Writing Examination Answers

This is an independent study course, with no classes or tutor feedback. The course materials are designed to be useful for anyone taking formal written examinations. They are self-contained, with a Key providing answers, advice for the individual learner and links to useful websites.

Introduction
Students who fail in examinations often do so because they fail to understand the question and therefore write a different answer from what the question required. The purpose of this Writing Examination Answers course is to give you practice in responding to the type of questions you are likely to meet in written examinations for the university course you are attending. Two of the eight units deal with global issues related to work for examinations: Unit 1, the Introduction, on analysing questions, and Unit 8 on preparing for examinations.

Units 2-7 deal with the principal instructions found in university exam papers - Discuss..., To what extent... etc. It is essential to understand clearly what the examiners mean when they use one of these key words, so that you can plan and write an appropriate answer. Each of units 2-7 includes the following activities:

- analysing the question-type and specific examples of questions
- planning answers to a sample question
- writing up in limited time an answer to a question from your field

Examiners are interested in a well constructed answer that covers the ground of the question, rather than in a grammatically perfect piece of written English. (If possible, of course, they would like to have both!) So your priorities in thinking about exam answer writing should be:

- What does the question mean?
- What relevant facts can I remember?
- How should I organise the information?
- How can I best express my answer in English?

Notice that language comes last. Even native speakers make slips in grammar and spelling, particularly under exam conditions, and in many cases, small errors will not even be noticed by the exam markers.

Initial reflection points

1. ‘Passing an examination is not simply a matter of hard work’. Do you agree? If so, what reasons - apart from laziness - are there for a student failing an exam?
2. People sometimes quote the student who is supposed to have said, ‘I can’t possibly have failed. I learnt the course textbook by heart’. Do you accept the student’s point of view?
3. At the moment, do you think you are likely to pass your course exams? If not, what are the possible causes of failure?

Compare your answers with the suggestions in the Key.
Analysing exam questions

In units 2-7 we will be analysing what is meant by some of the commonest question instructions. In this first session, we take a general look at the way questions can be ‘dissected’ into their essential components. Compare these versions of the same question:

A. Mineral resources
B. Describe mineral resources
C. Describe the industrial uses of mineral resources
D. Describe the industrial uses of mineral resources from the deep ocean floor

As you see, the question instructions become more specific and more restricted. Question A is hardly a question at all; it might be the title of a secondary school essay, but not an exam question. Question B is also unlikely at university level. Question C leaves the writer free to write on the exploitation of any of hundreds of minerals. It is only Question D, that limits the scope of the intended answer enough to make it answerable in the time available in an exam. The way in which examiners restrict the scope of a question could be looked at in this way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>instruction</th>
<th>aspect</th>
<th>topic</th>
<th>restriction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe</td>
<td>the industrial uses</td>
<td>of mineral resources</td>
<td>from the deep ocean floor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Steps in analysing a question

1. Look for the topic, the central part of the question. Then look for any restriction - in this case, the source of the minerals.
2. Decide which aspect is to be addressed. It is often shown by a phrase ending in ‘...of’: for example, ‘the importance of ...’, ‘the role of ...’, ‘the contribution of ...’
3. Finally, look for the instruction, which is usually in the first part of the question. Sometimes the instruction is ‘hidden’ and you are expected to work it out for yourself. For example, in order to answer the exam question ‘The relative merits of drug and behavioural therapy in addiction treatment’, you would need to understand that the ‘hidden’ instruction is ‘Compare and contrast the merits of...’ etc.

Task 1

Below are a number of questions. Analyse them in terms of the four-part model of instruction-aspect-topic-restriction. Use a table like the one below to dissect each question; if a question does not contain one of the four components, put a zero in that column.

A. Discuss the social and economic consequences of a high birth rate.
B. Why has synthetic food production increased in the last 20 years?
C. Assess the contribution of the FAO to the reduction of locust attack in the Sahel.
D. Write notes on the feasibility of recycling nonrenewable materials, particularly those found in industrial waste.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>instruction</th>
<th>topic</th>
<th>aspect</th>
<th>restriction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compare your answers with the suggestions in the Key.
This step-by-step analysis of questions is essential for successful interpretation of what the examiners want. In units 2-7 we concentrate on the instruction words used in typical questions.

**Instruction Words**

Some examiners ask direct questions in examination papers, as in question B, Task 1. However, as we have said, ‘instruction words’ are very common. Many different instruction words or expressions are used. Here are some examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assess</th>
<th>Describe</th>
<th>Give an account of</th>
<th>To what extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Discuss</td>
<td>Identify</td>
<td>Write an essay on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment on</td>
<td>Examine</td>
<td>Outline</td>
<td>Write notes on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critically evaluate</td>
<td>Explain</td>
<td>Summarise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Task 2**

In the Key to Task 1, we suggested that in question B ‘Why’ was equivalent to ‘Explain’. Which instruction word is implied in each of the questions 1 to 4 below?

- *What role does the cytoskeleton play in morphogenesis?* (Cellular and Molecular Biology)
- *Why do states engage in protectionism?* (European and Political Economy)
- *What is the PERFECT? Is there an English Perfect?* (Linguistics)
- *How might ornament be viewed from a Freudian perspective?* (Architecture)

Compare your answers with those in the Key.

The list of instruction words in the table is not complete. Look through the past papers in your subject and note the instruction words used. Make sure you understand what they mean. If necessary, check with one of your tutors.

Do you think there is a difference between the following questions?

- *What are the employment implications of foreign direct investment?*
- *Explain the employment implications of foreign direct investment.*
- *Discuss the employment implications of foreign direct investment."

The first question may require only a simple statement of the facts. The second needs more detail, an explanation of those facts, e.g. why foreign direct investment affects employment. And for the third, you might be expected to give an opinion on the benefits or drawbacks of foreign direct investment.

How you interpret a question depends on a number of factors, including the amount of time allowed for it. For example, if you were allowed one hour for Q1 above, you would probably be expected to answer it as for Q3.

**Instructions for units 2-7**

At the end of each unit is a Writing Practice Task providing practice in answering exam questions in your academic field. The materials are more effective when you are able to use them with a partner, preferably a fellow student on your academic course. Your partner need not take part in the writing activities, but they should be prepared to discuss the content of answers with you.
Unit 1: Writing Examination Answers

Checklist: Your course exams

• When will the exams take place?
• How many exam papers are there?
• How are the subject-areas (lecture course topics) grouped in the exams?
• How long do the exams last?
• How are the papers structured?
  - How many parts / sections?
  - How many questions in each part?
  - How many must you answer?
  - Are any questions compulsory?
• Can you take materials, notes or a calculator into the exam room?
• Do you have to pass all the papers in order to pass the exam?
• Do you have to pass the exam to pass the course?
• What proportion of the final marks is made up by the exam?
• Can you re-sit your exams if you fail?

You probably don’t yet know the answers to all the questions. Be sure you find out any ‘missing’ answers before the end of the course.

Unit 1: ANSWER KEY

Initial discussion points: Suggested Answers

1. ‘Passing an examination is not simply a matter of hard work’. Do you agree? If so, what reasons - apart from laziness - are there for a student failing an exam?

