

Examiner Tips for AS and A Level Business Studies (9707)

How to Use These Tips

These tips highlight some skills that can easily be improved and also common mistakes made by students. Some are collected under various subheadings to help you when you revise a particular topic, while others are listed under the various papers to help with your examination technique.

General Advice

- Papers 1 and 2 each cover the whole AS syllabus. Paper 3 covers both the AS and A Level syllabus.
- Make sure that you read the instructions carefully on the front of the exam paper and that you attempt the right number of questions. If you find difficulty answering a question leave it (and a space in your answer book) and move on to a question that you can do. You can always come back to the difficult question later. You do not have to answer questions in the order that they are on the exam paper, but do remember that for Papers 2 and 3, parts of questions may have to be done in a particular order.

Commonly Confused Terms

Some frequently used terms are often confused and it is important that you know the difference between them:

- liquidation and bankruptcy
- ethnic and ethical
- cash, profit and profitability
- private sector and private limited company
- price and cost
- value added and mark up
- work study and market research
- shareholder and stakeholder
- shares and market share
- interest rate and exchange rate
- Why? and How?

General Tips

- The aim of examiners is to test your Business Studies knowledge and understanding, and your ability to use that knowledge. Examiners are not trying to trick you.
- Examiners are always looking for reasons to give you marks, not to take them away.
- You should allocate your time to questions to match the marks available in the questions. Always allow yourself plenty of reading time at the beginning of the exam, especially for data response and case study papers. Don't waste time re-writing the question and try to avoid repeating yourself in your answers.
- Examiners are not testing or marking your ability to write in English, but they do expect you to use business terminology appropriately and correctly.
- Before you start writing, you should read and analyse each question carefully into:
 - action
 - subject
 - context (where appropriate)
- Each question will contain an ACTION word such as *state, explain, analyse, discuss*, etc. Questions may start with *how, why* or *do you agree* which imply an action (e.g. *discuss*). Make sure that you understand what is meant by these action words.
- Each question will contain a SUBJECT word or phrase such as *marketing strategy, ethical issues*, etc. Make sure you are clear about which part of the syllabus the question is examining.

- Some questions will have a CONTEXT such as *in food retailing* or are set in the specific context of a case study or data response (in Papers 2 and 3).
 - Try to put yourself in the mind of someone who is managing a business in the given context.
 - Try to answer these questions in the given context and avoid general answers that could apply to almost any business.
- Answer the question that the examiner set and not the one that you wished that they had set.
- When you study topics, don't just learn the facts (e.g. the formula for a ratio) but also try to understand how they might be used and what their limitations might be.
- Remember that the examiners are not just testing Knowledge. They are also testing Application, Analysis and Evaluation.
 - Typical "trigger" phrases leading to Analysis include: *because...*, *this leads to...*, *as a result...*, *if.....then...*, *this could mean...*, etc.
 - Typical "trigger" phrases leading to Evaluation include: *on the one hand...*, *the most important...*, *I recommend...*, *...could be serious, in the short term...*, *however in the long term...*, *before they can consider...*, etc.
 - You should try to justify any evaluative comments that you make.
- It is usually useful to start an essay-style question (on any of the papers) with a definition of the subject of the question. For example, a question which asks you to "discuss whether decentralisation..." could start with a definition of *decentralisation* and finish with a conclusion which might be a decision, a judgement or a recommendation.
- Where appropriate you can use formulae or diagrams to illustrate an answer.
- Use your common sense, and local knowledge if appropriate.
- At the start of the exam, take deep breaths to relax yourself!

Paper 1 Tips

Section A

- Section A always has four compulsory short questions. These questions are designed to test knowledge and understanding. Lengthy answers are not required. Keep answers short, simple and to the point. Make a list of all of the key terms on the syllabus and make sure that you can define and explain them. Avoid circular definitions such as "market size is the size of the market".
- Pay particular attention to the ACTION word in the question and do what the question asks you to do. For example, *state* just requires a simple statement, whereas *explain* requires you to demonstrate that you understand the concept. You can often *explain* a concept by giving an example, which you can draw from your own experiences.

Section B

- Section B requires one question to be answered out of three possibilities. These questions are designed to test your analytical and evaluative skills as well as your knowledge and understanding. Practice recognising the evaluative part of questions.
- Spend time choosing which question to answer and make your choice carefully. Read the whole question and make sure you appreciate any given context.
- Practice planning essays. Critically read other people's essays and consider how you would improve them. Think about the conclusion that you want to reach and how to get there.
- You should try to develop both sides of an argument and come to a balanced conclusion. If the question asks for your opinion (e.g. *to what extent*, *discuss whether*, etc.) you should try to give a justified opinion or decision at the end.
- Where a question has a context (e.g. *small business* or *retailing*), think about the things that make such businesses different from other business. Write your answers with these differences in mind.

- Avoid the temptation to show the examiner everything you know; only include information that is relevant to the question that has been set.

