
Examiners' commentary

2018–2019

CO3320 Project – Zone A

General remarks

This commentary covers the examiners' observations on candidates' performance in the CO3320 Project exam (Zone A). In addition to reading this commentary, be sure to also read the commentaries for the CO3320 Preliminary Project Report (PPR) and for the Final Project Report (FPR).

The CO3320 examination is designed to verify that the candidate did indeed perform the work reported in their FPR, and to gauge their level of self-evaluation and reflection on the work they did and the results they achieved.

The examination comprises four questions, all of which are compulsory. For anyone who has diligently pursued their Project from start to finish, the examination should be straightforward. Most candidates this year, as in previous years, obtained roughly equivalent marks for their FPR and for the examination.

Of the others, some obtained significantly higher marks for their examination than for their FPR – these were generally cases where the Project had encountered significant problems and perhaps was incomplete, and yet the candidate was able to provide a good discussion of the problems in their examination and provide sensible suggestions of what they might do differently if they were to do the Project again. In these cases, the candidate had demonstrated that they had learned from the experience, even if the Project result itself was not what was hoped for.

In a small number of cases, candidates received significantly **lower** marks for their examination than they did for their FPR. In these cases, the examination script generally showed several of the weaknesses described below for individual questions.

The following sections consider each of the four questions in turn, and discuss any common problems observed.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This question was about the Project topic and structure.

- a. This should have been straightforward, and most candidates scored high marks. Some candidates lost marks in their discussion of which course they considered to have been the most helpful for their Project. In most of these cases a course was named but no explanation was given of why it was the most helpful. In a few other cases, no specific course was mentioned at all.
- b. Part (b) was answered well by most candidates. A small number of candidates failed to make it clear in their answer that objectives are concrete steps to be taken to achieve the Project's aims.
- c. Part (c) was also answered well by most candidates. Weaker responses included those that mentioned a range of different tasks rather than picking the one that the candidate thought was the *most* challenging.

Other weaknesses included not providing a clear explanation of what steps were taken to reduce the uncertainty, or why any steps taken did reduce uncertainty.

Question 2

This question was about academic writing.

- a. Part (a) was answered well by most candidates. This question was looking for understanding that background reading enables a candidate to get to know more about an area; to identify gaps in knowledge in the area; to get a sense of how researchers in the area approach problems; to help formulate research question(s), etc.
- b. Answers to (b) were mixed. The most important point to be made here is that articles published in academic outlets such as journals are **peer reviewed**, whereas articles published on websites, etc. are not. Because academic articles have gone through a process of peer review, their content is generally more reliable than articles that have just been published on the web with no review process at all. The most common weakness in answers to this question was a failure to highlight the role of peer review.
- c. Part (c) should have been easy, and many candidates answered it well. Most candidates correctly gave an example of an item from their reference list, but the most common weakness in answers was to not show how that item would have been cited in the main text of the report. The examiners were looking for the citation in the style used in the report, e.g. (Taylor, 2019).
- d. Part (d) should have been easy and was answered well by most candidates. The examiners were looking for an understanding that only the items that are actually cited in the report should be included in the reference list.

Question 3

This question was about Project outcomes.

- a. Answers to part (a) were mixed.
 - i. Here the examiners were looking for an understanding that conclusions are based on what is found in the results. Marks were given for evidence that the candidate understood that raw data and results are not quite the same thing, and that data needs to be analysed to come up with conclusions.
 - ii. The weaker answers generally failed to address all parts of the question.
- b. Part (b) was answered well by many candidates. The most common failing was to not fully answer the second part of the question regarding advice to be given, or to only offer very superficial advice. In this question the examiners were looking to see what lessons you had learned from the process of doing your Project, and how you could use your experience to formulate advice to a future student.

Question 4

This question was about self-reflection.

- a. The first part of this question was answered fairly well by most candidates. The examiners were looking for an insightful answer that rung true with respect to the Project and showed the candidate's ability to reflect on their experience. Weaker answers tended to dwell too much on technical aspects of the Project rather than general skills, or offered a variety of different lessons rather than identifying what the candidate believed to be the most important one.
- b. Part (b) was also answered well by most candidates. A few candidates lost marks because two of the aspects that they identified were actually very

similar to each other and were not really two distinct aspects of the Project. In general, however, there were some very good answers to this part, which demonstrated that the candidate had reflected upon what they had done and had learned important lessons from the experience.

Overall, most candidates did a reasonable job in the examination, and their marks broadly reflected the marks they achieved for their FPR. The main areas where some candidates fell down were in not responding to all parts of the questions, and in not providing detailed answers relating specifically to their own Project. Both of these shortcomings can be easily avoided.