You can probably think of several reasons but, as we said in the introduction, the reason we are most concerned with in this course is failure to analyse and interpret the questions correctly. Other reasons include poor health and even poor handwriting.

2. People sometimes quote the student who is supposed to have said, ‘I can’t possibly have failed. I learnt the course textbook by heart’. Do you accept the student’s point of view?

Of course not! At post-graduate level, it is important to read widely and to demonstrate critical ability.

3. At the moment, do you think you are likely to pass your course exams? If not, what are the possible causes of failure?

One possible cause for not passing is failure to know simple practical details like the date and place of the exam.
Task 1: Suggested answers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Restriction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Discuss</td>
<td>high birth rate</td>
<td>social and economic consequences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. (Explain)</td>
<td>synthetic food production</td>
<td>reason for increase</td>
<td>in last 20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Assess</td>
<td>FAO contribution*</td>
<td>reduction of locust attack</td>
<td>in the Sahel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Write notes on</td>
<td>recycling nonrenewable materials</td>
<td>feasibility</td>
<td>particularly those in industrial waste</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In Question C, the topic and aspect might be the other way round, depending on course content. For example, in a course exam for agronomists, the topic could be locust attack reduction; in an exam for a course in aid and development project management, the topic might be the FAO. (FAO = Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN).

Task 2: Suggested answers

The questions could be rewritten as follows:

- Q1 Describe the role of the cytoskeleton in morphogenesis.
- Q2 Explain why states engage in protectionism.
- Q3 Define the PERFECT. Compare the English ‘Perfect’ with the perfect in another language.
- Q4 Discuss ornament viewed from a Freudian perspective.
Writing Examination Answers

Unit 2

Introduction

DESCRIBE is relatively straightforward; you need to RECALL, ORGANISE and STATE relevant facts. A dictionary definition of the verb ‘to describe’ is: To state the major characteristics of. Notice the word state; you are not asked to give a personal view of the topic but to set out an answer in a neutral way.

DESCRIBE questions may require a description of one of three things:

1. a system/situation:
   - Describe the principal elements in Edinburgh’s transport system

2. a sequence of (past) events:
   - Trace the major developments in medicine in late 19th century Britain

3. a process:
   - Describe the procedure by which a company goes into liquidation

Approaching a DESCRIBE Question

Type 1: System / situation

One possible approach to a DESCRIBE question of the system / situation type is to identify all the relevant characteristics of the system. Take this question for example: ‘Identify the major aspects of Edinburgh’s museum provision’. You might think of the following characteristics:

- the number of museums in Edinburgh in comparison with other cities;
- Royal Scottish Museum, Museum of Childhood, Our Dynamic Earth, National Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art, Scotch Whisky Centre, the Zoo (Is it a museum?);
- the sections of the public these museums are intended to attract;
- the interactivity of exhibits, special exhibitions and other events;
- facilities, such as provision for disabled people, guided tours, museum shop and cafeteria;
- admission charges, opening hours;
- uniqueness to Scotland, etc.

You would need to decide which of these characteristics are relevant; your particular course would guide you in this. The question asks about “major aspects”. An aspect is a “way of looking at something”; it is a way of organising information. So you might next categorise the relevant characteristics into aspects.

- Aspect A, for example, might be Types of museum (general or special interest, etc.);
- Aspect B might be the Public (people who usually attend these museums, and their purpose in doing so).
- Aspect C might be Ways of improving attendance (special exhibitions and events), and so on.
You may then approach your plan as follows:

Paragraph 1 Introduction
Paragraph 2 Types of Museum
Paragraph 3 The Public
Paragraph 4 Improving Attendance

... ...

Paragraph X Conclusion

N.B. This structure (and the question) limits itself to major aspects of the topic. There is not time to go into less important areas.

**Type 2: Historical Sequence**

In the case of a type (2) question, you need to organise your information (events, decisions, dates) chronologically:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At the beginning of the 1850s...</th>
<th>PAST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During the subsequent 25 years...</td>
<td>TENSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of this...</td>
<td>FORMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the last quarter of the century...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By 1900 the state of the science was...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Type 3: Process descriptions**

Since process descriptions are timeless, the appropriate tense in English is the Present Simple. Your answer should set out not only the order of events but also how they relate. If appropriate to the topic, divide the chain (or cycle) of events into stages. You may find it useful to illustrate your answer with a simple diagram or flowchart.

**Task 1**

Plan an answer to this question by discussing the content and format of the plan (e.g. tree-diagram or flow-chart) with a partner:

Describe the various ways in which University of Edinburgh students find accommodation

**Task 2**

When you have completed Task 1, compare your plan with the version given in the Answer Key. In what ways does that version differ from yours? What are the strengths and weaknesses of your plan and of the example given?

**Writing Practice**

Select a DESCRIBE question form a past exam paper for your Master’s course. Past University of Edinburgh paper can be found at:

http://www.exampapers.lib.ed.ac.uk/exam_papers/exams.html

If no papers on your subject are available, or if you cannot find a suitable DESCRIBE question, you can invent an appropriate question. Plan an answer and make brief notes. Then write up your answer in essay form.

Allow yourself as much time as you will have in your actual exam - not more!

Typically, Master’s students have 30-45 minutes per question.

Show your written answer to someone who is familiar with your field - a classmate or, if possible, a lecturer from your course. Ask them to give you their comments on what you have written: its content, argument and clarity.
**ANSWER KEY**

**Unit 2: Task 1**

Describe the various ways in which University of Edinburgh students find accommodation.

**Possible answer plan**

Types of accommodation:

1. University accommodation
   - student house
   - hall of residence
   - university flat
   - approved list of accomm.

2. Private accommodation
   - independent flat
   - room in shared flat
   - bedsitter
   - room with family

Sources of information:

- university accommodation office
- letting agencies
- newspaper advertisements
- university noticeboards
- word of mouth (other students)
- Internet

Procedures:

University accommodation: **select - apply - wait for acceptance / refusal - sign contract**

Private accommodation: **search - select - view - decide whether acceptable - sign lease**
Writing Examination Answers

Unit 3: Compare and Contrast

Introduction
The two instructions COMPARE and CONTRAST frequently appear side by side in the same question. Even if you find that an exam question in a past paper contains only the word ‘Compare...’, think carefully about whether the examiner really means you to state both what is similar and what is different. For example, look at the two examples below:

- Compare the major features of cities in developing and industrialised countries
- Compare and contrast the major features of cities in developing and industrialised countries
- Comparing anything surely involves analysing how one thing is like and unlike another, so you would not write different answers to those two questions.

When you look through past exam questions for your course, you will need to bear in mind that the COMPARE instruction is likely to require an answer that sets out both the similarities and the differences between the systems, procedures, approaches, etc. mentioned in the question.

Example
Consider this question, and the graphic plan underneath:

Compare and contrast the Open University and traditional universities in Britain

Possible answer plan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>O.U.</th>
<th>conventional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Similarities</strong></td>
<td>1. academic status</td>
<td>av. age = 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. both carry out research</td>
<td>restricted entry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. both teach u’grads &amp; p’grads</td>
<td>face-to-face teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Differences</strong></td>
<td>av. age = 32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feature 4:</td>
<td>open entry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feature 5:</td>
<td>distance teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feature 6:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answer Structure:
In deciding on the structure of your written answer, it is usual to deal first with similarities and then with differences. The section on differences can be written in one of two ways. You can either refer to all three features (4, 5 and 6) at the Open University and then all three at the conventional university; or alternatively you can describe feature 4 at the Open University and conventional university, followed by feature 5 at both, and then feature 6 at both. It may help to think of these two approaches as ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’, in terms of the plan shown above.

