

**Cambridge International Diploma in
Management (Higher Professional Level)**

General Guidelines for Writing the Assignments

Cambridge International Diploma in Management (Higher Professional Level)

Introduction

This resource is intended as a guide to help centres prepare their students for the Cambridge International Diploma in Management at Higher Professional Level. It contains some sample assignments and comments from the examiners. It also contains the marking scheme that the examiners use when assessing the assignments and some general remarks about how to prepare the assignments. It is hoped that the guidelines in the booklet will help tutors to ensure that candidates' assignments are of the required standard to pass the award.

The sample assignments in the booklet are extracts from assignments that have been submitted by students for the diploma. These are real assignments and are not, therefore, presented as model answers. Rather, they give the reader an idea of the range of work that is presented for assessment together with some feedback from CIE examiners. There is also a summary of how the sample assignment could be improved to achieve higher marks. In order to respect the confidentiality of the work submitted, any references to candidate or organisation names have been deleted.

As the modular assignments, with the exception of the case study, are work-based, it must be remembered that no two reports are the same and different students from different environments will approach the assignments differently. This reflects the diverse approaches to management across different sectors and in different countries.

Guide to completing the assignments

Purpose

The purpose of the assignments is to encourage the candidate to demonstrate the knowledge they have acquired and to show that they have applied it in the context of a work situation. Clearly, the knowledge and skills will reflect the module syllabus or, in the case of the Case Study, show that the candidate can integrate the learning from a range of management topics and apply it to the problem provided.

Different people will approach the assignments in different ways and this is to be encouraged. Presentations will reflect the candidate's personal style or that of their tutor or employer. What is important is that the finished report meets the assessment criteria and is presented in a business format.

Making a Start – Guidelines for Candidates

The most difficult part of any written assignment is making a start. Candidates should adhere to the following guidelines:

Read the assignment task carefully to get a good understanding of what is required. Look at the module syllabus and see how the assignment links to this. It might be useful here to jot down some key areas that you feel need to be covered.

Devise an assignment plan. This should include at least the following:

- The area of work that will provide the focus of your research
- Any constraints or limitations you anticipate and how you will work within these and still meet the assessment criteria
- The information you will need to complete the assignment
- The sources of the information you will need (internal, external, occupational, academic etc)
- Your intended research and analysis approach
- The desired outcomes of your research and analysis
- Key activities that you need to carry out to reach your outcomes
- A plan of action for carrying out the various activities you have identified, including who you need to speak to, what research you need to do, time scales for doing the various tasks, etc.
- An outline structure for your report

Doing the research and analysis

Research and analysis are essential aspects of all the assignments. You need to clarify in your own mind what it is you are trying to find out, then plan your research to get there. Think about the possible sources of information available to you; there are generally more than you think. Consider the following:

- Senior managers in your organisation
- Fellow managers in your organisation
- Colleagues and team members in your organisation
- Relevant documents and literature in your organisation
- Relevant literature from competitor organisations
- Trade journals and magazines
- Relevant books
- The World Wide Web
- Other people, such as customers, suppliers, general public, fellow students etc
- Newspapers

It is important that you use as wide a range of sources as possible.

Always acknowledge your sources of information within your report, and then include these in a bibliography at the end.

Gather together all the information in a file dedicated for that purpose. When you have collected all the information, as set out in your assignment plan, start to sort it into a

logical order, so that you can use it for analysis. If you find you have collected information that is not relevant, then discard it to avoid cluttering up your file. Equally, if you need more information, be clear in your mind what it is you want and how you can get it.

As you analyse the information collected, summarise your findings in a systematic way, making clear notes. In this way, you will be able to show clearly how you have arrived at your conclusions and recommendations.

Writing the report

When writing the report, consider your audience. Your report is a valuable document, as it will not only be assessed for the Cambridge International Diploma, but also be useful to the organisation under study. You should adopt a business approach. Present the report for the organisation under study, rather than as an essay.

