



The Secrets of Examination Technique  
NEBOSH Diploma Courses



## The Secrets of Examination Technique

Passing an examination is never easy – but that is surely what makes them worth the effort. The NEBOSH Diploma 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.

It is important to identify the command word or action verb within the question, as this will give you an indication of the depth of knowledge required in your answer. The following meanings of the command words have been identified by NEBOSH:

### Describe

Give a detailed written account of the subject or item. Sufficient so that someone reading that description can visualise the item in their mind's eye.

#### Example Question

**Describe** the 'statement of intent' section of a health and safety policy document.

#### Example Answer

The statement of intent is usually a one page document with a title at the top of the page followed by several paragraphs of text. At the bottom of the document there will be the name and signature of the person at the top of the organisation (e.g. the Managing Director), along with the date the document was signed and a date when the document will be reviewed. Each paragraph of text on the page will summarise the key aims and objectives of the organisation with regards health and safety.

### Explain

Give an understanding of why or how something happens. With more detail than an outline would require.

#### Example Question

**Explain** the moral reason why an organisation should maintain high standards of health and safety.

#### Example Answer

The moral reason for maintaining high standards of health and safety arises from the basic human sense of right and wrong. When workers or others are injured or made ill by work activity they will experience pain and suffering. This pain and suffering is morally unacceptable if it can be avoided.

### Give

Provide without explanation. Is often used in conjunction with example (as in: 'give an example of').

#### Example Question

**Outline** the meaning of the word 'hazard' and **give** one work-related example.

#### Example Answer

The word hazard means 'something with the potential to cause harm'. An example of a work-related hazard would be an electrical flex trailing across the floor of a workroom that presents a risk of tripping.



## Identify

Give the item its name or title, often requiring just a word or short phrase.

### Example Question

**Identify** FOUR organisational factors that might give rise to a poor health and safety culture within an organisation.

### Example Answer

- Lack of management commitment.
- Absence of good quality training.
- Lack of consultation on health and safety matters.
- Inadequate resourcing of health and safety management.

## Outline

Give a brief summary of the item or its key features. A detailed explanation is not required, but the answers must be more than just a single word or phrase.

### Example Question

**Outline** TWO categories of worker who might be more vulnerable to risk in a workplace.

### Example Answer

- Lone workers – workers who work away from immediate and direct contact with their work colleagues.
- Young people – workers who because of their age lack experience in the workplace, are immature and have a poor perception of risk.

Students who have studied at NEBOSH Certificate level may well recognise these command words from Certificate level exam questions. NEBOSH also uses other command words in Diploma exam questions. These words, and an interpretation of their meaning, are presented below, along with part-question examples to illustrate their use:

## Analyse

Break down the subject into its component parts and examine their relationship.

### Example Question

**Analyse** the data presented in the table and suggest reasons for the difference in safety performance.

## Assess

Present judgments of relevant factors and their importance.

### Example Question

**Assess** the significance of the court ruling in R v Swan Hunter concerning the interpretation of Section 2(2c) of the Act.



### Calculate

Undertake a mathematical process. *N.B. It is important to always show your working out when presenting calculations.*

#### Example Question

Using the data in the table, **calculate** the 8-hour TWA exposure to flour dust for bakery operatives.

### Comment

Give a justified opinion on the issue.

#### Example Question

**Comment** on the Managing Director's point of view and give reasons why they are incorrect.

### Compare and Contrast

Identify the similarities and differences between the subjects. *N.B. You must cross-reference between the two subjects and not just write two completely separate descriptions.*

#### Example Question

**Compare and contrast** X-ray and alpha particle ionising radiation.

### Consider

Show your thinking about the subject matter.

#### Example Question

**Consider** the impact of the Director's decision on the safety culture of the organisation.

### Define

Give a broadly acceptable meaning of a word or phrase.

#### Example Question

**Define** the phrase 'safety culture'.

### Demonstrate

Prove by logical reasoning.

#### Example Question

Using the data in the two tables, **demonstrate** that the trend in accident frequency rate is upwards and discuss possible reasons for the increase.



## Determine

Come to a decision or conclusion by investigation.

### Example Question

**Determine** the root causes of the incident.

## Discuss

Critically analyse the subject matter.

### Example Question

**Discuss** the findings of the committee and analyse the strengths and weaknesses of its recommendation.

## Distinguish

Separate the subjects by highlighting differences.

### Example Question

**Distinguish** between Acts of Parliament, Regulations and Orders.

## Evaluate

Show the value of the subject by careful examination.

### Example Question

**Evaluate** the use of risk-rating matrixes in the risk assessment process.

## Justify

Support by using fact or reasoning.

### Example Question

**Justify** this choice of respiratory protective equipment as opposed to the cheaper alternative.

## Recommend

Present as a personal choice of action with some justification.

### Example Question

**Recommend** a course of action for the Managing Director to follow that will allow the company to discharge its legal duties in these circumstances.



### Review

Overview the subject matter and summarise.

#### Example Question

**Review** the information that is likely to be requested by the insurance company when investigating this claim for compensation.

Further information on these command words and their use is available directly from NEBOSH. A full guide giving specific examples of exam questions and full suggested answers that clearly illustrate the use and meaning of each of these words is available at no cost from [www.nebosh.org.uk](http://www.nebosh.org.uk).

RRC International has developed a full range of revision aids. Contact us for further details of how we can help you succeed in your NEBOSH examinations.

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