Task 1
Read the article ‘The Landmines Legacy’ (*EDIT Issue 13, Winter 1997/1998*), in the box section. It describes the problem of unexploded landmines and some of the techniques for dealing with them.
Read the article selectively, looking for relevant information to answer the following question, ‘Compare the different techniques for clearing landmines’. You will need to look for the positive and negative effects of each technique, but not all effects are actually mentioned. You may find it useful to create a table, like the one below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Speed</th>
<th>Sensitivity/Terrain</th>
<th>Effect on soil</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sniffer Dog</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Then write up an answer plan for the question. It may be better in this case to use the ‘horizontal’ approach: consider the cost of each technique, then the speed, sensitivity, and the effect on the soil, etc. Remember to include a conclusion.

**Task 2**

When you have finished, compare your version with the example given in the Answer Key.

**Writing Practice**

Select a COMPARE/CONTRAST question from a past exam paper for your Master’s course. Past University of Edinburgh papers can be found at [http://www.exampapers.lib.ed.ac.uk/exam_papers/exams.html](http://www.exampapers.lib.ed.ac.uk/exam_papers/exams.html)

If no papers on your subject are available, or if you cannot find a suitable COMPARE/CONTRAST question, you can invent an appropriate question. Plan an answer and make brief notes. Then write up your answer in essay form.

**Allow yourself as much time as you would have in the actual exam - no more!**

Typically, Master’s students have 30-45 minutes per question.

Show your written answer to someone who is familiar with your field - a classmate or, if possible, a lecturer from your course. Ask them to give you their comments on what you have written: its content, argument and clarity.
The Landmines Legacy

**Jenny Booth** examines the issues and a possible weapon in the war against landmines.

The carpet of flowers laid out in front of Kensington Palace in September made Pat Banks very sad, but not just because of the death of a beautiful Princess. Mrs Banks, a landmines clearance expert from Edinburgh, said the money could have been spent on the charity which was closest to the heart of Diana, Princess of Wales, in the days before she died.

Diana’s last public duty was her visit to Bosnia to comfort landmine victims, and to campaign for an end to the senseless slaughter and maiming of civilians. The trip had already produced some success, persuading America to endorse the Princess’s campaign for a ban. Within a week of her return, President Clinton announced that the US was interested in supporting a Canadian initiative to ban anti-personnel mines by December.

“I think it was the images of Diana meeting child victims that pushed them over the edge,” said Jerry White, co-founder of Landmine Survivors Network, the charity that flew the Princess to former Yugoslavia. “Her symbolic visit to Bosnia showed that Clinton was just sitting on the fence on this issue. The timing was perfect, August is a dead month in Washington and she forced their hand.”

Sadly, nothing is quite that simple in the complex world of international politics. America was keen to join - but only if it could continue to lay landmines to protect the border with Communist North Korea. Clinton also wanted exemptions allowing American troops to use both ‘smart’ mines, which disarm themselves automatically, and the ordinary $3 variety, in combat zones if they were attacked. What is the point of banning landmines until the military wants to use them? argued the other countries at the talks. After 24 hours of tense diplomacy, America did not sign. Nor were Russia or China, two of the world’s biggest landmine producers and exporters, among the 100 nations who signed up.

So the treaty that will duly be signed in December will indeed enforce a total ban. Unfortunately, rather less than half the world will be signed up to it, and herein lies the danger for all the landmine victims past and future whom Diana was trying to help. Many in the mine-clearing industry fear that the public interest in landmines which Diana woke up will turn over and go back to sleep again, now that she is dead and something appears to have been done.

The sombre truth is that a limited landmine ban will have even less effect on protecting innocent civilians from mines, than the British government’s ban on handguns will have on protecting innocent passers-by from drugs enforcers. There are too many mines already out there, in the soil of former war zones, killing 25 people a day and wounding 40 more on US estimates. Victims are almost exclusively civilians, peasant farmers creeping back to their land to scrape a living for their families, women fetching water from distant springs, and children foraging for firewood.

If Diana’s wishes are to be carried out a massive clearance effort is needed, but that takes money - the kind of money that can buy a million bouquets. “It has grieved me seeing all that money in flowers,” said Mrs Banks, days before she returned to Bosnia. “The death has highlighted the mines issue, and it is very much in Diana’s spirit to use the opportunity to press for change, but I fear that the attention will wane if people aren’t reminded.”
The Landmines Legacy
- continued

But there is a bright patch in the sky, she says - the work of Professor Stephen Salter, an inventor at the University of Edinburgh, in developing a low budget device for clearing landmines. Mrs Banks and Professor Salter met last year after she was shown an article in The Scotsman about his extraordinary prototype, the Dervish. Cash is still lacking to pay for field trials in Bosnia this winter, but the Dervish has already done well in Scottish experiments. Professor Salter and his team hope that it will provide an answer to at least some of the more insuperable problems that face mine clearers like Mrs Banks and her husband Eddie, who was head of the United Nations mines clearance programme in Angola until the political situation worsened.

The Banks now run their own de-mining company, working with whatever international funding is available. Modern clearance methods are painfully slow. Sniffer dogs are used sometimes to map where the mines are, and mines can be detonated in situ rather than digging them up, although this tends to sow metal fragments in the earth. In sensitive spots, like cemeteries or houses, the mines have to be pinpointed and then dug up by hand. This is still the most common technique of de-mining, but is so slow that it takes a day to clear four square metres.

Most of the technology for speeding up the process was designed by the military, and has drawbacks for civilian work. During the Second World War the British army fitted giant flails to the fronts of tanks, and charged through minefields threshing the ground and exploding the mines in the tank’s path, to clear a track broad enough for a column of men to mount an attack. This, and other devices like it, was dubbed one of ‘Churchill’s funnies’. But such devices are cumbersome, no good on wooded terrain, and are extremely destructive of the fragile African topsoil that farmers depend on for their livelihoods. “This kind of mines clearance machine costs £150,000 to £200,000, and operating costs are too high,” said Mrs Banks, sitting in Professor Salter’s research laboratory, where she had come for one of her regular progress checks on the Dervish.

The concept behind the Dervish is easily understood - a hallmark of the work of Professor Salter, an engineer with a track record of developing simple solutions to complex problems. His ideas to harness wavepower through ‘ducks’ strung across bays and turned by the tide, was put into use in Scandinavia, but received little acclaim in his home country. He aims to invent a mine-clearer that will cost less than US $3,000, and be capable of operation and repair by local people in the country where the solution is most badly needed. Most importantly, its clearance rate is up to four square metres a minute, a day’s work for a hand-prodder - and the Dervish works 24 hour shifts.

Now on its third prototype, the Dervish is a simple tetrahedron of scaffolding poles, with an axle and a toothed wheel, made from very tough Swedish Hardox 400 steel, at each corner. From the apex is suspended a 250 cc motorcycle engine in a protective case, to drive the wheels. When set in motion, the Dervish spins round, like its namesake, and slowly traverses the ground so as to cover every millimetre with a pattern of overlapping circles.