This means that you should use business language throughout and not make reference to the assignment instructions. The assignment given to you will be broken down into tasks, which are numbered; this is purely to help you reach the desired outcomes. You should consider the assignment as a whole and not use these task numbers in your finished report.

When structuring the report, consider the different sections you should have and give these titles, so that the reader is clear what it is they are about to read. Examples include: background; introduction; the current situation; options for change; summary; conclusions; recommendations etc.

Use your allocated word count to describe what you did, how you went about it and your findings. Put all supporting information, such as information collected, analysis findings, literature etc in the appendix and refer to these in the text.

Have a cover page that includes the assignment title, your name and the date of writing. Put an index at the front to make it easier for the reader to find different sections and make sure the index works when you have printed the final copy. An executive summary at the beginning is very useful. The purpose of this summary is to briefly summarise what you have done, why and your key findings. This means that a busy senior manager can quickly read your executive summary and understand what it is about, then read the main body of the report at their leisure.

Demonstrating knowledge and application

Whilst this assignment is a work-based activity, it is a requirement of the award that you demonstrate knowledge and understanding in line with the syllabus and show that you can apply such knowledge in the work place. In order to convince the examiner and your employer that you know the subject, you should include references to relevant theories and concepts, then describe how you have used these in your research, analysis and conclusions. Always acknowledge the source of your references (books, papers, publications, web etc), then include them in your bibliography at the end.

Some people find it useful to reflect on the assignment and summarise key learning points. This is an excellent way of showing the examiner that you understand the module

subject; however, you need to be careful that you do not use up too much of your allocated word count.

Finalising the report

You have done your research, analysed the findings, completed all assignment tasks, read lots of books on the subject and finally written the report. Before submitting it, take a little more time to check that it meets the requirements and stands a good chance of satisfying the examiner. Read it through again and have a look at the mark scheme. Ask yourself the following:

- Does the index or contents page work?
- Is there a clear executive summary?
- Do the conclusions derive from the research and analysis and can the reader follow this?
- Are recommendations realistic and based on the conclusions?
- Is the language business-like?
- Are section headings clear and sensible?
- Does the appendix contain all relevant support material?
- Is there a bibliography showing all reading and research sources?
- Are theories, concepts and relevant extracts included and acknowledged?
- Are all assignment tasks completed?
- Will this report address the mark scheme and give a good mark?
- Is this report a useful document for the organisation studied?
- Is the report within the specified number of words and is this indicated somewhere?

Completing the case study

Your approach to the case study will be very similar to the module assignments. However, in this case, you are presented with information about an organisation and are expected to make proposals for change. The instructions are clear and you are expected to follow these. However, you should not confine yourself to the information provided. Rather, you would be expected to carry out research relevant to the case study. This may include researching the sector upon which the case study is based or finding out information about legal issues. It is useful to look at companies that are operating in the same sector as that under study. If the case study suggests that the organisation intends to set up business in your country, research the implication of this: what are the development opportunities? What incentives are available? What difficulties could be encountered? What are the staffing issues, etc? A useful resource is the World Wide Web, as this will give you an international perspective and show that you are creative in your research.

There may be occasions when you have to make assumptions with a Case Study; do not be afraid to do this, but make sure you justify your assumptions.

In making recommendations to the organisation under study, you should be as creative as possible. Consider all the options available, then decide which to recommend. Present your case by justifying your chosen option. Address your report to the company under study, as directed in the assignment guidelines.

In writing the report, think about the audience. What size of organisation is it? How busy is the intended recipient of your report? What will they expect to see in the report? What structure is best?

The notes on writing the assignment report (above) apply equally to the case study. The examiner will be using the mark scheme provided, but also looking for evidence of creative thinking and the integration of a range of management topics. So, if you are proposing a change of some sort, what will be the impact on HR, finance, culture, strategic direction etc?

Finally, remember to check your report before submitting it for assessment. You can use the checklist provided for the module assignments as a guide.

