

IPMA[»]

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IPMA Qualifications

Exam technique – Level C

Report

The Report should be based on the project(s) that you used in the Executive Summary Report.

Reports are commonly used in the workplace and within the project management industry, so candidates are likely to have experience in writing reports.

For each of the competency elements being assessed candidates must call upon personal experiences to evidence how they have met the competence element within the appropriate level of complexity.

The evidence must be applied to 80% of the competency elements being assessed and must demonstrate how at least 50% of the key competency indicators in the Individual Competence Baseline (ICR4) have been met.

Candidates should not use the words 'we' and 'the team' as evidence cannot be directly attributed to the candidate.

Whilst there are many ways in which to prepare and write a report the following process is one candidates might wish to consider.

Stage 1 Understand the requirement

- It is important for candidates to know the exact requirements of a report.
- This does not just apply to the report's content but how it should be presented in terms of number of pages, font size and type. Further information on the latter points can be found in the Candidate Guidance online.
- Where there is any doubt about the requirement then candidates must contact your accredited training provider, as appropriate, for clarification before moving onto stage 2.

Stage 2 Research and information gathering

It is highly likely that candidates will gather information from several sources and will call upon several experiences to inform the content of a report. At all times candidates must consider whether the information and its source are appropriate to the level of complexity being assessed.

For level C the context must be moderately complex.

Stage 3 Analysing the information

Once candidates have conducted their research and gathered information it is necessary to determine which information will be used and how this will be presented. It is likely that some information will be discarded but it is also just as likely that additional information will need to be gathered once the initial analysis has been completed.

Stage 4 Drafting the report

It is important to present information in a logical and structured way which will enable anyone who reads the report to fully understand what is being presented.

A report could be structured as follows.

Introduction

A brief outline of the purpose of the report, its focus and how the report is presented.

Background

This is where you must provide:

- a detailed description of the project role in context
- the project's key stakeholders
- the project's scope and objectives
- the resources which you are responsible for.

Description of management and leadership challenges

This is where candidates must provide:

- details of how these were acted upon and results achieved
- reflection on these results and lessons learnt.

Presentation of Information

To support a logical structure to the report and to enable candidates to focus their response on the requirement, it is recommended that the situation, task, action, result (STAR) approach is used when structuring detailed responses.

The following is an explanation of STAR.

Situation

What was the challenge? What was the context? What were the intended/expected outcome(s)?

Task

What were you required to achieve? What were the targets? What were the challenges?

Action

What options did you consider? What did you do? Why did you choose this option?

Result

What were the outcomes of your actions? To what extent were expectations/intended outcomes/targets met?
What did you learn from this experience? What would you do differently in a similar situation?

The STAR approach would be used for each of the challenges which you faced during your leadership of projects.

Conclusion

The conclusion is used to draw the report to an end where candidates can present the significance of your leadership of different challenges. Candidates could focus on what they consider to be the key points, perhaps highlighting commonalities or trends which have become apparent using the STAR approach. However, no new evidence should be introduced in the conclusion.

Stage 5 Review and redraft

Professional presentation of a report will be expected by an assessor. This includes ensuring grammatical and typographical errors have been corrected. One possible approach is for someone who has no real knowledge of a subject to proofread a report. The proof reader can identify errors in structure in addition to answering the question 'does this read well?'

Once the report has been proofread then any necessary amendments must be done before submission. It would be prudent to have the report proofread at least one week before the submission deadline. This allows candidates time to make any adjustments.

Stage 6 Submit the report for assessment

Candidates must submit the report no later than the agreed deadlines and follow the procedure issued by the APM.

Short Answer Questions (SAQs)

Each SAQ at level C is worth five marks. SAQs test candidate's ability to apply and analyse and will contain command verbs such as illustrate, compare and clarify. For each level C SAQ there will be a short context to each question. To achieve the highest marks for a level C question it is necessary to refer to the context in the candidate's response.

If a question asks for two explanations/descriptions, then two must be given to achieve higher marks.