“We are trying to roll over a mine with a weight that is heavier than a person’s foot, so that the mine will function. The Dervish will take little damage as it is an open structure with all members lying oblique to the shock fronts,” explained Professor Salter. He and University of Edinburgh electrical engineer Jimmy Dripps are now working on a high frequency version of the Decca Navigator system which can command the Dervish’s movements to a precision of a few millimetres from a control point hundreds of metres away.
In field trials at Otterburn, tests with an anti-tank mine charge showed that most of the structure could survive quite severe explosions, because its streamlined shape presents little profile to the blast. Funding has come from a wide range of public and private sources, notably the City of Edinburgh Council, and in a swords-to-ploughshares touch the explosives firm Dell has lent its expertise. The Dervish is likely to be most effective on flat farmland free of rocks, where it can spin unimpeded. This sort of terrain is receiving little attention from mine clearers at the moment, as governments prefer to concentrate on towns and business zones to get the economy going again.

But bigger hurdles than rocks lie in the Dervish’s way. The main fear at the moment is that the UN will rule the Dervish out unless it can be proved to clear 99.6 per cent of mines, the current humanitarian standard for a UN mines clearance certificate. The trouble is, the figure is both unproveable and unachievable. “Mines move, earth moves, mines swim in wet and sandy soil. The fact is, the figures are meaningless,” said Mrs Banks. “You should see the devastation in the clearance contingents when an accident happens because something has been missed - but something will always be missed. All the clearance methods have failings. You just need a combination of enough techniques sufficiently different so they fail in different ways.”

The greatest danger is public apathy. Diana is gone, and the world still faces a crisis of so many landmines it seems impossible ever to clear them all. In the circumstances, Mrs Banks fears people will become discouraged and shut their eyes. Yet ironically, the job is not quite so big as they fear. The figures, 8 million mines in Bosnia, 18 million in Angola, and so on, were only ever guesstimates and are now being proved wrong. In fact there are only likely to be about 2 million mines in Angola, and half a million in Bosnia - still bad, but achievable.

“At the moment we have surveyed and quantified 60 per cent of the minefields in Bosnia, and by 30 June there were 227,000 mines,” said Mrs Banks. “Yet everyone continues to use the inflated figures, all for their own reasons. Those of us in the clearance community think it’s going to have a backlash. At the same time, so much more could be done with the money we are spending on clearing mines in old-fashioned, ineffective ways. We could save many lives and speed our work by training local women to map minefields, and giving children mine safety training.”

Neither she nor Professor Salter were bold enough to voice the hope, but if the $3,000 Dervish is successful in its field trials, it could be built, worked and repaired by local people so that they could take control of their own lands once more and overcome the crippling terror of mines. That would be a truly fitting memorial to Diana, Princess of Wales.

*Jenny Booth is Home Affairs correspondent of The Scotsman*
### ANSWER KEY

You will not be able to fill every cell in the table from explicit information in the article, but some of the missing information can be inferred.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Speed</th>
<th>Sensitivity/Terrain</th>
<th>Effect on soil</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sniffer dogs + detonation in situ</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>sows metal fragments in earth</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>digging up by hand</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4 sq m/day</td>
<td>sensitive/any</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>dangerous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>giant flails on tanks</td>
<td>£150,000-£200,000</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>not woods</td>
<td>destroys topsoil</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Dervish</td>
<td>&lt;$3,000</td>
<td>4 sq m/min.</td>
<td>not rocks</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>operation &amp; repair easy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Possible answer plan**

- **Introduction:** A number of factors have to be taken into account, including cost, speed of operation, sensitivity and effect on the soil.

- **Cost:** Cheapest methods are sniffer dogs and manual removal; tanks fitted with flails are the most expensive (£200,000). The Dervish is expected to cost less than this (about $3,000) to buy, and will be capable of operation and repair by local people, further reducing costs.

- **Speed and Sensitivity:** Digging up by hand is very sensitive - suitable for use in cemeteries and towns, but slow (4 square metres/24 h). Tanks faster but they unsuitable for use in towns. The Dervish is fast (4 square metres/min).

- **Soil:** Detonation in situ by any method, including the Dervish, tends to sow metal fragments in the earth - tanks destructive of the topsoil and are therefore unsuitable for farmland; also of little use in wooded areas. The Dervish needs to spin unimpeded and is therefore most effective on flat land free of rocks. Only sniffer dogs and detonation in situ or digging up by hand can be used where the area is covered with trees, rocks or other obstacles. The latter carries risk to personnel involved.

- **Conclusion:** No single technique perfect - only solution is to use a combination of methods.
Introduction

Truth is rarely a 100% matter. In most academic fields it is possible to present evidence to show that a statement is true or appropriate for some circumstances but not others. In such cases, the question setter may ask you to explain to what extent you accept the truth or applicability of a particular idea or comment. For example, take this question:

‘To what extent can the British public be said to participate in the political process?’

Here the examiner assumes there is public political participation in the UK, but is asking you to say what level of participation there is. You have, of course, to justify your opinion. The extent of your agreement is up to you, but you are expected to avoid total agreement or total disagreement.

The fact that the question has been set in that form is an indication that there are two sides to the issue. The examiners expect you to show both sides, though not necessarily to accept there is an equal balance between them. We could express this in a diagram:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANGE OF OPINION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;-----agrees-----&gt; &lt;-------------------disagrees-----------&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;----------agrees------------&gt; &lt;--------disagrees----------&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;------------------agrees---------------&gt; &lt;-----disagrees-----&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is no single correct answer. If students A, B and C justified their different positions equally well, they would get equal marks. At the end of your answer, it is important to make clear exactly where you are setting the balance between the ‘yes it is true’ and ‘no, it isn’t true’ parts of your answer.

The conclusion can be brief, but it should leave the reader in no doubt about your final position in terms of the truth or validity of the statement. Alternative expressions in TO WHAT EXTENT questions are HOW FAR... and HOW VALID... If you look through your past papers, you may be able to identify other variants.

Task 1

Consider this question:

‘To what extent does a Master’s degree qualify you for professional work in (your field)?’

Think carefully about the necessary elements in your profession and decide which of them can or cannot be improved by a postgraduate course. Notice that the question refers to all postgraduate courses in your field, not only the one you are now doing at Edinburgh. Make your planning notes in the grid below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAN be trained/ improved</th>
<th>CANNOT be trained/ improved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Task 2

Exchange notes on the ‘yes’ and ‘no’ aspects with another student. Discuss anything which is not clear.
Writing Practice

Select a TO WHAT EXTENT question from a past exam paper for your Master’s course. Past University of Edinburgh papers can be found at

http://www.exampapers.lib.ed.ac.uk/exam_papers/exams.html

If no papers on your subject are available, or if you cannot find a suitable TO WHAT EXTENT question, you can invent an appropriate question. Plan an answer and make brief notes. Then write up your answer in essay form.

Allow yourself as much time as you would have in the actual exam - no more!
Typically, Master’s students have 30-45 minutes per question.

