Exam technique

Session CBEs
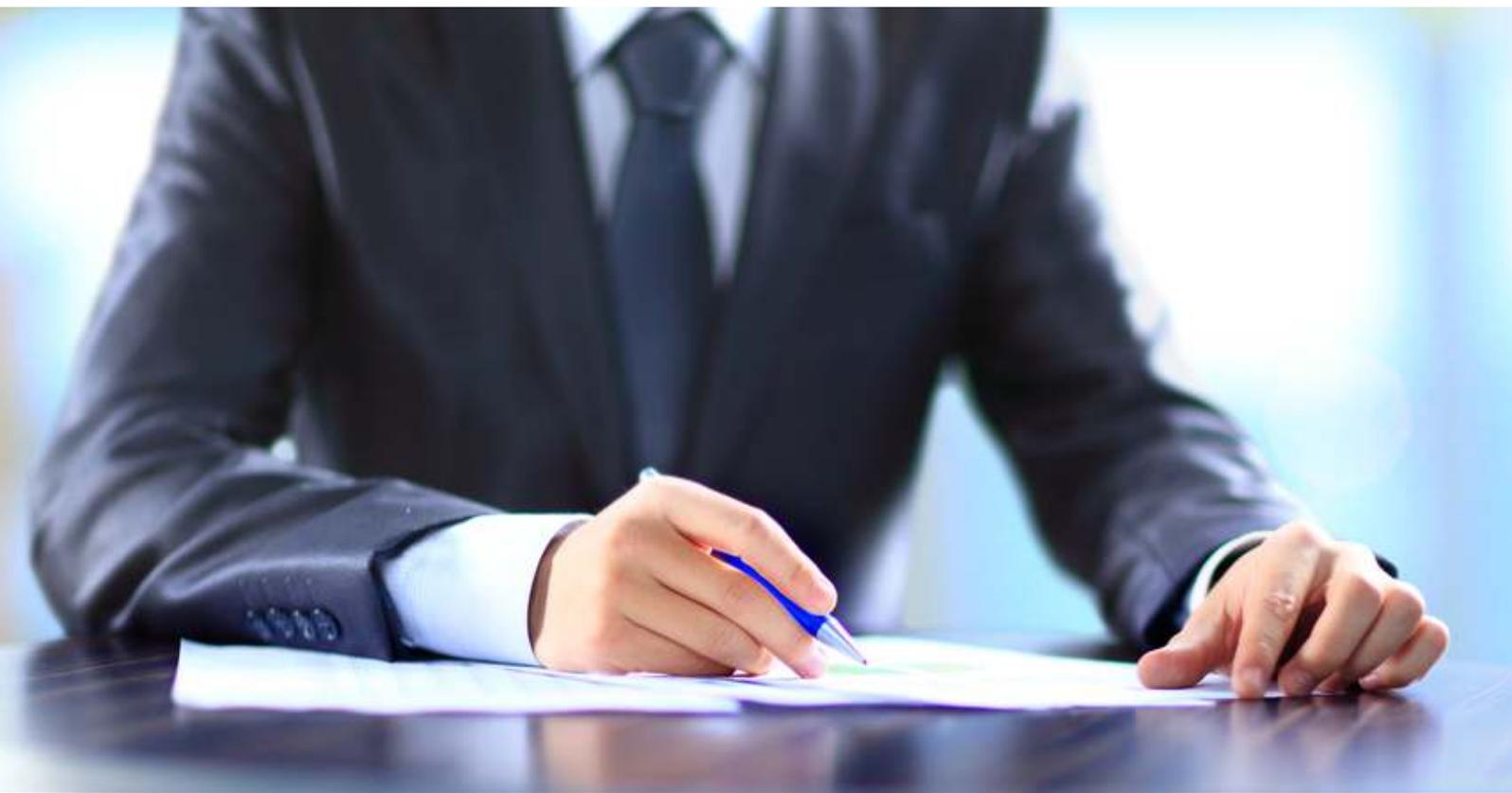
Exam technique summary:
Session CBEs

This short article is relevant to on-demand CBE format exams for:

◉ Performance Management (PM)

◉ Taxation (TX-UK)

◉ Financial Reporting (FR)

◉ Audit and Assurance (AA)

◉ Financial Management (FM)

1.   Exam structure and content

Except for AA, these exams will be split into three sections:

◉ Section A – 15 objective test questions (OTs) of 2 marks each

◉ Section B – three 10-mark OT-case questions (i.e. five OT questions based on a common scenario)

◉ Section C – constructed response questions (CRs).

