



## **THE NATIONAL BOARD OF ACCOUNTANTS AND AUDITORS (NBAA)**

### **HOW TO PASS NBAA EXAMINATIONS – A GUIDE FOR CANDIDATES AND TRAINERS**

The Board has very often stressed the importance of the need for adequate groundwork and preparation and mastering of examination techniques if one expects to pass the Board examinations.

For the guidance of both students and teachers we have extracted guidelines and recommendations which the Board has pinpointed in previous Examiners Reports.

We strongly feel that repetitive doses of these recommendations will provide a much needed boost to candidates' efforts at preparing for these examinations.

#### **LONG TERM PLANS**

A candidate should commence preparing for an examination at whichever level, (*be it ATEC or PROF.*) at least two years before he/she sits the examinations.

A positive attitude should be developed right from the beginning once NBAA has accepted officially the minimum requirements for a particular examination level.

The following guidelines should be adopted:-

- (i) Set aside two hours per day every week for serious study
- (ii) Consolidate ones knowledge by :-
  - 1) Serious and meaningful participation in discussions with senior colleagues or examinees:
  - 2) Attending lectures and tutorials.
  - 3) Noting and understanding the basic concepts of the subject under review.
  - 4) Reading widely connected articles, materials and write-ups in professional journals, Newspapers and textbooks.
  - 5) Revise or review on a weekly basis what has been studied in the previous week.
  - 6) By attempting to answer/ solve past examinations.
  - 7) As far as circumstances allow, attend workshops, seminars and lectures conducted for Accountants which you feel may benefit and strengthen your understanding of subjects like Accountancy, Auditing, Costing, Management, Computers, and Data processing, Taxation, etc.

Any reported activities highlighted in newspapers should be clipped and filed. For example:- A question was set in Auditing requiring candidates comments on a ministers statement which appeared in the Daily News as follows:-

Lack of strict accountability is a contributing factor to fraud and embezzlement of funds in Parastatal organizations comment.

## SHORT TERM PLANS

These guidelines apply to preparations during the three months immediately prior to an examination February to April for the May exams and July to October for the November examinations. Many candidates make fatal mistakes of engaging in selective preparations. In excessive concentration on selected topics.

It is recommended that:-

- (i) Candidates revise everything in the syllabus. Never engage in desperate attempts at “sporting” Likely questions. It is foolhardy and very risky. Do not deceive yourself that there are topics which should be examined in very examination.
- (ii) Consolidate your knowledge by revising constantly.
- (iii) Read and understand Examiners Reports of previous examination.
- (iv) Attempt as many past examination question papers as possible under strict examination conditions. Attempting past papers is an unsurpassed remedy to one’s success.
- (v) **CLOSE ALL “ESCAPE HATCHES** and concentrate on **PASSING** in the examination. Escape Hatches are excuses for candidates who have willed themselves to fail, lack of study materials. Poor tutors, dearth of textbooks, illness, too much work in office – these excuses are negative and will hinder a candidates chances of passing an examination. Some students claim that the CPA is a going seriously since if he / she will get it some other time. Surely that is a wrong attitude to approach a professional examination with.
- (vi) Cultivate the ability to apply theoretical knowledge to situations arising in practice.
- (vii) Develop proper examination techniques – reading and understanding the examiners Requirements, answering questions to the point, marshalling facts in logical sequence Proper timing in answering the questions.

## THE SECRET OF SUCCES IN AN EXAMINATION IS REVISION

By revising, ones knowledge is consolidated constant revision is important. Revision immediately before an examination alone is insufficient and useless as one’s mind gets clogged and clouded. The current practice of students copying solutions from trainers is not enough for one to pass a professional paper, it is of utmost importance that the students answers / solves the questions / problems themselves.

## THE EXAMINATION

1. On the day before the examination date, it is advisable to locate the examination centre and know where you will be seated.
2. On the day of the examination, arrive at the centre at least half an hour before the appointed time
3. Take all your requirements with you: your identity card, pens, pencils, eraser, ruler, but not your Study materials. Last minute revision will confuse you.
4. **DO NOT** attempt to go into the examination room with un-authorized material as the penalty of
5. This act is heavy i.e disqualification from writing the examinations.
6. **Examination techniques** – You should strive to attempt and finish the question well within the Allocated time. For example in a three hour paper (180 minutes), a question may carry say 10 Marks out of 100. This should be answered in 18 minutes only ( $\frac{10}{100} \times 180$ ), likewise 20 marks question in 36 minutes, 28 marks question in 50.5 minutes and so on.

Spending more time on one question reduces the candidate’s chances of scoring more marks in other question.

## **SALIENT BASICS:**

### **You can't communicate what you don't know.**

This comment seems almost too self – evident to require stating. Yet each year a large number of candidates present themselves for the exams and prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are not prepared in any way to write the NBAA examinations. Candidates who think they can pass the NBAA examinations without knowing the material sufficiently will invariably be disappointed. Therefore, the primary consideration is knowledge of the subject matter.

### **I think I know it, but.....**

The National Board of Accountants and Auditors (NBAA) has published a syllabus for each level of its Accounting examinations in Tanzania. All candidates should have a copy of the syllabus booklet and study it thoroughly. Keep in mind that this syllabus is the basic document from which the examinations are derived. So a thorough understanding of this syllabus is critical.