Show your written answer to someone who is familiar with your field - a classmate or, if possible, a lecturer from your course. Ask them to give you their comments on what you have written: its content, argument and clarity.
Writing Examination Answers

Unit 5: Discuss (part 1) and Explain

Introduction

If you look back through past papers you may well find that DISCUSS questions are the most common single type of instruction in exams in your field. Here is a random sampling of University of Edinburgh postgraduate exam papers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Total no. of questions</th>
<th>DISCUSS questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trop. Vet. Medicine</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Management</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatry</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trop. Vet. Science</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Medicine</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that DISCUSS questions are so common is one reason for devoting two units of the course to this instruction type. However, there is a more important reason why more time needs to be spent on DISCUSS, which should become clear in the course of Task 1.

Task 1

Below is a list of eleven questions (A-K). Read through all the questions - not just those from your own specialist field. Think about what the candidate is being asked to do in each case; can you identify why, in general terms, the DISCUSS instruction can be problematic?

A. ‘Attempts to eradicate diseases of animals from specific countries often prove more difficult than anticipated’. Discuss this statement with reference to the tropics and subtropics. *(Tropical Veterinary Medicine)*

B. Discuss the survey techniques which can be used to investigate complex causal associations in veterinary medicine. *(Tropical Veterinary Medicine)*

C. List the common causes of “sudden death” of cattle in the tropics. Discuss the problems of establishing its causes. *(Tropical Veterinary Science)*

D. Discuss critically the use of neuroleptic maintenance treatment of schizophrenia. *(Psychiatry)*

E. ‘Planning, as a form of state intervention, is in the public interest, because it removes some control from the capitalist’. Discuss. *(Urban Design and Regional Planning)*

F. Discuss some of the physical problems affecting human settlements which may be caused by changing world conservation and energy restriction policies. *(Urban Design and Regional Planning)*

G. Discuss the responses of farm animals in general to hot dry conditions. How would (a) Aberdeen Angus, (b) Jersey and (c) Zebu cattle differ in their responses to such conditions? *(Animal Breeding)*

H. Discuss the place of radiotherapy in the management of cancer of the prostate gland. *(Medical Radiotherapy)*

I. Inbreeding has been of considerable use in maize improvement. Discuss why it has been of much less importance in the improvement of domesticated poultry and animals. *(Animal Breeding)*

J. Health Authorities are being encouraged, as a matter of national policy, to give priority to the development of their community services for the mentally ill. Discuss whether this is likely to lead to a more effective and efficient service. *(Community Medicine)*

K. Discuss the case for and against the financing of a national health service by compulsory insurance. *(Community Medicine)*
From that sample, you should have found the second reason for spending more time over DISCUSS questions: it is the fact that the instruction DISCUSS is used to introduce two different types of question. In one case, DISCUSS means something like DESCRIBE; in the other, it is an issue for DEBATE. It is therefore essential to practise identifying which type of answer the question setters had in mind.

Task 2

Look back to questions A-K and decide in each case whether the question belongs to the DISCUSS/DESCRIBE category, or to DISCUSS/DEBATE, or could be interpreted as either. Write the question letters in the appropriate box below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>question letter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DISCUSS = DESCRIBE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCUSS = DEBATE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compare your answers with your partner. Then check them against those given in the Answer Key.

We saw in Unit 2 that a DESCRIBE answer is expected to be essentially factual. In a DEBATE, you are asked to weigh up the pros and cons (as made explicit in question K), putting forward your own view of the appropriacy, etc. of something in particular circumstances. It may be that in your specific field one of these two DISCUSS question types is more usual. For example, one might expect that DISCUSS/DESCRIBE would be more frequent in a pure science and DISCUSS/DEBATE in the social sciences. But you will need to make a careful analysis of your past papers, to see which of the two types each DISCUSS question matches.

Task 3

Look through past papers (with another student, if possible) for DISCUSS questions. Analyse whether they require DESCRIBE or DEBATE responses. Does your analysis suggest only that only one type is found in your specialism, or both?

DISCUSS type (1) = DESCRIBE

We are now going to concentrate on the use of DISCUSS / DESCRIBE. (We will be working on what is needed in a DEBATE answer in Unit 6). Look at this sample question:

Discuss the strategies adopted by the international community for dealing with the increasing drugs trade.

Task 4

Go to the article ‘Filthy Lucre’ (EDIT, Issue 14, Summer 1998), linked to this unit. Identify the information you would need to refer to in writing a relevant answer to the question above. (Notice that the question requires you to focus on solutions, not problems.)

Think about what you would want to put into the answer; discuss your answer plan with someone else. Do not take more than 10 minutes. Then check your plan against the one in the Answer Key.

Explain

Another fairly common instruction word is EXPLAIN. The word ‘explain’ means:

- to make clear or easy to understand
- to give a reason for.

EXPLAIN questions can be answered like DESCRIBE questions. [Click here for Unit 2: Describe if you want to re-read it.] Quite often EXPLAIN is combined with ‘how’ or ‘why’. EXPLAIN HOW generally means ‘Describe the sequence of events …’ or ‘Describe the process …’, as in ‘Explain how the Environmental Impact Statement review package works.’ EXPLAIN WHY means ‘Give reasons for …’ as in ‘Explain the decline in British trade union membership since 1979’.
Filthy lucre

American police raided the home of one drugs dealer in New York to find a room literally crammed from floor to ceiling with banknotes, all dirty money from the sale of drugs. This find was just a drop in the ocean. According to some UN estimates, the annual turnover from the production and sale of illegal drugs tops $400 billion or nine per cent of the global economy, making it bigger business than the trade in petroleum oil, more valuable than the world market in food. There is only one market bigger than the global drugs market, and that is the arms trade. Put another way, if you took eleven identical banknotes from your pocket and laid them on the table in front of you, one of them would be tainted by drugs.

The implications are wide. Illegal drugs are a worldwide industry employing millions of people in growing, refining, transporting and selling. The coca plant is grown in South America for drugs cartels based in the Colombian drugs capital Medellin, processed into cocaine and shipped through the Caribbean and Central America into North America, where it is distributed and sold. The opium poppy is grown in the golden triangle of South-east Asia and the golden crescent of South-west Asia, processed into heroin and transported overland into Europe, where more people are involved in distribution and sale.

As with more legitimate industries, control of the trade has become increasingly organised. Until a decade ago the heroin trade routes were through the Balkans, but since the break-up of the old USSR drugs now pass through former Soviet countries where law and order has broken down. New Russian mafia groups - also involved in extortion, prostitution, and trade in arms and nuclear materials - are taking charge of Europe’s drugs trade, according to Marc Pasotti of the UN’s Centre for International Crime Prevention at a conference in Budapest in March.

“Every month record seizures of drugs en route to the Russian Federation and further to Western Europe are carried out, but the results of the actions by law enforcement bodies are far from affecting 10 per cent of the whole traffic,” warned Mr Pasotti.

“Increasingly powerful crime groups in Russia are taking advantage of the largely cash economy of Eastern Europe and the absence of money-laundering laws in many of these countries.

“Russian mafia groups are growing in power, controlling some 40 per cent of private businesses, 50 per cent of Russian banks and 60 per cent of state-owned companies. Some experts say that two-thirds of the Russian economy is under the sway of crime syndicates.”