AA has only two sections:

◉ Section A – three 10-mark OT-case questions

◉ Section B – CRs.

The make-up of constructed response questions depends on the approach to examining:

◉ PM, FR and FM: two 20-mark questions

◉ TX: one 10-mark question and two 15-mark questions

◉ AA: one 30-mark question and two 20-mark questions.

Although CRs will predominantly examine specific syllabus areas (as described in the approach to examining in the ACCA syllabus and study guide), OTs may be drawn from any area of the syllabus.

2.   Allocate your time

All session CBEs are **3 hours 20 minutes** and contain 110 marks of exam content:

◉   100 marks contributing to candidates' results; and

◉   10 marks of "seeded" content which does not contribute to a candidate's overall mark.

Seeded content will either be randomly distributed in five single OTs or an OT-case question.

All questions within each section are **compulsory**.

Allow **1.8 minutes** per mark on average; for example, a 20-mark question should take 36 minutes. Do not try to allocate time exactly to each individual OT as some questions will be relatively harder than others.

3.   General approach

Each exam will aim to cover the entire syllabus, so if you are well-prepared for it you should be able to work through it from start to finish taking each question in turn. In general, candidates prefer to start with Section A; however, there is no reason why you cannot navigate to start with a constructed response question.

4.   Objective test questions (OTs)

The most common question types are:

◉   Multiple-choice questions (MCQs) – select one option;
◉   Multiple-response question – select the specified number of options;
◉   Fill in the blank – key in a number
◉   Drag and drop – matching items to a response area
◉   Drop down list – select one option from a drop down menu
◉   Hot spot – select a point on an image
◉   Hot area – select one or more boxes, typically in a table.

General guidance

◉   Always read the "stem" (the question in bold) carefully.

◉   If a question immediately strikes you as particularly difficult, flag it and move on. Return to it, using the navigator function, when you have worked through "easier" questions.

Numerical questions

◉   Pay attention to dates, time periods and "units"; for example, a question will clearly indicate in the amount should be a number of thousands.

◉   Avoid looking at the options, where given (i.e. in an MCQ), until you have completed your calculation(s). This should ensure that you are not distracted by an incorrect option which is a working towards the correct answer but not the final answer.

◉   For number entry questions, consider the "reasonableness" of your answer (e.g. inventory days of 27 million cannot be correct).

◉   Key in your answer in the required format, that is, without commas and, where relevant, using the full stop as a decimal point and/or the minus sign as a negative symbol (e.g. – 10530.25).

- If you get stuck, make a best guess, flag the question and move on. Do not leave any question unanswered. Return to flagged questions if you have time.

Non-numerical questions

- If you are unsure of the correct answer after reading the question carefully, read each of the options and eliminate incorrect options; if one is left, it must be correct.

- Avoid wasting time overthinking why answers that appear to be incorrect may be justifiable. You should not expect "trick" questions, so if an answer stands out as the correct response, this is probably confirmation that you understand the issue.

- Take particular care with "hot area" questions, the navigator function will show these items as completed even if you have not selected the required number of boxes.

5. OT-cases

Although exam techniques for individual ("stand-alone") OTs apply equally to OT-case questions the following points are worth noting when tackling an OT-case question:

- Be strict in allocating 18 minutes to each case; do not try to allocate 3.6 minutes to each OT.

- Questions are answerable in any order so do any "easy" ones first. (Although each group of 5 OTs will be based on a common scenario, each question is carefully devised to ensure that there are no dependencies between individual questions. So an incorrect answer to any one individual question should not affect your ability to answer the four correctly.)

- Use the "splitter bar" (the divider between the scenario on the left side of the screen and the OTs on the right side) to resize them. Widening the left side, for example, may reduce or eliminate the need to scroll up and down to read the scenario.

6. Constructed response (CR)

- Identify the number of parts to each question; this is stated immediately above the scenario on the left side of the screen.

- Allocate your time to each part according to the number of marks available.

- Use the highlighter when reading the scenario and the strikethrough function to mark off points of information as you deal with it.

- Provide **all workings and calculations** in the CR workspace using the spreadsheet or word processing tools. These will be assessed by the expert marker. Workings, etc that you note using the "scratch pad" (or paper provided at the exam centre) will **NOT** be marked.

- If you need help with the CR functionality during the exam (though you should not if you have practiced it sufficiently during your preparation) refer to the "Help" feature.