

CIMA[®] Case Study (CS) examinations are designed to challenge candidates to provide solutions to the type of problems that they would encounter in the workplace for the job role matched to the level of the professional qualification. The examination uses a simulated Case Study to provide a rich, immersive scenario to prepare and to provide a context for the tasks in the examination.

The scenarios are developed around today's modern business environment and the challenges that candidates will face, allowing them to demonstrate the core activities that have been identified as critical. Examination tasks will be practical and applied, not theoretical or academic.

Therefore, to be successful, you will have to perform the core activities (in the [Exam Blueprints](#)) in the same way and to the same standards that would be valid and valued in the workplace. The Examiner's Report is one of the most important resources that would help you produce an answer that would score highly. CIMA publishes a comprehensive Examiner's Report for each level and you may read it in the study guide exam window of CIMA Planner under the "Full Post-Exam Support Materials".

Examiners have identified four common mistakes across all three levels, not only under the CIMA 2019 Professional Qualification (PQ) but also under the CIMA 2015 PQ – candidates keep failing CIMA CS Exams for the same reasons despite the syllabus change! If a candidate scores low marks (e.g., score at a level 1 on a given trait), it is likely that they did one or all of the following:

- Failed to answer the question that was asked.
- Demonstrated limited technical ability (i.e., gaps in knowledge or understanding).
- Provided insufficient justification for arguments.
- Failed to reflect the scenario or the specifics of the organisation and its environment.

As always, the key to achieving a passing mark or better is to answer the question as set. Higher marks are awarded to fuller answers that are relevant and correct.

'To achieve a level 3 in most traits, it was expected that you would demonstrate good technical understanding of the topic being tested through clear and comprehensive discussion, and where asked, justify your answer. The answer should, of course, be applied to the organisation (both pre-seen and unseen materials) and the particular scenario within the task'.

– Examiner

These are the **top 5 expectations of the examiners** in your CS Exam answers. You answer should:

- Be **relevant** to the requirement.
- Demonstrate the necessary technical **knowledge** of the syllabus content.
- Demonstrate your **ability to apply** that knowledge to a specific scenario, as specified in the case.
- Be **well-structured**, with good use of paragraphs to clarify the development of an explanation.
- Contain **justification of the arguments** made in the answer.

Examiner's advice on common mistakes in CIMA Case Study Examinations

To achieve this, below are the **top 10 recommendations by the examiners**.

Before the exam

1. **Revise study materials thoroughly.** Candidates should study all areas of the syllabus and ensure that all three pillars are covered. It is risky to skip topics, even if they are difficult.
2. **Read the pre-seen material carefully and think about it.** Think about the industry and the entity. That is important because the tasks are all about the application to the scenario, which could mean that the technical issues have to be applied in a particular way.
3. **Practise tasks from past case studies** and reflect on whether your answers are full and relevant. Take the time to type or write full answers. You need not necessarily do so under exam conditions at first because part of the value of this exercise is to ensure that you can interpret and answer questions correctly, within the time allowed.

During the exam

4. **Plan your answers** during the exam and pay close attention to timings. It is very helpful when constructing your answer that it has a logical structure. Typing an outline answer plan at the start of each task or requirement will help you to plan the structure and reduce the risk of forgetting any good points.
5. **Use time wisely.** The tasks are subdivided into separate requirements, with recommendations as to the weighting for each requirement. If you have, say, 24 minutes available for a requirement then you should aim to spend roughly that amount of time on it. It is probably unwise to pinch time from another requirement to make that answer as full as it can possibly be. If you run out of ideas before the time has elapsed, then it might be better to spend some of the time left thinking about possible ways of expanding that answer, rather than returning to an easier requirement.

It is, of course, worth using the whole time allowed for each task, even if that does mean reviewing and expanding answers.

6. **Answer the question.** No matter how obvious that seems, markers regularly observe that candidates often fail to respond to the specific question requirements. Revising for the CS Exams requires that you study and learn several models and theories for each of the three pillars. Tasks will generally expect that these models and theories will provide a suitable structure for answers, but the key is to apply that knowledge to the scenario. Candidates frequently offer detailed summaries of syllabus content, with little or no reference to the scenario. Answers must relate to the scenarios to earn a passing score.

'There were many examples where candidates answered the task that they had prepared for and wished they had been asked, rather than what they were asked. Preparation, ahead of sitting the exam is to be applauded, but candidates need to be mindful that they must tailor their answer to address the task given to them on the day. Candidates need to read the task very carefully to ensure that they do not end up wasting time.'

— Examiner

7. **Application to the scenario is key.** It must be stressed that demonstrating good technical understanding is not enough on its own to pass. Candidates need to demonstrate technical understanding in the context of the scenario and the particulars of the issue addressed. Information given to candidates as part of the task is there for a reason and should be, as far as possible, incorporated into answers, along with relevant information from the pre-seen. Clearly, where there are gaps in knowledge, the application is not possible and therefore the importance of candidates ensuring that their knowledge base is complete needs to be stressed.

Examiner's advice on common mistakes in CIMA Case Study Examinations

- 8. Commit to an argument.** Some answers are weaker because they seem to have been written to avoid contradicting the examiner's suggested solution. Remember that the marker will mark answers on their merits. There can sometimes be more than one correct answer in business. If you are unsure, then invest a minute or two in thinking and developing an argument rather than typing something vague and unhelpful.
- 9. Keep your answer relevant.** No matter how tempting it is, do not waste time in providing irrelevant material that does not answer the question. Candidates for the CS Exams often investigate the industry and learn about recent events in the business news. The insights from such background research can often help develop answers. However, the danger is that candidates often feel obliged to offer real-world examples that do not relate to the task. Credit is given for all relevant points made in the answer, including illustrations from the real world. Irrelevant points will simply waste time, even if they demonstrate prior reading.

'You are able to explain with clarity and comprehensively, rather than making unsupported statements. Writing comments such as, "this improves decision making", "this graph is essential" or "planning is enhanced" are not enough to gain any marks. Candidates must explain "how" and "why" this is the case. Explanations can quite often be improved by adding, "because of ..." at the end of a sentence. Explanations should also utilise the information given to you within the case study itself, especially financial information. For example, reasons for variances are often given to you in the unseen information, the skill is to pick this out and use it.'

— Examiner

- 10. Make sure the presentation and tone are right.** Marks are not allocated for setting out documents in a specific way. Similarly, it may be necessary to answer in a manner that could prove unpopular with senior managers, perhaps by recommending the rejection of a proposal made by one of the directors (note: more applicable to SCS Exam). The best way to deal with that is to offer a clear and relevant argument that satisfies the requirement.

We recommend that you read the examiner's report in conjunction with the examiner's suggested answers and marking guidance.

Note: This article is commissioned using extracts directly from the Examiner's Reports across all three levels of CIMA Case Study Examinations.