Often candidates confuse 'how' with 'why' and do not give an appropriate response. 'Why' refers to the cause of something, for example "Explain why a motivated project team performs effectively." In this example an appropriate response would focus on reasons such as to achieve key performance indicators or to deliver a quality service.

However, 'how' in contrast refers to what makes something happen. Consider the question "Explain how a motivated project team performs effectively." In this instance, an appropriate response would focus on topics such as performing effectively through proactive collaborative working or by reducing the number of quality errors.

When reading a question, it is important for candidates to understand its components. Candidates must recognise the command verb and what it means (see separate *Command words* document). A candidate must also recognise the broad topic area or context, and the specific aspect of a question.

Consider the question "Describe how motivation is used to improve the performance of a project team." In this question the verb is 'describe', the broad topic area or context is 'improve the performance of a project team', with the specific aspect being 'motivation'.

A response which focuses on motivation as a general concept would receive few marks, but a response which places the use of motivation in the context of improving the performance of a project team has a greater chance of being awarded high marks.

The way in which candidates respond to a SAQ will influence the number of marks which are awarded for a response. If the response is not clear and/or the content of a response is disjointed, it will be difficult for an assessor to be confident that candidates have demonstrated secure knowledge.

Candidates must present a response through a logical and easy to understand structure which focuses on the exact requirement of the question. An assessor must be able to understand what it is the candidate is saying so that the assessor can determine if the candidate has provided a relevant response.

Each question has indicative content which assessors use to mark candidates' scripts. These are not model answers but marking guidance. It might be useful to know what assessors are looking for when marking exam scripts.

The Level C SAQ indicative content always starts with:

"Indicative content

A comprehensive answer covers the two aspects of:

- contextualise the scenario (1 mark)
- identify and develop a response to address the scenario in relation to the question (4 marks)."

Exam technique

Time management within a level C SAQ examination is very important if candidates are to provide responses to all the questions.

The two-hour level C SAQ examination allows candidates two minutes to read and understand each question and eight minutes to answer each question.

One possible technique is to read through all the questions and make a note of those which the candidate is more confident of answering effectively and those where they have less confidence. The RAG approach could be used here where;

R for Red indicates low confidence

A for Amber indicates medium confidence, and

G for Green indicates high confidence.

Candidates could, after the initial review, begin with G, followed by A, followed by R. This would give candidates the greatest chance of achieving the highest marks possible. It could also mean that less than eight minutes is spent on the G questions which would provide more time for the R questions.

However, there is a word of caution here. Candidates need to respond to all 12 questions for Level C SAQ, scoring at least one mark for each question attempted.

Extended Interview

An extended interview is a less structured conversation conducted by two assessors (the interviewers). Candidates (the interviewee) would be required to respond to each question in depth and with a focus on the exact requirements of a question.

The interview questions focus on specific learning outcomes and assessment criteria. See the assessment specification to see which specific assessment criteria are assessed by the interview.

Assessors might go back over some competence elements covered in the Report if they were not sufficiently evidenced at that assessment stage. Candidates must satisfy the assessors that they have met 80% of the competency elements and 50% of the key competency indicators which are being assessed via extended interview.

Questions will be asked to encourage candidates to use their own experiences, in addition to knowledge and understanding, to provide an acceptable response.

At each level candidates are required to provide an in-depth response to all questions. Candidates are to focus on the content of a question, ensuring the level of complexity in which they operate is fully articulated to the assessor. If a response to a question is not placed in the appropriate level of complexity or focuses on the specifics of a question, there is a possibility that the competency will not be achieved.

The interview will include a final mandatory question each candidate will be asked "Is there anything else that you wish to add to support your application?"

The use of the STAR approach, when answering extended interview questions, is recommended. As with the report, responses should be located in the appropriate level of complexity and indicate how candidates have demonstrated leadership when dealing with challenges.

In preparation for the extended interview candidates are encouraged to develop their knowledge of interviews and interview techniques. Candidates could engage in 'mock' interviews wherever possible so candidates can rehearse their responses and receive constructive feedback from their 'interviewer(s)'.

For level C the extended interview will last no longer than 90 minutes.