
Examiners' commentaries

2017–2018

CO3320 Project – Zone A

Introduction

This report covers the examiners' comments on candidates' performance in the CO3320 Project exam (Zone A). In addition to reading this report, be sure to also read the reports 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 final project report (FPR), and to gauge their level of self-evaluation and reflection on the work they did and the results they achieved.

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

Of the others, some obtained significantly higher marks for their exam 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 exam 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 exam than they did for their FPR. In these cases, the exam 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.

Question 1

This question was about the project subject area.

Q1(a) This part was straightforward and most students scored high marks. For the second part of the question, the examiners were looking for a thoughtful answer about how the project might help future plans, whether in further study or work. Some candidates lost marks by not discussing the second part of the question.

Q1(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; "objectives" are the concrete, measurable steps taken in order to achieve the aims.

Q1(c) Marks were generally a little lower for this part of the question. For projects that involved a literature review (i.e. most projects), the examiners were looking for answers covering:

- what factors make for reliable sources of information (peer review, etc.) and a sensible process of discovering relevant material
- some information about the most relevant sources found
- a discussion of how the sources influenced the direction of the project

Projects that did not involve a literature review as such were often software development projects. For these, examiners were looking for discussion of how the candidate searched for what (if any) similar systems were already available. Some candidates lost marks on this part by not providing details of **how** they discovered relevant material to review or by not discussing specifically how the work influenced the direction of the project.

Question 2

This question was about planning and project management.

Q2(a) This question was answered well by most candidates. The examiners were looking for a thoughtful answer that related to the student's specific project, and a description of how the student decided on time allocation in their initial plan. The most common problems seen in weaker answers included not focusing on the planning stage **at the start of the project** but rather talking more generally about project management as the project proceeded. Another problem was that some students gave answers that simply did not correspond to the project plans presented in their reports.

Q2(b) In this part the examiners were looking for some realistic reflection on how well the planning process actually helped in the execution of the project. This was generally answered well by most candidates. The most common flaw was giving an answer that was too general or without sufficient specific reference to what actually happened in the candidate's own project.

Q2(c) Most candidates provided a good discussion for this part. Weaker answers were those that gave statements that were very specific to the particular project without showing more general insight into what the candidate had learned about project planning and how they might handle the planning process differently in future based upon their learning.

Question 3

This question was about results and conclusions.

Q3(a) This question was about the role of data analysis in the project. For candidates who collected some kind of data in their projects (i.e. nearly all students), examiners gave marks for:

- describing what data they collected
- the appropriateness of the analysis techniques used
- an explanation of the relationship between the findings and the project aims

The data could be experimental data or the results of user evaluations, etc. For the few projects where no original data was collected, marks were given for an insightful and persuasive answer about the candidate's view of how the success of the project should be assessed.

This question was well answered in general. Weaker answers often failed to given sufficient details of the techniques used to analyse data in the project. A smaller number of candidates talked about the role of input data (e.g. in their machine learning projects), but this question was about experimental data collected and analysed as an output of the project.

Q3(b) This was another question testing the candidate's ability to reflect on what they did and on possible areas for improvement. Examiners were looking

for any sensible, insightful discussions relating to the candidate's own project. The standard of responses to this part was mixed. The best answers were by candidates who demonstrated a realistic view of the weaker aspects of their project design (specifically the data analysis aspects) and offered specific and useful suggestions for improvements.

Question 4

This question was about presenting the results of the project to a wider audience.

Q4(a) Although some candidates may not have thought about presenting their work in a short video before, the same basic principles of presentation apply here as they do to the more traditional forms of presentation discussed in the Subject Guide. The question was very clear about what the examiners were looking for in an answer. The general standard of response to this question was very high. One problem seen in some answers was when the candidate proposed a presentation which was structured very much like their report, including too much detail for 2 minutes (some even had a slide of references at the end). The key to composing an effective short video like this is to concentrate on the most important message, and think carefully about how best to convey that effectively.

Q4(b) The general standard of responses to this question was disappointing, even though marks were awarded for any reasonable suggestions. Some of the better responses included suggestions such as adding a link to download the project report, and (where appropriate) to download the developed software. Other reasonable suggestions included providing more background information about the project, etc.

Q4(c) Again, marks were awarded for any sensible suggestions here. However, a number of candidates did not even attempt this part, but perhaps that was because they had run out of time. Good answers included various kinds of social media campaigns to link to the website, and to show the video. Others suggested adding social media buttons on the website to allow readers to share and like the content, etc. Some of the weaker answers did not specifically involve social media at all.

Overall, most candidates did a reasonable job with the exam, 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.

