What to avoid in Module One: examination tips and advice

You've taken the Module One course on the site, tried out the revision course and made lists of things to do in the examination, so what can possibly go wrong?
Here's a list.

As a teacher, you are probably quite good at advising your students about examination techniques. Don't forget to tell yourself the same things.

Cambridge Assessment English issue reports on all three Modules of the Delta quite frequently.

What we have done here is to review the comments from a series of reports, looking in particular for what the Principal Examiner has repeatedly noted about weaknesses that lead to failing the Module One examination.

We have also made some suggestions about how to avoid the weaknesses altogether.

Passing an examination requires you to avoid things almost as much as it requires you to do certain things so read on if you are interested in passing the examination the first time around.

There are three areas which are repeatedly noted by the report writers and we'll take them one at a time. They are not prioritised, unfortunately, in the Cambridge reports so we can only assume they are of equal importance and represent the most frequent reasons for being unsuccessful in the examination.

Reason #1: Lack of adequate knowledge

The reports for Module One cite this as *the most common reason* for failing the examination. Obviously, if you don't know your subject, you can't pass an examination in it.

So, what knowledge do you really need? Here's a rundown:

Systems knowledge:

The reports repeatedly point out that unsuccessful candidates:

> *have a very poor knowledge of language systems, particularly describing grammatical and lexical form/use and phonology which can result in a significant loss of marks in Paper One, Tasks 4 and 5*

It might be suggested that ignorance of the nuts and bolts of English *will* rather than *can* result in a significant loss of marks.

So, what do you need to do and what do you need to learn?

The features of the learner's text you are asked to look at for Paper 1, Question 4 and the genre example for Question 5 are remarkably consistent over the years so you need to be familiar with the concepts and know the terminology to describe them.

If you can't, for example, define any of the following (which does not constitute an exhaustive list) without going to a reference text, you need to extend and deepen your knowledge of the structures of English

1. Verbs forms
   finite and non-finite forms
   aspects: continuous, simple, iterative, durative, habitual
   tenses: absolute and relative
   voice
   auxiliary verbs: primary and modal
   verbal processes: relational, behavioural and material
2. Lexis:
   lexical relationships: synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, hyponymy, collocation, colligation
   markedness: on adjectives, nouns, pronouns and verbs
   cognate forms
   style vs. register
   mass vs. count nouns
   prepositional phrases
   types of adjectives
   adverbials vs. adverbs
3. Phonology:
   phonemes and allophones
   consonants: plosives, fricatives etc. and places of articulation: labial, alveolar, voiced vs. unvoiced etc.
   vowels: tongue height and position, lip rounding, pure vs. diphthong vowels etc.
   features of connected speech: assimilation, catenation, weak forms etc.
   stress: word and sentences stress, timing etc.
   intonation: contours, tone movements etc.

You will find the ability accurately to transcribe English phonemes and word stress is invaluable. There is a course in transcription on the site.

4. Phrase, clause and sentence structures:
   complex and compound sentences: subordination vs. coordination
   concession and/vs. condition
   phrase types
   clause types
   clause and phrase constituents
   modification: of noun phrases, verb phrases etc.
   etc.
5. Genre and discourse:
   conventional text staging for a range of genres
   cohesion and coherence
   theme-rheme structures

There are resources on the site to help.

Reason #2: Lack of awareness of task requirements

If you have done the Module One course on the site, it is unlikely that you will suffer from a lack of awareness of what is required in each task.

Equally, if you have taken an alternative, paid-for, course, your tutors should have spared no efforts in making sure that you are fully familiar with the demands of all tasks on both papers. If that is not the case, what have they been doing with your money?

To remind you, here are the basics. For more, go to the site.

Paper

Paper 1 Task 1:

You will be given six definitions of ELT-related items for which you have to provide the correct term.

- For this task, the advice from the Principal Examiner is:
  - o *only write the required term; do not give an example or any extra information*
  - o *do not provide alternative answers unless you are sure they are **both** right. If one is wrong you will get no marks.*
  - o *spell terms correctly; a very limited number of alternative spellings are accepted*
  - o *provide an answer, even if you are not sure it is correct.*

Paper 1 Task 2:

You have to provide a definition and an example of four terms you are given.

- For this task, the advice is:
  - o *only write about four terms*
  - o *give a basic definition, an example and one item of further information for each term*
  - o *lay out your answer clearly using the sub-headings of Term, Definition, Example.*

Paper 1 Task 3:

You will be given a section of published ELT materials and directed to some of the language features learners would need to be able to command successfully to complete the task.

