



Preparing for Constructed Response (CR) Exams

For CIPS Exams L4, 5 & 6.

Constructed Response Exams

Questions our students ask

Our students often ask similar questions about their exam performance, especially in constructed response (CR) exams. Unfortunately, due to the large number of you taking exams, we can't provide individual feedback beyond the current performance report.

We've produced this guidance to help you understand how you can improve your answers.

Commonly asked questions

1

I didn't pass my exam, and I don't understand why because I wrote a lot.

2

Are the command words really that important?

3

I have passed all my other exams, but I cannot seem to pass this module.

4

I keep failing CR exams. I know the content, so I don't understand what I am doing wrong.

Here's some guidance to help you improve your CR exam answers

1. Read the question very carefully

This may sound obvious, but misunderstanding the question is one of the most common reasons you lose marks. Many of you show good knowledge of the subject but don't focus closely enough on what the question is asking you to do.

For example, a question may be about Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues but ask you to focus only on environmental risks. If your answer discusses all ESG risks, you will only gain marks for the parts that relate specifically to environmental risks.



If a question asks for **three** examples, giving more than three will not gain extra marks. Examiners will only mark the number requested.



2. Understand the level of study expected

CIPS qualifications from Level 4 to Level 6 are equivalent to degree-level study.

This means you are expected not only to remember theories and concepts, but also to:



Apply them



Analyse situations



Evaluate different options

3. Pay close attention to command words

Command words are very important because they tell you the level of thinking required. As you progress from Level 4 to Level 6, the command words require deeper understanding and more critical thinking.

For example: A question about environmental risks ...

Explain

In the example about environmental risks, we're expecting you to provide information about the principles you have learned.

- Give clear reasons or examples.
- Demonstrate that you understand and can interpret how and when these apply and the likely impact.
- A simple list or outline of the risks is not enough.

Analyse

To analyse means we want you to scrutinise the issue in more detail.

- Demonstrate that you have a depth of understanding of the impact of the principles you have learned, such as about environmental risks: where risks come from, and in what circumstances they are most likely to occur.
- If relevant, explore any connections between the principles.
- Examples should be used where possible.

If you only provide a basic outline of risks, the outcome is likely to be a fail.

Evaluate

Here we expect you to make a judgement.

- To help you to evaluate, the question may specify additional steps, such as that you should include risk mitigation.
- You should consider the advantages and disadvantages of each principle, such as each risk mitigation measure.

Justify

Similar to **Evaluate**.

Your focus should be on how effective the approaches/solutions are, and what your recommendation is for a given situation and why.

Refer to the list of **common command words** in your qualification guidance to understand how they are used at each level.

4. Use the syllabus as a study tool

All exam questions are based on the syllabus. In our exams, we won't ask about content that is not included in the syllabus, so it is an essential read for revision.

In each syllabus the module purpose explains the overall focus of the module and the key competencies you'll be expected to develop. Each module is then divided into learning outcomes, which outline the main topic areas. In CR modules, there are usually four learning outcomes.

Within each learning outcome, the assessment criteria explain exactly how your work will be assessed. The indicative content then narrows this further, showing you the specific areas you should study.

Using more than one source of information is essential to help you develop a stronger understanding of the concepts and how they are applied in practice.

5. Manage your time and practice your exam technique

The final question in an exam paper is often answered least well. This may be because students study topics in syllabus order and feel tired by the time they reach the last learning outcome. It is important to give equal attention to all areas of the syllabus.

Time management in the exam is also key. Poor exam technique can result in unfinished or underdeveloped answers, even when knowledge is strong. There is no single 'correct' way to structure an answer, so find an approach that works well for you.

- Keep introductions brief. They help set the context but should only take a few minutes.
- Focus closely on the question. Avoid writing about wider issues that do not directly answer it.
- If a specific number of points or examples is requested, do not give more than asked for.
- Try to divide your time evenly across all questions. Spending too little time on questions you are finding more challenging, may result in an overall fail - unless other answers are exceptionally strong.
- Where a question is supported by a case study, your answer should clearly link and be applied to the information provided.
- If there is no case study, use relevant examples to illustrate your points. These may be drawn from industry practice, your own organisation or sources you have researched.

