



Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice

How to Prepare for the Examination

Effective From June 2007 Assessment

1. Introduction

The following information provides guidance on how to prepare for the MRS Advanced Certificate examination, on the range of information required by some of the types of questions contained in the examination.

2. How long is the exam?

The MRS Advanced Certificate is 2^{1/2} hours long and contains 2 sections. In order to complete all the sections, it is recommended that you plan how best to use your exam time. Use the following suggestion as a guide:

The examination has 2 types of question:

- **Section 1** - a compulsory question based on a short case study
- **Section 2** - option essay questions

The requirement is for candidates to complete all of the questions in Section 1 and two questions from six in Section 2, failure to do this by either selecting more or less questions than the requirement may result in the paper being marked as non-compliant.

Section 1: Compulsory Question (Recommended time: 50 mins)

This section contains a short case study with 3 associated questions, all of which the candidate must answer. The aim of this type of question is to test the candidate's ability to apply their knowledge of market research to a concrete situation and to offer clear and convincing solutions.

Section 1 questions normally follow the following format.

- A short case study (around 150 – 200 words), usually containing the following types of information:
 - Background information & secondary data;
 - Specification of the client's needs or problem;
 - Definition of the task for the researcher.
- There are three questions associated with the case study. Candidates must answer all three. The normal format for the questions is as follows:
 - One question requiring candidates to demonstrate their understanding of research methodology, make informed methodological choices and justify those choices.
 - One question requiring candidates to analyse an aspect of the market research process.
 - One question requiring candidates to apply their knowledge to an aspect of the market research process to produce an MR 'item'.

Section 2: Option Questions (Recommended time: 50 mins)

This section contains 6 essay titles. Candidates must answer **two** out of six.

The questions are 'traditional' essay titles and are drawn from across the syllabus. The questions normally ask candidates to demonstrate:

- their knowledge of the given topic (e.g. through a descriptive element in the question);
- their understanding of the given topic (e.g. through analysis or evaluation);
- their ability to relate their knowledge and understanding to the practical application of market research principles.

Assessment weighting

All three questions which candidates must answer questions are equally weighted in their contribution towards the final result. Where questions are subdivided into 2 or 3 tasks, the weighting for each task within the question will be clearly indicated.

3. How can I best prepare for the exam?

There are a number of things you can do:

- **Remind yourself of the *learning aims of the qualification*.** Look again at the MRS Advanced Certificate syllabus to remind yourself of the scope of the type of questions which might come up. You can find a copy of the syllabus on the MRS Website.
- **Apply what you know to a problem.** When revising, it is useful to consider how you might apply what you are reading about to a practical situation. You have already done this when preparing your Integrated Assignment. Now try to think of practical situations which are relevant to the area you are looking at.
- **Analyse some research.** The business or social affairs sections of newspapers are good places to start. Keep an eye open for reports of recent research surveys, then evaluate the processes which are described. Which areas would you like more information about? You may be able to find a copy of the research report on the internet.
- **Read.** Broaden your knowledge by reading the core text along with recommended supplementary reading – Recommended text and Codes & Guidelines
- **Get to know the exam.** Read the past paper enclosed in this pack or on the MRS Website
- **Practise writing to time.** The MRS website http://www.mrs.org.uk/qualifications/cert_resources.htm contains sample questions. Give yourself 50 minutes to write an answer, then compare your ideas with the relevant Answer Guide.

4. How much should I write for each question?

Remember that both sections require you to write in continuous prose. The amount you write will be dictated by the time you have and the range of ideas you have.

5. How are my exam answers marked?

All examiners who mark the MRS Advanced Certificate papers are very experienced market and/or social researchers who are involved in training researchers. Before they begin to work as examiners, they undergo thorough training in assessing examination work.

When marking papers, the examiners have *Exam Answer Guides* to support them. Examples of these answer guides are on the MRS website http://www.mrs.org.uk/qualifications/cert_resources.htm to help you assess your own answers to the sample questions. These answer guides are not 'model answers', nor definitive lists of all the points which could be made in relation to the question. They are summaries of key points which might be made in answer to the question. However, if you do not cover all of the points in the answer guide or if you make different points, don't worry – the examiner who reads your paper is an expert who will give credit for all relevant and convincing points which you make.

In addition to this first round of marking, a sample of all exam scripts are double marked by a Senior Examiner. After marking, all exam scripts which fail to meet the pass standard or which fall on a borderline are then subject to moderation by an industry expert and by the Joint Chief Examiner. Only then is a decision made on your result.

6. What is the examiner looking for in my answers?

As with many subjects, there are few 'black and white' solutions in market research practice. The examiners are seeking evidence that you:

- have a range of ideas which are relevant to the question being asked
- can justify the suggestions you make, thereby demonstrating your *understanding* of the research process
- can identify the limitations of the suggestions you make – i.e. you can identify any potential problems which may not be solved by your suggestions.

In short, the examiner is looking for a *range* of suggestions which demonstrate the *depth* of your understanding.

7. What are the most common problems in the exam?

Completing an exam can be stressful. Overcome the most common exam problems by following these guidelines:

- **Take time to read the paper:** When the exam begins, take a few minutes to plan how you are going to tackle the paper. For example, you may want to do one of the essay questions first as you feel you can answer the question effectively and quickly. That's fine – don't feel constrained to answer the sections in the order in which they appear in the paper.
- **Working to time:** Avoid spending too much time on one question. Instead, try to follow the suggested timings given above.
- **Answer the question:** Remember that you need to identify exactly what the question requires. Writing all you know about a subject will mean that only a few of the points you make may be relevant. Try to focus on the key elements of the question.
- **Plan your answers:** When writing in continuous prose, it is easy to go off at a tangent. Remember to stay focused on the question and to plan your answers, making sure that you can link each point you make with the question being asked. You can do this rough work in your answer booklet – simply put a line through any notes which you don't want the examiner to take into consideration.
- **Use the question to support your answer:** The question may give you a lot of context within which to base your answer. This is certainly true of the Mini Case Study section, where you are given a research 'problem' and asked to provide suggestions and/or solutions. Remember to link your answers to the context given.
- **Demonstrate your understanding:** Remember that the examination is a time for you to show exactly how wide and deep your knowledge and understanding of key issues are. When writing your answer, try to give the rationale for the points you make. Don't forget – the examiner doesn't know you, therefore she or he can't assume that you know *why* you have made a particular suggestion. Don't be afraid to 'state the obvious' – it demonstrates that you know what you are talking about!

Remember, as with most exams, *exam technique* is important. Try to use the sample questions and the relevant answer guides on the MRS Website

http://www.mrs.org.uk/qualifications/cert_resources.htm

8. Marking the examination

Answers do not receive a numerical mark, but are given a band mark (Distinction, Merit, Pass, Fail).

In order to achieve a Pass overall, candidates normally need to achieve a minimum of a Pass in each question. If one answer is awarded a Fail grade, candidates are normally expected to achieve a Merit band or above in one of the remaining two questions in order to Pass.

When deciding grades, the examiners, moderators and Chief Examiner use the Examination Level Descriptors for guidance.

9. When do I get my results?

The results are released approximately 12 weeks following the exam, after exam scripts and integrated assignments have been marked and moderated.

10. What happens if I don't pass the exam?

Don't worry! All candidates can retake the examination twice after the initial sitting, as long as the retakes are taken within the 3-year registration period. Full details for those who wish to retake assessment are included with the notification of results.