Examiners' commentaries

2017–2018

CO3320 Project – Zone B

Introduction

This report covers the examiners' comments on candidates' performance in the CO3320 Project exam (Zone B). In addition to reading this report, be sure to also read the reports 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 final project report (FPR), and to gauge their level of self-evaluation and reflection on the work they did and the results they achieved.

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

Of the others, some obtained significantly higher marks for their exam 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 exam and provide sensible suggestions of what they might do differently if they were to do the project again. In these cases, the student 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, students received significantly **lower** marks for their exam than they did for their FPR. In these cases, the exam 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.

Question 1

This question was about the project subject area.

Q1(a) This part was straightforward and most students scored high marks. A few of the weaker answers did not answer the question of **why** the project topic was chosen.

Q1(b) This was another easy question for candidates who had read the subject guide and designed their project properly. Most candidates provided a sensible discussion and scored highly on this part. Some candidates did not address the second part of the question and therefore missed out on marks.

Q1(c) Marks were generally a little lower for this part of the question. For projects that involved a literature review (i.e. most projects), the examiners were looking for answers covering:

- what factors make for reliable sources of information (peer review, etc.) and some sensible process of discovering relevant material

- some information about the most relevant sources found
- a discussion of how that influenced the direction of the project

Projects that did not involve a literature review as such were often software development projects. For these, examiners were looking for discussion of how the student searched for what (if any) similar systems were already available. Some candidates lost marks on this part by not providing details of **how** they discovered relevant material to review, or by not discussing specifically how the work influenced the direction of the project.

Question 2

This question was about planning and project management.

Q2(a) For this part the examiners were looking for an answer that reflects the actual plan presented in the project report (or in the PPR if no plan was given in the final report), and supported by reasonable justifications. We received a mix of good and weaker answers to this part. Some of the weaker ones did not match well with what appeared in the candidate's report. Others described the plan presented in the report fairly well, but failed to explain **how** decisions had been made about how much time to allocate to the various tasks.

Q2(b) Most candidates provided a good discussion for this part. Weaker answers were those that gave statements that were very specific to the particular project without showing more general insight into what the candidate had learned about project planning and how they might handle the planning process differently in future based upon their learning.

Q2(c) This part was answered well by most candidates. The weaker answers often gave little discussion of how effective the other tools or techniques were. For candidates who did not use any other tools, the examiners awarded marks for evidence that the candidate had some insight of what didn't work so well in terms of project management and how they could improve their approach in future projects.

Question 3

This question was about results and conclusions.

Q3(a) This section focussed on the role of data analysis in the project. For candidates who collected some kind of data in their projects (i.e. nearly all candidates), examiners gave marks for:

- describing what data they collected
- for the appropriateness of the analysis techniques used
- for an explanation of the relationship between the findings and the project aims

The data could be experimental data or the results of user evaluations, etc. For the few projects where no original data was collected, marks were given for an insightful and persuasive answer about the candidate's view of how the success of the project should be assessed. This question was well answered in general.

Weaker answers often failed to give sufficient details of the techniques used to analyse data in the project. A smaller number of candidates talked about the role of input data (e.g. in their machine learning projects), but this question was about experimental data collected and analysed as an output of the project.

Q3(b) Answers to this part of the question were generally somewhat weak. Many candidates failed to discuss the validity of their conclusions to any

significant degree. Others glossed over significant and quite obvious weaknesses in their methods (e.g. basing conclusions upon responses from only a handful of testers of their systems). The examiners were looking for a realistic discussion of the soundness of the conclusions, discussing issues such as statistical significance of results, etc.

Question 4

This question was about presenting the results of the project to a wider audience.

Q4(a) Although some candidates may not have thought about presenting their work in a video like this before, the same basic principles of presentation apply here as they do to the more traditional forms of presentation discussed in the Subject Guide. The examiners were looking for answers that met the brief as specified in the question, particularly respecting the fact that the audience know nothing about the subject area. The 12 minute time allotment meant it needed to cover only edited highlights of the project. Most candidates scored well for this part. Some of the weaker answers went into details about the content of specific slides when this part of the question was looking for a higher-level description of the proposed approach and organisation of the presentation.

Q4(b) Most candidates did well on this part. The examiners were looking not just at the content of the individual slides but also the overall structure and flow of the talk. Another important aspect was delivering content at an appropriate level of detail for an audience who know nothing about the subject area (as specified at the start of the question). Some of the weaker answers to this part went into too much technical detail in some slides (e.g. presenting UML diagrams or even source code).

Overall, most candidates did a reasonable job with the exam, 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.