The Chinese Triads, Japanese Yakuza, Sicilian Mafia and a new generation of Caribbean crime groups are also deeply involved in drugs, and using the profits to feed their other business interests, some criminal and others legitimate. Their organisations are as large and diverse as multinational companies, and there is ominous evidence that they are forming international alliances to expand into and monopolise foreign markets.

It is not a situation of which many people in Britain are clearly aware. So long as we are not addicted to illegal drugs, and do not have to suffer powerful, turbulent cartels or mafia killing our police, corrupting our courts and perverting our government, as they do abroad, it is tempting to ask - so what? Does the global drugs trade matter to us?
Of course it does. Half of all UK property crime is committed to obtain money for drugs. Drugs crime fills our prisons and employs our police, paid for by our taxes. Drugs money in Britain finances and feeds other forms of domestic and overseas crime. It filters into the legitimate economy and distorts it, particularly in the South-east of England, and cheats the Treasury of tax revenue. The huge profits from drugs represent a dirty tide that washes through our financial institutions - the City of London is the money laundering capital of Europe. And our government forks out taxpayers’ money on overseas aid to combat the effects of the drugs trade on other countries.

SO FAR ACTION against the drugs trade has mainly been targeted at the drugs themselves. In 1961 and again in 1988 certain narcotics were declared illegal by UN conventions signed by hundreds of countries, and a policy of policing and enforcement put in place, trying to prevent drugs from being produced, intercept them in transit and arrest dealers and buyers. Domestically this has gone hand in hand with a social education policy to “Just Say No”, and heavy legal punishments.

But the direct war on drugs has been an expensive failure. The volume of drugs trafficked has continued to bloat every year, the profits made by the criminal have swelled - and the number of UK teenagers who try illegal drugs has risen above 50 per cent. So in the last decade a new international approach has been tried. This is to target the dirty money which drugs generate, intercepting profits as they are laundered clean of the drugs taint. The principle is simple. Criminals deal in drugs because it is very profitable, but may be deterred if they fear the proceeds of their crime will be tracked and confiscated.

Under pressure from America, the EU and the OECD, more and more countries are passing laws that enable the police and the courts to confiscate money or property they believe to be the proceeds of crime. The Canadian government now owns and runs a ski resort. In America, the Drug Enforcement Agency is partly financed by the drugs profits it seizes, adding an extra incentive to agents on the trail of a trafficker in an expensive speedboat.

Targeting the cash rather than the drugs is practical, because the money will always end up with the person in charge of the drugs trade. Petty street dealers can be quickly replaced if they are arrested, but with persistence, the money trail can he tracked back to the drug barons so they can be brought to justice.

“After all, when they imprisoned Al Capone it was for tax evasion,” says Bill Gilmore, Professor of International Criminal Law at the University of Edinburgh, whose book Dirty Money is one of the seminal texts on money laundering.

TRACING THE DIRTY money is easiest at the start, says Professor Gilmore, when the street sellers have collected in the payments from customers. The sheer physical bulk of cash is, in some cases, greater than the drugs it paid for. Somehow the banknotes have to be converted into property or financial credit, so the next phase of the laundering process can begin: of muddying the financial trail, so the money cannot be traced back to drugs, but can eventually be claimed and spent by its criminal owner.

The obvious answer is to begin by banking it, but in the last decade this loophole has been closed in many first world countries through stricter banking laws. In America all cash deposits over $10,000 have to be reported, a law which has spawned a new criminal industry known as ‘smurfing’ - employing innocent-seeming individuals to deposit amounts just under $10,000.
Britain has set no cash limit, but has placed a duty on all financial institutions to know the identity of their customers and to notify the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) of suspicious transactions. Even luxury garages are supposed to report customers who pay for a new car in cash.

The stricter laws are paying off, with 16,000 notifications to NCIS annually - four times the number six years ago. But the challenge has made criminals more inventive. Insurances have become a target, with some salesmen on commission only too happy to sell a policy paid up in full with cash. Drugs syndicates may buy businesses that generate a lot of small denomination cash, like launderettes or car parks, and use crooked accounting to swell their legitimate profits with drugs money. In many countries a lot of drugs cash passes through casinos, where it is converted into gaming chips and returned as a banker’s cheque at the end of the night.

More effective drugs operators will always tend to switch the cash abroad, where the money is less traceable and enforcement less tough. There are many offshore banking centres with conveniently strict bank secrecy laws and a lack of curiosity about their customers, ranging from the Caribbean to the Channel Islands. It is not long since private planes carrying bags of money used to circle through the blue sky to land on a small tropical isle whose sole amenities were a runway with a bank at the end of it.

But physically transporting money is old-fashioned by comparison with the possibilities offered by the international money markets, with instant electronic cash transfers worldwide.

“Less sophisticated criminals will move money around in the boots of cars and small planes, but highly sophisticated criminals will exploit the technology,” says John Hamilton, former deputy director of NCIS and now Chief Constable of Fife.

“They are able to launder the money by carrying out multi-transactions across the world, in several time zones and many markets, all within minutes. It becomes more and more difficult to identify.”

Switching currency is an important laundering method, although monetary union and the single European currency will close one major avenue. International fraud investigators are predicting a tidal wave of unlaunched drugs money to flood through Europe’s economies in the run-up to EMU in July 2002, as criminals try to offload billions of unlaunched Deutschmarks and francs.

“Criminals are likely to be pulling their money out of banks and converting it into property, art and jewellery,” says Chris Duggan, head of the Financial Investigation Unit of the City of London Police.

But EMU is unlikely to deter operations as huge and sophisticated as that of Colombian cocaine kingpin Rodriguez Gatcha, known to have used 82 separate accounts in 66 countries on four continents to ‘layer’ his drugs profits, muddying its path. Investigators admitted these were only the accounts they managed to trace.

Professional crooked accountancy operations have sprung up to control laundering for major multinational crime outfits. The financial techniques they use are little different from the creative accounting that allows legitimate multinationals to get away with paying as little tax as possible.
“My personal favourite is where you ship your money offshore and set up an offshore company,” says Professor Gilmore. “Then you buy a business at home, using some legitimately earned cash but taking out a loan for the remainder from your offshore company. It transfers the funds to you, so you are now a business person, paying back the loan to the company you set up, which is helping to legitimise it and, in many countries, getting tax deductions on the payment of interest.”

Threats of economic sanctions and diplomatic blacklisting have succeeded in persuading several countries, including the Seychelles, that setting up as a money laundering centre is not in their long term interests.

BUT DESPITE GROWING worldwide co-operation, the global net to catch criminals remains full of holes. In many places law is ineffectual, banks ask no questions and the economy is conducted in cash. In such countries no effort is needed to launder dirty money - it can be spent right away.

“The big questions are how to make the global strategy work more effectively in those countries which have taken it on board, and how to ensure that more countries make some effort to implement the strategy,” says Professor Gilmore, who sits on a new Council of Europe task force which assesses the anti-money laundering strategies put in place in Central and Eastern Europe. “I don’t think we have paid enough attention to carrots and sticks.”

And as one loophole is closed, the ingenuity of the criminal will find a new way round. The latest worry involves banking experiments with smart money, where a customer is issued with a smart card he can charge up with credit, and use instead of cash to pay for goods. One can imagine how drugs barons will seize with glee on a technology that allows them to switch cash credits from one smart card to another if this can be done untraceably.