- The advice is:

Do	Don't
o *read the rubric carefully and only discuss what the rubric requires*	o *outline more than five features (five as the task requires and a maximum of an extra one for 'insurance')*
o *know about the features of spoken and written discourse in depth in terms of what different text types require*	
o *cover a range of relevant subskills and discourse features*	o *rely on pre-learnt answers from previous Guideline Answers*
o *make your answers, including examples, **specific to the activity** described in the task*	o *repeat any of the wording of the extract*
o *provide one example for each area and avoid repeating any*	

o *provide full language examples, not just sentence stems* o *remember the level of the learners and give examples which learners at this level could realistically produce* o *use bullet points*	o *include any information on why the feature is included* o *write an introduction, summary or conclusion*

Paper1 Task 4:

You will be given either a transcription of a learner's spoken language or a piece of authentic writing from a learner. Your task is to analyse the language noting **strengths** as well as **weaknesses**. You need to find **four** strengths and/or weaknesses.

- The advice is:

Do	Don't
o *focus on the criteria stated in the rubric* o *state only four features and give one example for each (a maximum of 12 marks is available in this section)* o *include at least one strength and one weakness* o *give accurate examples* o *bear the learner's level in mind* o *use bullet points and set things out clearly:* o *Strength – Rubric criterion – Point – Example*	o *say why the features have been included as no marks are allocated for this* o *go through the rubric area by area. Just focus on four areas* o *give more than one example* o *be obscure*

Paper1 Task 5:

You will be given an authentic text (such as an article from a magazine or a brochure etc.) and asked to identify typical features of the genre. You are also asked to explain the form, meaning, use and phonological features of different language items.

You will often be told not to include something, such as more than one comment on the layout of the text. Do as you are told.

- The advice is:

Do	Don't
o *state five features (the rest will be ignored)* o *give one example of each feature only but make it a good one* o *use bullet points and set things out clearly*	o *waste time explaining why the features are included* o *give more than one example of each feature* o *give more than one example* o *use only line numbers – copy out the example* o *provide more than you are asked*

Paper 2

Paper 2 Task 1:

You will be presented with a test or an extract from one and be asked to comment on it in terms of its effectiveness for the stated use.

- The advice is:

Do	Don't
o *state what kind of test it is* o *state six features (the rest will be ignored)* o *mention at least one positive and one negative point*	o *repeat yourself*

Do	Don't
o *use a range of criteria to evaluate the test, e.g., type of test, language content, skills content, assessment mode, test content/topics, task types, level, instructions*	o *write things you have read in previous reports*
o *show you understand key testing terminology*	o *approach from the point of view of assessing validity, reliability and practicality*
o *apply everything you say to this learner*	
o *use bullet points and set things out clearly stating whether the point you are making is positive or negative*	
o *Use headings:*	
o *Point: ...*	
o *Application to this learner: ...*	

Paper 2 Task 2:

In this task, you are given an extract from a coursebook.

Your mission is:

a. to work out what the purpose of the activities and stages in the material are

b. how they combine and

c. figure out what the author(s) believe. In other words, what the assumptions about language and learning are that underlie the design of the material

Read the rubric carefully because you will sometimes be directed to areas of the material to ignore or which are not relevant.

- The advice is:

Do	Don't
o *set your answer out in three discrete sections:*	o *repeat yourself*
a) Purposes of the activities / exercises	o *write things you have read in previous reports*
b) Combinations of the activities / exercises	
c) Assumptions and reasons	
o *read the rubric carefully to ensure you discuss only those exercises specified in the task rubric*	o *focus on what the learners have to do*
o *do the exercises yourself so you really understand what the learners have to do*	o *mix things up – stay focused on the three separate parts*
o *In part a) identify six relevant purposes but only one for each exercise*	
o *ensure that all the purposes cited refer to the stated focus of the material (i.e., the overall purpose)*	o *use the exercise numbers as headings – focus on the three sections*
o *look at the skills necessary to achieve the focus of the extract*	
o *look at the purposes of the exercise rather than describe what the learners have to do in them*	
o *In part b) identify six ways the activities / exercises combine*	
o *consider a range of ways exercises can combine, e.g. in terms of language and skills, the focus of the extract, the type of practice, presentation to practice, student interaction patterns, opportunities for personalisation, progression, recycling, the balance between accuracy and fluency, the topic/context etc.*	
o *In part c), do your research*	
o *identify only six assumptions*	
o *give one reason for each and no more*	
o *use headings:*	

o *Assumption – Reasons – Exercise* o *In all parts: use numbers so it is clear what you are writing about*	

Paper 2 Task 3:

In this task, you get an extract or two from something such as a methodology or resource book, a lesson plan, a discussion of a lesson or tutor feedback.

Your task is to answer a series of questions about it, often divided into two parts, based on your knowledge of approaches, methods, theories, resources and roles.