Guide to submitting electronic assignments

In order to improve efficiency, centres are now being encouraged to submit their students' assignments electronically. The following guidelines are designed to assist students preparing electronic assignments.

Style and presentation are equally important: include a cover sheet with your name and candidate number clearly displayed. Use page breaks and sub-headings in exactly the same way as if you were providing a printed copy. Consider introducing colour to make sections stand out on the screen and illustrate quantitative information with charts or graphs wherever possible.

Give your assignment a title; this does not necessarily have to be the same title as the assignment task if a different one would be more meaningful, particularly if the final report is to be submitted to your organisation.

Make clear references in the text to research sources, such as trade journals, books, web-pages etc. List these sources in a bibliography at the end and make sure it is included in the final report.

Make clear references in the text to the supporting material in the appendix.

Carefully consider the supporting evidence in the appendix. Is it necessary? Does it really support the report? If not, do not use it. Where your supporting material is essential reading, such as research questionnaires that you have used, these must be provided electronically. Where supporting material is only available in hard copy, consider how important it is for the examiner to read. If it is essential, perhaps it could be scanned and included.

Where supporting documentation is important to illustrate the breadth of research, but does not have to be read in detail by the examiner (for example, annual statements by the company chairman), these do not need to be included. However, it is important to refer to them. Include a page in the appendix that contains the appendix reference number and a short description of the document (e.g. Chairman's statement to the shareholders on 11 January 2003; page 3 describes the changes planned for the next 12 months). Make sure you use this page to provide enough information about the document to support what you have said in the report. It may be that you have to type a summary or synopsis here. If you need to do this, include a statement at the bottom of this page stating that you have done this (e.g. Summary of key points taken from the Chairman's statement to the shareholders).

It is essential that your tutor, before submitting your assignment, checks all supporting material to confirm that it has been accessed. You should retain all such material in case CIE asks to see it.

Frequently Asked Questions

- Q1.** What if the information in my company is confidential and I am not allowed to include it in the assignment (e.g. financial information)?
- A1.** This is not unusual and confidentiality must be respected. Change the figures that are confidential by applying a factor to them (e.g. multiply or divide them by 10) and include the factored figures in the report. Explain in a footnote that you have applied a factor to the figures to disguise them (do not state what that factor is).
- Q2.** What if the confidential information is not of a financial nature, such as their strategic plans?
- A2.** First of all, consider if there are areas within the organisation that you could work on where confidentiality is not an issue. If this is not possible, perhaps you could exclude the name and identity of the organisation. You could make up a fictitious name for the organisation that you are studying.
- Q3.** If an assignment asks for two multinational companies to be studied and I have identified two national companies that would be more suitable for my research, can I use these instead?
- A3.** You should look at the assignments flexibly. What is the assignment asking you to do? In this case, it is expecting you to look beyond your own organisation and consider issues around wider trading. If reviewing national organisations would benefit your organisation and still enable you to take a more global view, particularly in your research, then this is quite acceptable. The examiners will allow you the flexibility to interpret the assignment title according to your circumstances.
- Q4.** A lot of emphasis is placed on research in the Cambridge International Diploma in Management. What does this mean to me? What am I expected to do?
- A4.** You should identify the information you need, then access as many sources as possible that are relevant. This will include documents and other people inside the organisation you are studying, documents and perhaps people from other relevant organisations, trade journals, newspapers, books and, in particular, internet-based sources. The requirement for the award is to demonstrate your ability to conduct in-depth research and see the wider picture, rather than focus just on what is happening in your own organisation.
- Q5.** I keep finding that I am exceeding the specified word count; does this matter?
- A5.** Yes it does matter. You will be penalised for exceeding or under-utilising the specified word count. Carefully re-read your report when it is completed. Are you repeating yourself? This is very common. Could some of the information be presented in tabular or bullet format? For example, a SWOT analysis could be short statements under each section of the SWOT, rather than long sentences. Perhaps you have included information in the main body of the report that would be more suitably placed in the appendix. Is what you are saying essential or are you just padding out the pages? Remember: be clear and concise.