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# Examiners' commentaries 2016–17

## CO3320 Project examination – Zone A

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### General remarks

This report covers the examiners' comments on candidate performance in the **CO3320 Project** examination (Zone A). In addition to reading this report, you should read the reports for the CO3320 Preliminary project report (PPR) and the Final project report (FPR).

The CO3320 examination is designed to verify that the candidate performed the work reported in their FPR, and to gauge their level of self-evaluation and reflection on the work they undertook, 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 the examination than for their FPR; these were generally cases where the project had encountered significant problems, and perhaps was incomplete, but yet the candidate was able to provide a good discussion of the problems in the examination and provide sensible suggestions of what they might change if they were to do the project again. In these cases, the candidate 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 the examination than 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.

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### Comments on specific questions

Attempt all FOUR questions. Each question is worth 25 marks.

#### Question 1

This question was about the project subject area.

- a. This should have been straightforward and most candidates scored high marks. However, note that there are multiple things being asked in the question. Some candidates did not address all parts of the question in their answer, and therefore, lost out on easy marks.
- b. This was another easy question for candidates who had read the subject guide and designed their project properly. Aims are the high-level goals and aspirations for the project, and objectives are the concrete, measurable steps taken in order to achieve the aims.
- c. Most candidates performed well here, although a few only gave details of one source. It is very rarely the case that a project does not

need some kind of literature review; those who had not done one could still gain some marks here for explaining how they went about understanding what existing work was relevant to their project (e.g. if the project was developing a mobile app, what apps performing related functionality were already available).

## Question 2

This question was about project implementation and execution.

- a. This addressed the difficulties candidates had in estimating the time to allocate to individual tasks in their project plan. For example, it is often difficult to estimate the duration of software development tasks, especially where these involve components that are new to the student, such as a new programming language or new software library. Some ways in which such uncertainty can be mitigated include dividing development tasks into a prioritised list of subtasks, and having contingency plans in place in case you are unable to successfully complete a particular aspect of the project.
- b. This was fairly straightforward. Most candidates used a Gantt chart or similar project planning aid to help them keep track of their progress. Where the candidate had a supervisor, regular meetings with the supervisor were also a useful tool. Note again that there are several things asked in this question, as with several other questions, some candidates lost marks by not explicitly answering every aspect of the question.
- c. Relatively few candidates scored highly on this part. The question was looking for an understanding of issues such as target audience, recruiting a representative sample from that audience, the numbers of responses required for statistical significance, ethics and so on, plus practical limitations on doing all of these things in the context of the project. Few candidates discussed factors such as numbers required to obtain statistically significant results. However, a few did answer this well; even in cases where it was impossible to recruit sufficient numbers for meaningful statistical tests, some candidates were still able to obtain high marks here by displaying that they were aware of the issues and the limitations of drawing firm conclusions from a small number of responses.

## Question 3

This question was about data analysis, results and conclusions.

- a. This was looking for a detailed response about data collection in the project. Some candidates replied with 'qualitative' or 'quantitative' data, which was fine as far as it goes, but the examiners were looking for more specific details for full marks.
- b. For candidates who collected data in their project, this question was looking for an understanding and discussion of the journey from data collection to analysis and then conclusions. Some candidates simply said that they used 'data analysis' techniques, but the examiners were looking for more specific details of exactly what was done. For other kinds of projects (e.g. an extended literature review), the examiners were looking for an insightful discussion of drawing information from sources and generating an original contribution using the sources as justification.
- c. This was looking not only for a summary of the project's conclusions, but also for some comment about the candidate's confidence in

the validity of the conclusions. While the first part of the question was straightforward, the second part was not well answered in general. Many candidates simply said that they were confident in their results. Some pointed to the results of testing to justify their confidence without any apparent awareness of weaknesses in their methods or deficiencies in their tests. For example, the results of testing an app on five people are not likely to form the basis of highly confident conclusions. This question was an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their awareness of issues such as statistical significance, testing against a control group and so on, even if they had been unable to do as much testing as they would have liked within the confines of their project.