*Jenny Booth is Home Affairs Correspondent of The Scotsman*
**Writing Practice**

Select a DISCUSS/DESCRIBE or EXPLAIN question from a past exam paper for your Master’s course. Past University of Edinburgh papers can be found at:

[http://www.exampapers.lib.ed.ac.uk/exam_papers/exams.html](http://www.exampapers.lib.ed.ac.uk/exam_papers/exams.html)

If no papers on your subject are available, or if you cannot find a suitable DISCUSS/DESCRIBE or EXPLAIN question, you can invent an appropriate question. Plan an answer and make brief notes. Then write up your answer in essay form.

*Allow yourself as much time as you would have in the actual exam - no more!*

*Typically, Master’s students have 30-45 minutes per question.*

Show your written answer to someone who is familiar with your field - a classmate or, if possible, a lecturer from your course. Ask them to give you their comments on what you have written: its content, argument and clarity.

**Answer Key**

**Unit 5: Task 1**

‘Discuss’ type 1 (= Describe) B, C, F, G, H, I

‘Discuss’ type 2 (= Debate) A, D, E, H, J, K

N.B. Question H could be approached as either Debate or Describe.

**Unit 5: Task 4**

Discuss the strategies adopted by the international community for dealing with the increasing drugs trade.

**Possible answer plan:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction:</th>
<th>The extent of the drugs problem world-wide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aspect 1:</td>
<td>Strategies targeting the drugs themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UN illegalisation of certain drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• policing and enforcement of the laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspect 2:</td>
<td>Failure of these measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspect 3:</td>
<td>Strategies targeting money derived from drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• laws to enable police &amp; courts to confiscate ‘dirty’ money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• stricter banking laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• European Monetary Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion:</td>
<td>More action needed, especially to deal with the electronic age</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Writing Examination Answers

Unit 6: Discuss (part 2) and Debate

Introduction

Now we turn to the second type of DISCUSS instruction, the one in which you are expected to DEBATE or ARGUE. If you look back to the list of sample examination questions in Unit 5, you will find examples of three common types of DISCUSS (2) questions:

(i) a question that begins with a controversial quotation, followed by the word DISCUSS. Examples of this subtype are questions A and E.

(ii) one like question K, which explicitly uses a phrase like ‘for and against’.

(iii) one that asks you to consider mainly the negative side of an issue. Examples are Question D ‘Discuss critically...’ and Question I ‘Discuss why (x) has been of less importance...’

It is important to consider what sort of argument you are expected to produce. With the first two question types above, ‘quotation’ and ‘for and against’ questions, the examiner is leaving the field open to individual judgement. You are expected to show that you are able to take into account both sides of an issue - e.g. the costs and benefits of a particular method - and to conclude by showing where you think the overall balance lies.

In the case of question K, for example, you might decide to conclude that there are stronger reasons for not having an insurance-financed NHS than for having one, or vice-versa; alternatively, you could remain neutral if you indicate a general equilibrium between the ‘pro’ and ‘con’ cases.

But in questions of type (iii), involving some sort of negative aspect, the examiner makes the assumption that there is more to be said in criticism than in favour. So, for example, in question D there is an implication that the specific treatment of schizophrenia is abused or overused. In this situation, it would be inappropriate to produce a ‘on the one hand..., but on the other...’ answer.

In the case of the more ‘open’ question-types (i and ii), you could think of your answer in similar terms to the TO WHAT EXTENT response we looked at in Unit 4. You need to include as many perspectives as possible in your answer.

Further examples of instruction words that expect a DEBATE answer are:

• Analyse...
• Assess (the significance of)...
• Comment (on the statement that)...
• Evaluate...
• Examine...
• Weigh the arguments...

If you come across other alternatives in your field, add them to that list.
Task 1
What approach would you need to adopt in planning an answer to this question:

‘The written examination is still the best way to assess students’ performance on an academic course’. Discuss.

Write your notes below and then compare them with those of another student:

Task 2
Compare your notes with those suggested in the Answer Key. In a question like this, the examiners do not have a pre-determined list of points that you must mention; it is not a matter of being right or wrong, but of making informed and relevant comments, showing that you have read and thought about your topic. The classic structure for a Discuss answer of this sort would be:

1. Arguments / Evidence in support of the statement
2. Arguments / Evidence against
3. Conclusion based on 1 and 2.

Your answer needs to end with a conclusion paragraph, in which you ‘subtract’ the negative from the positive elements, and arrive at an overall opinion. Be sure to make clear what your conclusion is; do not leave it up to the examiner to work it out.

Writing Practice
Select a DISCUSS/DEBATE question from a past exam paper for your Master’s course. Past University of Edinburgh papers can be found at:

http://www.exampapers.lib.ed.ac.uk/exam_papers/exams.html

If no papers on your subject are available, or if you cannot find a suitable DISCUSS/DEBATE question, you can invent an appropriate question. Plan an answer and make brief notes. Then write up your answer in essay form.

Allow yourself as much time as you would have in the actual exam - no more! Typically, Master’s students have 30-45 minutes per question.

Show your written answer to someone who is familiar with your field - a classmate or, if possible, a lecturer from your course. Ask them to give you their comments on what you have written: its content, argument and clarity.

Answer Key
Unit 6: Task 1
‘The written examination is still the best way to assess students’ performance on an academic course’. Discuss.

Possible plan for answer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive points</th>
<th>Negative points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>same conditions for all students</td>
<td>exams emphasise memory, not judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>examination occupies only short time</td>
<td>focus on theory rather than practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exams are good practice for similar professional qualifications later</td>
<td>exams encourage narrow attention to topics frequently tested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nervous students are disadvantaged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Writing Examination Answers

Unit 7: Outline

Introduction

Alternative versions of OUTLINE are SUMMARISE or BRIEFLY..., e.g. ‘Briefly describe the techniques necessary to...’. This question-type is an indication that the examiners think the subject matter is too complex to be dealt with in detail in the time available. You are being encouraged - or warned - not to go into depth, but to set out the principal issues, stages or procedures relevant to the question.

Unless you are specifically told to WRITE NOTES ON..., you should write in full sentences, with at least one paragraph on each of the points you wish to cover. The wider your coverage of points, the higher the mark is likely to be. Plan and time the writing-up carefully, so as to be able to bring in all the relevant major points.

Simple, concise and direct writing is what to aim for. Note that unless the specific question actually asks for them, you should not present personal opinions. If you are asked to do so - for example, if the question asks you to make policy recommendations - then you will need to justify what you say.

Task 1

Look through these questions and put a tick on the right hand side if you think that the type of answer required is ‘personal-opinion-plus-justification’; put a cross if you think it is not.

A. Summarise the principal requirements of the law in respect of the employer-employee relationship.


C. Briefly describe the kinds of change in ecosystem productivity, stores and nutrient cycling that take place during succession.

D. Outline the two main philosophies of resource management and discuss their practical relevance to the situation in a country of your choice.

E. Outline the epidemiology of parasitic gastritis of cattle in an area with a savannah-type climate. Describe how you would seek to control this disease in nomadic cattle and in exotic dairy cattle on a government farm in this area.

