



# The Secrets of Examination Technique

Passing an examination is never easy – but that is surely what makes them worth the effort. The NEBOSH qualifications, in particular, have a great reputation but how do you go about ensuring success in the written exams?

One of the most common errors made by people in exams is failing to read the question properly. This sounds like such an obvious point but any examiner will tell you that it lies at the root of many failures!

It is important to remember that NEBOSH often give you hints in their questions as to what they expect from your answer – all you have to do is learn to read the clues. NEBOSH are not trying to “catch you out” – you just have to learn to provide them with the information they have asked you for.

## Define

When NEBOSH ask you to define something, they expect you to provide a definition of the subject of their question. They are not asking you to explain or describe so spending your time doing this is a waste of effort and means that you risk not leaving yourself sufficient time for other questions.

### Example Question

Define the term ‘permit-to-work system’. (2 marks)

### Example Answer

A permit-to-work system is a formal, documented, planned procedure designed to protect personnel working in hazardous areas.

## Describe

When NEBOSH ask you to describe something, they expect you to ‘give a word picture’. This is likely to require a slightly more in-depth explanation so you will need to ensure that your description is accurate and complete.

### Example Question

Describe four unsafe conditions that can lead to an accident. (4 marks)

### Example answer

- Guard missing.
- Machine not maintained.
- Defective hand-tool.
- Torn and damaged PPE.



## Explain

When NEBOSH ask you to explain something, they want you to ‘give a clear account of, or reasons for’.

### Example Question

Explain the term ‘negligence’ in relation to health and safety. (2 marks)

### Example Answer

The two main points to make are that:

- Negligence is a tort or civil wrong.
- It represents lack of a reasonable standard of care.

## Give

When NEBOSH use this term, they want you to ‘provide without explanation’ so don’t waste time giving the examiner detailed explanations he hasn’t asked for. It is usually used with the instruction to ‘give an example [or examples] of...’.

### Sample Question

Give an example of a piece of health and safety legislation using the term “so far as is reasonably practicable”. (2 marks)

### Sample Answer

Section 2, Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974.



## Identify

When NEBOSH ask you to identify something, they expect you to select and name it.

### Example Question

Identify the legal requirement whereby an employer must prepare a written health and safety policy. (2 marks)

### Example Answer

Under Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, an employer with five or more employees must prepare a written health and safety policy.

## List

When NEBOSH ask you to list something, they expect precisely that – a list without any further explanation. Remember too that the question is specifically asking for 8 physical states so you will be unable to gain full marks if you only give 6 and you will be wasting your time if you give 9.

### Example Question

List eight physical states (composition) of a hazardous substance. (8 marks)

### Example Answer

The physical states of a hazardous substance include:

- Liquid.
- Gas.
- Vapour.
- Mist.
- Fume.
- Dust.
- Aerosol.
- Solid.

## Outline

NEBOSH define 'outline' as 'giving the most important features of'. Your answer should provide less depth than either 'explain' or 'describe', but more depth than 'list'.

### Example Question

Outline the controls needed to ensure pedestrian safety in locations where the forklift trucks are in use. (8 marks)

### Example Answer

There are a number of rules that a driver must adhere to when leaving their forklift truck unattended. The first one relates to leaving the forklift truck on a firm and level surface, in a designated area, to ensure that it cannot roll away. The truck must not be left in a position where it could obstruct emergency exits, walkways or fire points, and must be parked away from other vehicles.

The truck should be left with the mast tilted slightly forward and forks resting on the floor, to ensure that it is stable and not likely to overturn. The truck must not be left until the brake has been applied and the power switched off. Where a key is used, it must be removed and returned to a responsible person, as appropriate. This will prevent unauthorised use of the truck.

## Sketch

When NEBOSH ask you to sketch something, they expect you to provide a simple line drawing using labels to identify specific features. (6 marks)

### Example Question

Provide simple sketches to show three methods of 'tying' the scaffold to the building.

### Example Answer

Your answer should comprise clear sketches with each of the key points clearly labelled.

## State

When NEBOSH ask you to state something, they are expecting 'a less demanding form of 'define' or where there is no generally recognised definition'.

### Example Question

State the primary hazards associated with the movement of people and vehicles. (8 marks)

### Example Answer

The primary hazards associated with the movement of people and vehicles are:

- Slips, trips and falls on the same level and from height.
- Collision with moving vehicles.
- Collision with or being struck by a falling object, e.g. part of a load.
- Striking against fixed or stationary objects.
- Environmental conditions.

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