#### Question 4

This question was about report writing and presentation.

- a. This was straightforward bookwork, so should have been easy. However, a disappointing number of candidates still could not say exactly what citations and references were. Citations are markers used in-line at the point of use in the main text, to indicate that a particular quote or result has come from another source, for example, '(Taylor, 2012)'. A reference appears in a reference list and gives the full publication details to allow the reader to find the cited work. There was also a second part to this question ('Why is it important to use both citations and references in academic writing?'). Again, some candidates failed to answer this second part. Always be sure to answer all parts of the question.
- b. This was about appendices. It was straightforward and answered well by most candidates.
- c. This was a little different to questions that have appeared in previous years. The emphasis was on producing a short video (e.g. a YouTube video) to publicise the project to a general audience. Some candidates did well on this, although many answers lacked inspiration. One aspect of the answer was selecting what information should be presented. Many candidates went into too many technical details for a general audience. Nearly all candidates decided to use the maximum video length of five minutes as specified in the question. However, it is often better to have a much shorter video to grab people's attention (most videos shared on social media are under one minute in length) and a few candidates opted for much shorter, snappier videos which would probably attract more views. The other aspect of the answer was deciding how the information should be presented. Many candidates relied on the suggestions given in the question, but many more options are possible. This question was really looking for creativity in showcasing the project to a general audience in a short, easy-to-understand and memorable way.

Overall, most candidates did a reasonable job with the examination and marks broadly reflected the marks 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.

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# Examiners' commentaries 2016–17

## CO3320 Project examination – Zone B

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### General remarks

This report covers the examiners' comments on candidate performance in the **CO3320 Project** examination (Zone B). In addition to reading this report, you should read the reports for the CO3320 Preliminary project report (PPR) and the Final project report (FPR).

The CO3320 examination is designed to verify that the candidate performed the work reported in their FPR, and to gauge their level of self-evaluation and reflection on the work they undertook, 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 the examination than for their FPR; these were generally cases where the project had encountered significant problems, and perhaps was incomplete, but yet the candidate was able to provide a good discussion of the problems in the examination and provide sensible suggestions of what they might change 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 the examination than 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.

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### Comments on specific questions

Attempt all FOUR questions. Each question is worth 25 marks.

#### Question 1

This question was about the project subject area.

- a. This should have been straightforward, and most candidates scored high marks. However, note that there are multiple things being asked in the question. Some candidates did not address all parts of the question in their answer, and therefore, lost out on easy marks. A few candidates gave surprising answers to the question of what course they regarded as most relevant to their project; however, as long as the answer was accompanied with a reasonable justification, high marks were still awarded.
- b. This was another easy question for candidates who had read the subject guide and designed their project properly. Aims are the high-

level goals and aspirations for the project, and objectives are the concrete, measurable steps taken in order to achieve the aims.

- c. Many candidates performed well here; however, a surprising number of answers did not address the second part of the question about a source that was read but turned out to be of little direct relevance. It is almost always the case that you will find papers or other publications in your literature review that seem relevant from their title but turn out to be on a rather different topic than you expected. It is very rarely the case that a project does not need some kind of literature review; those who had not done one could still gain some marks here for explaining how they went about understanding what existing work was relevant to their project (e.g. if the project was developing a mobile app, what apps performing related functionality were already available).

## Question 2

This question was about project implementation and execution.