F. Write brief accounts of the isolation and identification of the following from clinical material: (a) mycoplasma; (b) mycobacteria.

G. There have been sporadic abortions in a newly developed cattle ranching scheme. Outline your approach to this problem.

H. Give a brief account of behavioural methods of treating obsessional illness.

I. Briefly formulate your preferred definition of regional planning, and substantiate your choice.

J. Outline the degree of overlap between the processes of reading comprehension and listening comprehension, referring to experimental data to support your view.

K. Summarise the differences between the concepts of Islamic haj and Christian pilgrimage.

Now check your answers against the Key.
Task 2 (10 minutes)
Plan an answer to the question ‘Summarise the contribution of television to human progress’.

Task 3
Compare your plan with the example given in the Answer Key. Consider the following points:
1. Do both plans (i.e. yours and the one in the Key) present the principal issues relevant to the question? If not, what has been omitted or what should be omitted?
2. Which plan achieves the wider coverage of relevant issues?
3. Look at the organisation of ideas. Which plan do you prefer? Why?

Writing Practice
Select a OUTLINE-type question from a past exam paper for your Master’s course. Past University of Edinburgh papers can be found at:
http://www.exampapers.lib.ed.ac.uk/exam_papers/exams.html
If no papers on your subject are available, or if you cannot find a suitable OUTLINE-type question, you can invent an appropriate question. Plan an answer and make brief notes. Then write up your answer in essay form.

Allow yourself as much time as you would have in the actual exam - no more!
Typically, Master’s students have 30-45 minutes per question.

Show your written answer to someone who is familiar with your field - a classmate or, if possible, a lecturer from your course. Ask them to give you their comments on what you have written: its content, argument and clarity.

ANSWER KEY

Unit 7: Task 1
A: No B: Yes C: No D: Yes E: No F: No G: No H: No I: Yes J: Yes K: No

Unit 7: Task 3
‘Summarise the contribution of television to human progress’

Possible answer plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>Summary and conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aspect 1: Commonest functions of TV educational (schools / OU) entertainment dissemination of information cultural information (countries, religions) forum for debate current events scientific uses televising of parliamentary proceedings</td>
<td>Aspect 2: Features of TV versus other media immediacy sense of participation visual element wide availability not restricted by location or time recordable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspect 3: Changes achieved in individuals’ attitudes or behaviour</td>
<td>Aspect 4: Social / political changes already influenced by TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspect 5: Likely future changes due to TV</td>
<td>Aspect 6: Use of television in science; possible future uses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

The activities in this unit are designed to help you to prepare for your course exams, by getting you to think about your own study and revision techniques. Where we give advice, remember it is general advice. You must decide for yourself if it suits you as an individual.

Long term preparation

This involves gathering as much information as you can about the exams for your course. In Unit 1 we asked you to find answers to various questions about your exams. Have you done that? Go back to Unit 1 to check.

Make sure you know the answers to these questions.

Medium term preparation

Clearly, you will need to revise for your exams. We are going to consider three aspects of revision:

- planning a revision timetable
- revision methods
- organising materials for revision

In other words, the when, the how, and the what of revision.

Planning a revision timetable

Many students find it useful to make up a revision timetable, in other words to decide in advance how much time to spend revising each subject for the exam.

Revision methods

You may think of revision as primarily a reading activity. Certainly the literal meaning is “seeing something again”. But a wide range of strategies for revising course materials for exams in available.

Task

If possible, work with one or two other students. (It doesn’t matter what your subjects are.) How many different types of revision activity can you think of? Which have you used yourself? Discuss the merits and demerits of each one. Note them down by adding sub-branches to this “spider” diagram:
When you have discussed this or thought about it, see below one possible version of the spider:

Different people study best at different times of day: some in the morning, some in the evening. Some need silence, some play music in the background. If you are not sure about yourself, experiment to find out the conditions that suit you best. Psychologists recommend regular, short breaks to avoid fatigue. How long do you find you can concentrate on one subject? How often do you take breaks?

Continue practising as you have done on the course. Write by hand to improve your legibility, especially if you have been using a word-processor. Ask another student to look at your answers and comment on them. You can do the same for them.

**Organizing your revision materials**

Think about these points:

- What form are your notes in - paper, index cards, computer files? Why do you use this form?
- Where do you store your notes - in a notebook, a ring-binder, a card index box, a computer? Why?
- How are they organized?
- Apart from notes, what other materials do you use when revising?
- What will you actually do with your notes? Do you have any special techniques to help you remember information? Do you underline? highlight with different colours for different aspects of the topic?

It can be very useful to make a summary sheet of each set of notes, and then a master summary sheet of all the summary sheets. This may seem complicated but it helps in two ways: firstly, the sheets provide you with a more and more concise form of the information for revising as you get nearer and nearer to the exam; secondly, the process of making the summaries helps to transfer the information into your long term memory.

Which topics will you spend most time on revising, and why? During this course, you have been looking through past exam papers. So you should have a good idea of the types of questions asked. It is not a good idea to try to guess which questions you will be asked in the exam (because you will probably be wrong!), but you may decide which topics/areas of study are most important.

**Short term preparation**

When you have done all the revision, there is still the exam day itself to prepare for. When do you stop revising - a week before? the day before? the day of the exam?

Most people would recommend stopping a day or two before. Last minute “cramming” is rarely worthwhile, and is likely to make you more nervous than necessary.
What do you normally do to keep calm on the day? A little nervousness is said to be good, because it “keeps you on your toes”, but excessive nervousness is counterproductive.

This may help: Go to bed early the night before and get up in plenty of time in the morning. Do some deep breathing and light exercises. Drink plenty of water or fruit juice, and eat a normal breakfast.

**In the exam**

- Make sure you understand the main instructions, e.g. the number of questions you must answer. If you do not understand, ask the invigilator.
- Scan the questions, looking for the one(s) you feel most confident about answering. Decide which questions you will answer.
- Calculate the amount of time you have for each question.
- Many people recommend beginning with the “easiest” question. This should give you more confidence to tackle the difficult ones later, whereas beginning with a difficult question could be discouraging.
- Be careful not to spend too long answering the easier questions, leaving no time for the last one. But if you do find yourself in this situation, try at least to write a list of points. This is better than nothing.
- Remember to analyse the wording of each question and to answer exactly what is asked. See Unit 1. You should find it helpful to make a plan and notes of your answers before beginning to write.
- Try to write legibly. If possible, allow enough time for a quick check of your answers before time is up.

**For more information**

We recommend The Good Study Guide by Andrew Northedge (Open University, 1990).

[http://www.ouw.co.uk/goodstudyguide](http://www.ouw.co.uk/goodstudyguide)

This book contains some excellent ideas on the best ways to revise and to approach the exam itself. The Open University also publishes more specialized guides, which you may like to consult. These are:

- The Arts Good Study Guide by Ellie Chambers and Andrew Northedge
- The Sciences Good Study Guide by Andrew Northedge and others
- The Manager’s Good Study Guide by Ken Giles and Nicki Hedge

You will also find plenty of good advice on preparing for exams at:

[http://www.studyskills.soton.ac.uk/studytips/exams.htm](http://www.studyskills.soton.ac.uk/studytips/exams.htm)

**Good luck!**