PAY ATTENTION:
 - focus on what you are learning or revising, and don't let your mind wander. Try listening to music to help concentration and avoid screens such as phones or TV.
 - understand the concepts you are learning – if you don't understand them, you will not remember them
 - re-phrase or re-state the information, so that you are forced to think about what it means
 - if you have to remember lists, repeat the items enough times to lodge them in your memory.
2. Use a mnemonic to help you remember lists, theories, or staged processes.

E.G - Devise a simple mnemonic to help you remember the names of these recognised management theorists: Mullins, Brech, Armstrong, Fayol, Mintzberg, Drucker

Use their initial letters: Most British Accountants Find Maths Difficult

If you devise your own mnemonics, they are usually easier to remember than someone else's. Try to make them funny or personal to you.

- 3. Visual memory can help to support recall of information for an exam. If this works for you:
- make charts, mind-maps, tables or pictures while revising – you may find you can recall these better during the exam than sections of text
- use coloured highlighters in your revision notes, choosing different colours for different topics or related concepts. If a question on one of these topics comes up in the assessment, you may be able to recall relevant information by remembering the items that you had highlighted in the same colour.
- 4. Research shows that re-creating the circumstances you were in when you were revising helps you to recall better in the exam. Clearly, you can't take your classroom into the exam room, but one tip you might try is to wear a particular scent whilst revising. Wear it again on the day of the exam, and the smell may help you to recall the information you need.

Revising for CIPS exams

1

Plan a timetable for revision and break up each area into manageable chunks

2

Stick pieces of paper around your room with notes and look at them regularly.

3

Be prepared. If you feel confident and know what to expect it can have a really positive effect on your state of mind and level of nerves.

Top tips

- Use the syllabus learning outcomes as a check-list of all the things you need to know.
- Make your own notes, rather than relying on books, or those by lecturers. You may like to summarise your notes on cards that you can carry round with you. If you are a 'visuals' person, make mind-maps instead. Use highlighters and coloured pens to focus on important things.
- Use your mobile phone or an online voice recorder (there are lots free available online) to record your voice. Record yourself reading your notes or summaries and then listen to the recordings.

- Use sample questions from CIPS website to gain an understanding of how the examiners design questions on the topics you have studied. Sample questions for each module are available in the relevant qualifications page in the sample questions tab.

- Read any examiners reports and guidance provided by CIPS.
- Get as much practice as you can: make sure you can concentrate for 2-3 hours at a time, try to get used to writing in time-constrained conditions, if you are preparing for Constructed Response exams.
- Revise with a friend. Explain things to each other and ask some questions. Go for a walk with a friend and test each other while you are walking.
- Take regular breaks, perhaps of around ten minutes, to avoid revision-fatigue. Start by revising for short periods between breaks, then gradually lengthen the revision time, but keep the break-times the same. Make extra time for revision during the day by getting up earlier, or using your lunch break.

The screenshot shows the CIPS website's 'Study Resources - Level 5 Advanced Diploma' page. It features a navigation bar at the top with links for 'For Individuals', 'For Business', 'Learn', 'Events', 'Membership', and 'Who We Are'. The main content area is titled 'Study Resources - Level 5 Advanced Diploma' and includes a sub-heading 'Find resources to support your studies.' Below this, there is a paragraph stating: 'Our new learning resources have been created to give you every chance of success in your exams. We understand that everyone learns in different ways so we've completely redesigned our resources to support your study.' This is followed by a note: 'The following resources are for the new syllabus, July 2019 exams onwards.' The page is divided into sections for 'Sample Questions' and 'Sample questions for our Objective Response exams' and 'Sample questions for our Constructed Response exams'. The 'Sample questions for our Objective Response exams' section lists various modules such as 'Advanced Diploma in Procurement and Supply Module (S102)', 'Advanced Diploma in Procurement and Supply Module (S103)', 'Advanced Diploma in Procurement and Supply Module (S104)', 'Advanced Diploma in Procurement and Supply Module (S105)', 'Advanced Diploma in Procurement and Supply Module (S106)', 'Advanced Diploma in Procurement and Supply Module (S107)', 'Advanced Diploma in Procurement and Supply Module (S108)', 'Advanced Diploma in Procurement and Supply Module (S109)', 'Advanced Diploma in Procurement and Supply Module (S110)', and 'Advanced Diploma in Procurement and Supply Module (S111)'. The 'Sample questions for our Constructed Response exams' section lists 'Advanced Diploma in Procurement and Supply Module (S111) OR Sample Questions' and 'Advanced Diploma in Procurement and Supply Module (S112) OR Sample Questions'. At the bottom, it states: 'You will also find questions in the Study Guides, eBooks and eLearning for you to work through and self assess as you prepare for your exam.'

On the day of your exam(s):



- Eat properly to keep your blood sugar and energy levels up. Make sure you drink plenty of water to keep you hydrated.
- Try to remain relaxed. Take deep breaths and, if possible, try to stretch. This can help clear your mind and relieve any build-up of tension.
- If you have a sudden 'mental block' during the exam, try not to panic - this is quite a common problem. If it happens to you, some of the following techniques may help:
 - Flag the question and move to the next one. This will give you confidence and give you time to clear your head.
 - Answer questions you feel confident about first – just remember to write in the correct section of the booklet.
 - Try to recall the information using one of the memory aids. If you have used these methods during revision (see page 4).
- Pace yourself – make sure you know how much time to allocate to each question or section and stick to your plan.

