HOW TO PASS

RELEVANT TO ALL ACCA STUDENTS

Why do students fail the OBU *Research and Analysis Project* (RAP)? One significant cause of failure is that they either have inadequate knowledge and understanding of the relevant guidelines, or they do not follow the guidelines in their submitted projects. The current guidelines (2008) are on the ACCA website, and should be regarded as a template for achieving a good pass.

The assessment details for the RAP are a vital part of the guidelines, as they specify what you have to do to pass. The RAP Assessment Grid (available at www.accaglobal.com/documents/assessmentgrid.pdf) is also a key document: it provides details of what is required for each assessment criterion.

ASSESSMENT OF THE RAP
The research project
In order to pass the RAP, students must attain a pass grade (A, B, C) in the four technical and professional skills (see below). In order to pass this element, students must show understanding of relevant concepts, theories and models in accountancy/business.

They must show that they can apply these concepts, theories, models in accountancy/business to gather, analyse and evaluate information, and present conclusions and recommendations on their chosen project topic. Understanding, applying, analysing and evaluating are important cognitive or thinking skills, and the research project is a guided independent study to enable students to demonstrate that they possess them. In addition, students must also demonstrate competence in each of three 'graduate' skills

in: communication, information gathering and referencing, and information technology.

The grade awarded for the research project is the grade for the technical and professional skills element.

The Skills and Learning Statement
Students must pass the *Skills and Learning Statement* (SLS) by demonstrating competence in two 'graduate' skills of self-reflection and communication.

Self-reflection is assessed by answers to four specific questions and communication skills by the preparation and delivery of a presentation to the mentor.

Note that if you pass the RAP, but fail the SLS, then on successful resubmission of the SLS you will be awarded the original grade for the research project.

How do markers apply the assessment criteria?
Let us consider how markers interpret the RAP Assessment Grid in assessing a specific topic: The key factors or indicators in the motivation of employees in an organisation.

This is the second most popular topic, normally representing 10 to 11% of all submissions.

Understanding accountancy/business models
The starting point is the grade descriptor, and for our purposes we will consider in all cases what markers are looking for in a grade A submission. The generic A grade descriptor (see RAP Assessment Grid) is: 'highly appropriate choice of theory/concepts; very clear relevance and shows evidence of wider reading'.

This provides a general guideline; more specifically, markers will be looking for evidence of understanding of concepts, theories models etc.

Understanding implies that you can define concepts, explain interpret and critique theories selected, and draw appropriate inferences from them. Thus a clear definition of 'motivation', and explanations of 'factors of motivation' (what motivates employees?) and 'indicators of motivation' (evidence that employees are motivated) must be provided. A range of relevant theories must be reviewed, and their implications considered. Explanations must demonstrate understanding, and be linked appropriately to the organisation studied. Similarities and differences between theories should be explained, for example between 'content' theories – which focus on what motivates employees – and 'process' theories, which focus on how employees are motivated.

Where there is little evidence of understanding of concepts/theories of motivation, incorrect interpretation of theories, and no discussion of factors or indicators of motivation, then the project will fail.

Application of accountancy/business models
The generic A descriptor is: 'insightful and critical application of models to the project topic'. Application implies that the theories chosen can, and must be, related to the organisation studied.

Markers expect to see theories used to design appropriate research tools about motivation in the organisational context (eg in a questionnaire or suitable questions for interviews) which enable conclusions to be established.

YOUR RAP

STUDENTS MUST RECOGNISE THAT MARKERS WILL FAIL PROJECTS THAT DO NOT CONFORM TO GUIDELINES AND DO NOT MEET THE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA. TO ACHIEVE A PASS, THE BEST ADVICE IS TO READ THE GUIDANCE ON PROJECT PREPARATION AND FOLLOW IT.

Any limitations to the application of theories should be discussed, and the theories chosen should be applied in identifying/defining issues in the organisation studied.

Markers fail projects where theories have not been used to design the research instruments, and are not used to identify key issues in the organisation studied.

Evaluation of information, analysis and conclusions

The generic A descriptor is: 'high level of critical thought shown in the analysis, and a rigorous approach to the evaluation of information'. This criterion is one of the main areas of project failure. Where there is little analysis, or attempt to explain and the discussion is mainly descriptive, then a fail grade is awarded on this criterion.

Analysis implies detailed examination of an issue, and breaking it down into its constituent parts. It implies a capacity to compare and contrast: for example to compare one organisation with another, or to contrast what actually occurs in an organisation against what the theory considered predicts.

Evaluation implies reviewing and appraising options and alternatives, and drawing conclusions and making recommendations that can be justified based on the evidence considered. Markers expect to see a full, clear and accurate appraisal of the evidence gathered against the theories considered. Conclusions must be reasoned, based on analysis, supported by evidence gathered and related to the factors/indicators of motivation in the case organisation. Limitations to the analysis/conclusions should be identified and discussed, and where possible, sound practical recommendations, based on evidence and related to theories considered, should be made about the case organisation.

You must be aware that markers fail projects where there is no attempt to appraise the evidence against theories outlined, where conclusions and recommendations are weak or absent, and where there is no discussion of limitations relevant to the analysis and conclusions.

Presentation of project findings

The generic A descriptor is: 'can engage reader in a professional manner and produce a relevant and coherent project with an appropriate structure'.

Markers expect to see a project which meets the guidelines in terms of structure, word count, presentation, etc. There should be appropriate use of appendices (note the need to include a copy of eg questionnaire/summary of results), excellent use of language/graphics, etc, suitable for a business audience.

The graduate skills descriptors outlined in the RAP Assessment Grid are sufficiently explicit to require little further amplification. However, it may be helpful to emphasise that students often have problems with information gathering and referencing. Markers do expect to see a range of relevant sources, including online sources, in a correctly referenced list of references, and also to see evidence of referencing in the main body of the text. Correct referencing is an essential skill and one that is expected by markers.

Finally, in the *Skills and Learning Statement*, you must answer the four specified questions. Show that you have reflected on your own strengths and weaknesses, on what you did and how you did it. Providing evidence and specific examples that illustrate what you have learned from the entire process is the best way to demonstrate that you have met the self-reflection criterion. The communication skills element requires you to include a copy of the presentation to your mentor. The presentation must have an appropriate structure and content linked to your project report findings.

The RAP can be a valuable experience for students, which enables them to develop their skills by completing a significant piece of work on an approved topic area. However, students must recognise that markers will fail projects that do not conform to guidelines and do not meet the assessment criteria.

To achieve a good pass, the best advice is: read the guidance on project preparation and assessment carefully … then follow it.

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