- a. This addressed the difficulties candidates had in estimating the time to allocate to individual tasks in their project plan. For example, it is often difficult to estimate the duration of software development tasks, especially where these involve components that are new to the student, such as a new programming language or new software library. Some ways in which such uncertainty can be mitigated include dividing development tasks into a prioritised list of subtasks, and having contingency plans in place in case you are unable to successfully complete a particular aspect of the project.
- b. Relatively few candidates scored highly on this part. The question was looking for an understanding of issues such as target audience, recruiting a representative sample from that audience, the numbers of responses required for statistical significance, ethics and so on, plus practical limitations on doing all of these things in the context of the project. Few candidates discussed factors such as numbers required to obtain statistically significant results. However, a few did answer this well; even in cases where it was impossible to recruit sufficient numbers for meaningful statistical tests, some candidates were still able to obtain high marks here by displaying that they were aware of the issues and the limitations of drawing firm conclusions from a small number of responses.
- c. This asked what was the most challenging part of the project; it might be a conceptual difficulty with the academic content, or a practical difficulty (e.g. things taking longer than planned, unavoidable delays, etc.). The examiners were looking for a discussion of a specific challenge, and one that reflected what was written in the project report. Most candidates performed well on this question.

## Question 3

This question was about data analysis, results and conclusions.

- a. This was straightforward, and most candidates had no difficulty in answering it. Of those who had difficulties, several were confused about the status of questionnaires, stating that these gave quantitative data; this is often true, but not always and depends upon the design of the questionnaire, and in particular, on whether they allow the respondent to answer questions in their own words.
- b. For candidates who collected data in their project, this question was looking for an understanding and discussion of the journey from data collection to analysis and then conclusions. Some candidates simply said that they used 'data analysis' techniques, but the examiners were

looking for more specific details of exactly what was done. For other kinds of projects (e.g. an extended literature review), the examiners were looking for an insightful discussion of drawing information from sources and generating an original contribution using the sources as justification.

- c. This was looking not only for a summary of the project's conclusions, but also for some comment about the candidate's confidence in the validity of the conclusions. While the first part of the question was straightforward, the second part was not well answered in general. Many candidates simply said that they were confident in their results. Some pointed to the results of testing to justify their confidence without any apparent awareness of weaknesses in their methods or deficiencies in their tests. For example, the results of testing an app on five people are not likely to form the basis of highly confident conclusions. This question was an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their awareness of issues such as statistical significance, testing against a control group and so on, even if they had been unable to do as much testing as they would have liked within the confines of their project.

#### Question 4

This question was about report writing and presentation.

- a. This was straightforward bookwork, so should have been easy. However, a disappointing number of candidates still could not say exactly what citations and references were. Citations are markers used in-line at the point of use in the main text, to indicate that a particular quote or result has come from another source, for example, '(Taylor, 2012)'. A reference appears in a reference list and gives the full publication details to allow the reader to find the cited work. There was also a second part to this question ('Why is it important to use both citations and references in academic writing?'). Again, some candidates failed to answer this second part. Always be sure to answer all parts of the question.
- b. This was about the presentation of data and results in the report. The examiners were looking for answers that related to what was done in the project, showing awareness of the different ways in which data may be presented, and justifying the approach taken. Many candidates answered this question rather poorly, with little sign of realistic reflection on the effectiveness of their presentation of results. Answers that merely stated what had been done together with a statement such as 'I was happy with the result' did not score highly.
- c. This was a little different to questions that have appeared in previous years. The emphasis was on producing a short video (e.g. a YouTube video) to publicise the project to a general audience. Some candidates did well on this, although many answers lacked inspiration. One aspect of the answer was selecting what information should be presented. Many candidates went into too many technical details for a general audience. Nearly all candidates decided to use the maximum video length of five minutes as specified in the question. However, it is often better to have a much shorter video to grab people's attention (most videos shared on social media are under one minute in length) and a few candidates opted for much shorter, snappier videos which would probably attract more views. The other aspect of the answer was deciding how the information should be presented. Many candidates relied on the suggestions given in the question, but many more options

are possible. This question was really looking for creativity in showcasing the project to a general audience in a short, easy-to-understand and memorable way.

Overall, most candidates did a reasonable job with the examination, and marks broadly reflected the marks achieved for the FPR. The main areas where some candidate 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.