- The advice is:

Do	Don't
o *read the rubric very carefully and only provide the information you are asked for, i.e. keep to the point* o *make as many relevant different points as you can up to a maximum of 15* o *use bullet points rather than an essay format* o *consider the question (where appropriate) from the viewpoints of learners, teachers, institutional requirements, materials etc.* o *develop your points with reference to theories, settings, your experience, learner types etc.* o *do both parts of the task*	o *repeat yourself* o *let yourself run out of time before you have got to all the question*

Here's a summary and a few more tips:

Don't write more than you have to. There is a maximum which the marker is allowed to award for each item (and it is strictly adhered to). You will get no credit for writing more than you have been asked to write, no matter how good it is.

In Paper 1:

- Task 1 asks for 6 terms to match the definitions. Supply them and no more. You will get no credit at all for giving examples.
- Task 2 asks for a definition and an example. You will get 2 marks for each correct definition up to a maximum of 8 marks and 1 mark for each example up to a maximum of 4 marks.

  If the definition is wrong, the example is not scored at all.

  If you provide 2 examples for one item, one is wasted. You cannot provide 2 examples for one item and none for another in the hope that they will balance. They won't. You have wasted one example and lost a mark.
- Task 3 is similar: 2 marks for each feature and 2 marks for each example. Extra examples are a waste of your time.
- Task 4 asks for 4 strengths and weaknesses (i.e., you should have at least one in each category). You get 3 marks for each one and 2 more for one example of each. Identifying more than 4 is a waste of time. Providing more than one example of each is a waste of time.

  You get no marks for justifying your choice, so don't.

  You get no marks for prioritising the areas, so don't.
- Task 5 allows one mark for each correct point you make but you will get no marks for repeating yourself. Make sure you respond to all the demands of the task and tick them off as you go along.

In Paper 2:

- Task 1:

  You get 2 marks for each positive or negative comment up to a maximum of 12 marks (so include both sorts). You will get no credit at all for a seventh comment which will simply be ignored as will everything else over the 6 you have been asked for.

  You also get 1 mark for applying your comment to the learner for each idea so make sure you do that.
- Task 2:

  You will get 2 marks for recognising the purposes of the exercises up to a maximum of 12 so you need to identify 6 purposes (not more).

  You will get 2 marks for saying how the exercises combine up to a maximum of 12 marks so you need to say 6 things (not more).

  You get 1 mark for each of the writer's assumptions you identify. You are asked for 6 so give 6. Only the first 6 you state will be marked so make the first 6 your best 6.

  You get 1 mark for explaining the assumption (so refer to learning theory).

  You get one mark for referring to an exercise which illustrates the assumption.
- Task 3:

  You get 2 marks for each correct point you make up to a maximum of 15 points (i.e. 30 marks). The more detail and background theory with correct terminology use etc. you can give, the better. There are 10 marks available for the depth of your response.

Read the rubric and make sure you have responded to all parts of the task.

Later questions in both papers (the ones that carry the most marks) usually consist of more than one sub-task. Make sure you attend to all of them and tick them off as you go along.

Keep it simple.

If you have forgotten a piece of terminology to describe something, don't leave the area out altogether. You will get credit for identifying something even if you don't use the techno-term for it.

Be sure of what you say.

Do not use terminology you aren't sure about. It is better to supply a non-technical description with an example of what you mean than describe something wrongly.

Be prepared.

Do thorough revision and you will feel confident and assured.

Make sure you do the mock examinations on the site conscientiously.

Reason #3: Poor time management

The breakdown of the marks awarded for each task on both papers reflects the amount of time you should be spending on the tasks. There is little point in taking half the time to get 10% of the marks.

Every year, the reports highlight the fact that people who are unsuccessful have often failed to complete some tasks (although it is not possible to tell if that was due to lack of time or lack of knowledge).

One examiner's report states:

> *Candidates are free to attempt the tasks in the order of their choosing and those candidates who attempt the high scoring tasks first are therefore able to complete them fully and maximise the number of marks that they can gain for them.*

so work backwards on paper 1. 82% of the marks are available for Tasks 3, 4 and 5.

Keep an eye on the marking scheme and fix it in your mind

You have 90 minutes for each paper, so, bearing the marks you can get for each question in mind, the time allocation should be like this.

In Paper 1:

Task 1: 6 marks	Task 2: 12 marks	Task 3: 12 marks	Task 4: 20 marks	Task 5: 50 marks
5 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes	18 minutes	45 minutes

So, start with task 5 and work backwards. That way, you will have tackled the high-scoring tasks when you are fresh and alert. If you fail to do Task 1 at all, you can still, in theory, score 94% of the marks available. Even if you ignore both Tasks 1 and 2, you can still get 82% of the marks.

This will leave you two minutes at the end to relax, knowing you have done the best you can in the time available.

In Paper 2:

Task 1: 18 marks	Task 2: 42 marks	Task 3: 40 marks
16 minutes	38 minutes	36 minutes

Leave task 1 till last. Even if you fail to do it at all, you have given yourself the chance of scoring 82% of the marks on offer for the paper.

Subtract 1 minute from each task and you'll have three minutes over at the end.