Paper 2 Tips

- Paper 2 always has two questions, each with its own data response material (DRM).
- Part A of each question is always two *explain* terms, and the tips for Paper 1, Section A apply to these. Explanation can often be achieved through a definition and an example to develop that definition. Part A does not need to be answered in the context of the DRM but you can do this if you find it helpful.
- The remaining three parts to each question must be answered with reference to the DRM.
 - Think carefully about the special circumstances facing the business in the DRM.
 - Put yourself into the minds of people involved in the business: managers, owners, customers and employees.
 - Think what the title of the DRM might tell you, e.g. if it is a partnership, limited company, etc.
 - Think about constraints within which the business might operate (legal, financial, ethical, and/or environmental).
- Marks available provide the key to the detail and the skills required and the time to be spent answering each part.
- Avoid pure “textbook” answers. It is not necessary to go into detail about theories; it is sufficient on this paper to demonstrate that you can use the theories rather than state them (this is particularly true of motivation theory).
- Calculations are usually asked for with a purpose in mind, so consider whether the results of a calculation might be useful in answering a subsequent question. Remember to show how you arrived at your calculation – even if you get the answer wrong, you may get method marks. Consider whether your answer makes sense – you might have made a mistake.
- Analysis is often about developing consequences for a particular course of action. It is useful for you to keep in mind the main functional areas of the syllabus (marketing, hrm, finance, external factors and production) when developing consequences.
- Look for opportunities to show evaluation skills in higher-mark questions. If you come up with recommendations for the business, think whether these recommendations are realistic in the circumstances (for example, a sole trader is unlikely to advertise on TV). Make sure that any comments you make are realistic in the context of the business.

Paper 3 Tips

- Paper 3 consists of five compulsory questions and one *either/or* option essay question.
- Many of the tips for Papers 1 and 2 apply to Paper 3 as well; in particular:
 - You should answer all questions in the context of the business described in the case study.
 - Try to imagine yourself in the position of different stakeholders in the business, and recognise that their objectives might conflict.
 - For questions with calculations, you should always show your work, and think carefully about the answer you get and what it means.
 - For essay-style questions you should follow the tips given for Section B of Paper 1.
 - Consider whether the recommendations that you have made are realistic for the business featured in the case material.
 - The allocation of marks to each question provides a clear guide as to the time to be spent and the skills to be demonstrated in the answer.
- You should read the case material more than once and carefully consider:
 - What type of business is it?
 - What are its main products/ services?
 - Who are its main stakeholders?

- What constraints are likely to influence decisions?
 - What are the main issues facing the firm?
- Read the questions carefully and relate each question to the material in the case study. For each question, you should identify the action required and the subject of the question, and then decide how long you want to take on the question. For each question, highlight the information in the case material that is relevant to that question (check with your Centre whether you are allowed to write on the exam paper).
- For higher-mark questions you should identify the best way to demonstrate evaluation skills (e.g. making a recommendation, arguing which are the most important factors, making a judgement and so on).
- When the question invites an answer in the context of your own country, you should not worry that the examiners might not be familiar with your country – the examiners are more concerned with your ability to discuss features of your own country that might influence the business in the case.

Topic Tips: Business and The Environment

- You do not require detailed knowledge of laws or economic theories. What is more important is that you appreciate the impact that such external influences have on businesses.
- An understanding of objectives and stakeholders will often be useful in answering questions.
- Appreciation of external constraints will often help you in coming up with recommendations that are realistic.
- The legal structure of a business will often help determine what options are realistic for a business.

Topic Tips: People in Organisations

- People are usually the key to success in business activities.
- Employees may have a different outlook on decisions than management or other stakeholders, and it is often important for you to draw out these differences in your answers.
- Avoid too much quoting of motivation theories in your answers – it is how you use those theories that is important.
- You do not have to have detailed understanding of employment legislation, but you should understand how such legislation influences decisions.
- McGregor's theory applies to management perspectives, not to workers.

Topic Tips: Marketing

- You should see marketing in relation to other areas of business activities.
- While some topics (such as elasticity, SWOT, and Boston Matrix) can be studied in isolation, it is better to see these ideas as useful tools for decision making.
- Make sure that any marketing ideas you come up with are not only realistic, but are justified in the context of the business.
- Remember that market research usually has limitations.

Topic Tips: Operations Management

- Try to imagine what stages are involved in a production process.
- Remember that techniques such as JIT, flow production and TQM may not be appropriate in some circumstances (e.g. small businesses).
- Techniques such as break even and CPA are useful tools for decision making. You will not be expected to undertake complex calculations or draw complex networks.

Topic Tips: Finance and Accounting

- Keep in mind that this is not a course in accounting. The use of accounting information is far more important for this course than the production of it.
- Make sure that you recommend sources of finance relevant to the business that you are considering.
- When you calculate accounting ratios, or do investment appraisal calculations think about how the answers help the business in its decision making and whether the answers you get are realistic.

About the Examiner



Peter Joyce is Principal Examiner for Paper 2, and is also involved in other pieces of work relating to these exams such as teacher training and preparing materials. He has been a teacher of Business Studies for nearly twenty years, and has been involved in examining work for about fifteen years.

Peter enjoys working with students and as both a teacher and an examiner gets a lot of pleasure when he sees students performing to the best of their ability, which is why he thinks that these tips are particularly important to you; you can perform best when you know “the rules of the game”.