What to expect in Constructed Response exams

Timing is everything

Spend five minutes reading the instructions and questions through at least twice - so that you have an overall picture of what is being asked, before you focus attention on each of the questions as some may have several parts. This is so that you can make sure that you have established the focus of each question, and avoid straying into material that you might need to use in other questions. Some questions may contain a brief scenario or data source.

You will need to decide how to allocate your time for each question. Be ready to stop writing the answer when your allocated time runs out. If you do not move on to the next question, you are likely to run out of time and fail to gain marks overall. If you are struggling with completing your first and second answer in the time you have allocated, then you will need to review your plans for the other questions, in order to make sure you complete as many answers to questions as possible

Reading the questions and planning your answers

As you read through the question, identify what is being asked of you in each question. Remember, there will be one question for each of the learning outcomes from the syllabus:

- Determine which part of the syllabus the question relates to.
- Consider what key issues the question is asking you to write about, so that you are sure you fully understand the demands of the question. Format, context, task and outputs are very important.
- Take careful note if the question asks you to provide a specific number of examples or ideas – make sure you provide the number required. Examiners will stop marking after the required amount, so, if you are asked for five but list seven, only the first five will be marked.

Example

Discuss FOUR advantages and FOUR disadvantages of a win/lose approach to negotiation. (16 marks)

Make sure you give four of each, no more/no less. Two marks are allocated for each one, so you cannot earn marks if you do not provide the required number, no matter how detailed your discussion may be of the advantages/ disadvantages you include.

Next, highlight the command words in each question or part of a question.

Make sure you understand exactly what you are being asked to do: 'Explain' means you must not just describe something; 'Compare and contrast' means you should look for points of similarity and difference in the items given – it is all too easy to forget this once you start writing.

What to expect in Constructed Response exams

Example

Explain, with examples, the difference between direct and indirect costs. (10 marks)

If you do not give examples to illustrate your explanation, you will fail to gain marks. In the example given here, failure to include any examples could cost you 50% of the marks available.

Make sure that, even if a question sounds familiar to one you may have practised, you have checked the intent of the question on the paper – a difference in the command word may require a completely different type of answer from the one you have practised. Be careful not to simply repeat answers you have already prepared previously and remembered: make sure you answer the specific question asked, using your knowledge and understanding.

Writing your answers

- 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.
- 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
- Write your essay to the plan you have made, making each point clear and concise, and written in a way that answers the question
- You may wish to use sub-headings and/or underlining of key points in your text, to emphasise points in your answer
- It is good practice where possible to introduce your essay with reference to theories, models, or to a particular business context. This helps to show the examiner what you know about the concepts being assessed, but you should try to keep this brief as it may not add to your marks if you spend too long 'setting the scene'. If referencing authors in your answer, reference them properly. It may be better to discuss their views in broad terms, rather than attempt to quote them if you aren't sure.
- Always say why you have referred to a particular theory or model – it should add value to your answer.
 - Questions involving comparison or evaluation may require a summary paragraph in which you pull together the points you have been making and draw conclusions at the end. You should make a note, before you begin to write, what conclusions you intend to draw and work towards them as you present your arguments.

What to expect in Constructed Response exams

Example

**Discuss the benefits and challenges associated with the implementation of an MRP system.
(10 marks)**

You may wish to preface your answer with a short paragraph showing your understanding of MRP systems, before going on to discuss their benefits and challenges. Ensure your answer discusses both benefits and challenges. If you do not address one of these within your answers it will mean you fail to gain up to 5 marks.

General advice for candidates

- Use time at the end to review your answers. Do not amend your answers too much at this stage, it is too late for that, but if you have had to leave an essay unfinished, there may be time to go back to it at the end.
- 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
- Poor planning can lead to a well-written first half of an essay, but lack of focus and often some repetition in the second half. Try to make sure that your planning leads to a complete and balanced answer.

Good answers will be well reasoned and justified with appropriate theories, models or examples

4 In the Diploma in Procurement and Supply; scenario questions tend to focus on testing understanding such as asking why things are typically done. So, for example you may be asked to explain issues or suggest reasons for something, in order to demonstrate your understanding.

5 In the Advanced Diploma in Procurement and Supply, questions and tasks will focus on testing a greater depth of knowledge and understanding such as positioning questions from a management perspective. So for example questions may invite you to analyse issues and explain how something might be managed, in order to demonstrate the scope of your knowledge.

6 In the Professional Diploma in Procurement and Supply, questions and tasks will focus on testing a higher level of knowledge and understanding such as positioning questions from a senior or strategic management perspective. So, for example questions may require you to evaluate situations, or make an assessment, from a strategic point of view.

These questions may have more than one 'correct' answer, and often the way in which you reach your conclusion, and support and justify it, will earn you the marks. You will need to explore the issues raised by the question, and present well-reasoned or justified arguments supported with appropriate theories, models or examples. You should be able to judge the appropriateness of any theories or models that you use, and recognise their limitations.

Good luck in all of your future exams