Admittedly, the previous NBAA syllabus was very general to the extent that it did not clearly indicate the level and depth of coverage by candidates preparing for the examinations. This problem has however adequately been taken care of in the new NBAA Examination scheme and syllabus.

It is the candidate's responsibility to cover all the required syllabus. The principle of GIGO (Garbage in Garbage Out) in EDP systems will surely apply for one who will attempt the examinations while inadequately prepared.

It is important in this process for students to be completely honest. Wishing that you know about consolidation procedures is not the same thing as knowing about consolidation procedures. Practically speaking it is possible to use objective evidence to provide you with a good idea of your strengths and weaknesses. Try some of the following:-

- (i) Attempt questions from your text on different areas. If you handle a given question well. You can be confident you know the subject matter.
- (ii) Review your assignments. Test results. etc to see where you have wrong or where you are weak.
- (iii) Review the summaries often found at the end of chapter in most textbooks. If you find you don't remember the summaries then you haven't understood the chapter well. Those chapters which give you problems should be reviewed in greater depth.
- (iv) Attempt previous examination question papers under examinations conditions. Where suggested answers are available they can be used for reference to see how well one handled the Examination question.

**To sum up this basic point** – It is important for you to identify your areas of strength and weakness so that you can immediately take corrective action.

## **A FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPT**

**Don't read this paragraph** – Unless you want to pass the NBAA examinations.

The first marks on any question are easier to obtain than the last marks. Candidates who make no attempt on certain question will find it difficult to pass. The logical plan to follow in preparation for these examinations is therefore the one which broadens your knowledge rather than providing you with an in – depth knowledge of certain problems or subject areas. For instance. Many accounting Students spend days or weeks trying to completely master the subject of consolidation. A better approach would be to

study the major adjustments and conceptual nature of consolidation which will provide the candidates time to study other areas where they are weak.

Every question in an examination paper is important and relevant to the candidates passing the examination. Hence candidates are strongly urged to attempt all questions in an examination paper.

## **YOUR PERSONAL PLAN**

As the dates of NBAA examination approach. You should have a personal plan to guide your studies. Based on the following suggestions. You should be able to produce a plan with dates and deadlines which will give you the most knowledge in the least time:-

- a) Review your coverage of syllabus and realistically assess your own strengths and weakness, having regard to the level of knowledge required in each area.
- b) Acquire sufficient knowledge in all areas where questions could be asked to stand a chance of obtaining as many of the available marks as possible.
- c) Review areas covered earlier in your study programme that may now require updating.
- d) Review old examination and solution booklets to find out
  - (i) The nature of questions asked and the types of answers expected by the Board of Examiners.
  - (ii) The meaning of words such as discuss describe outline compare and explain
- e) Write some practice examinations under examination conditions. Writing three hour Examinations is an exhausting process and practice will prepare you for the real thing. So prepare a personal plan, intelligently and efficiently designed, to permit you to achieve your Knowledge goals. *THEN STICK TO IT.*

## **HOW TO WRITE THE EXAMINATION**

To pass a given NBAA examination, you must convince the examiners that you have the *KNOWLEDGE NECESSARY FOR A PASS MARK.*

It sounds simple but many students end up being disappointed, because they think they had the necessary knowledge whereas in fact they have not. What can be done? The following approaches, developed specifically for professional accounting examinations, have been found effective:-

### **Budget your time:**

In three – hrs examination, each mark is worth 1.8 minutes. A 20 mark question, should not take more than 36 minutes  $\left(\frac{20}{100} \times 180\right)$ . Do not fall behind. You must leave time for each question.

Remember that if you do not attempt a question, you will not receive a single mark from the question. If you do fall behind, reallocate your time among question and spend some time on each remaining question, rather than leave out an entire question. The thing to bear in mind is that usually the marginal value of your time is highest at the beginning of a question and diminishes the longer you spend answering it.

### **Read the question**

Carefully read the question through once to get an overall picture. Then: underline important features to determine exactly what is required in the question. If the question consists of several parts. Read them all to ensure that you do not include in the answer to one part, facts required for another part. Re read the given part of the question a second time, and underline or number important relevant facts to be used in your answer.

Re – read the question, or the part of the question you are answering to ensure that you are answering the correct question. You may wish to re - read the question again near to or at the end of your answer to ensure that you have been on the right track.

### **Be concise and to the point**

Use point form in your answers wherever possible. This reduces padding and allows you to make more points in less time. If you do not have time to complete a question say something like, the following points should also be considered: then list the points hurriedly. At least the marker will know that you are aware of points you may have omitted.

### **List the points you intend to make and plan your answer**

List the points you intend to make on a sheet of paper before you begin to answer an essay – type question. This allows you to organize your thoughts and then your answer. It also ensures that you don't forget points while you are writing your answers. Add to the skeleton outline any ideas that occur to you while you are answering the question for the same reasons. Hand in your rough plans especially if you did not complete the question. Try to avoid long narratives.

### **Answer the easy questions first**

You can earn marks easily on what you know you can answer. This will give you more confidence in the latter part of the examination, and will help to relax you moreover, it will prevent you from getting bogged down on hard questions and falling behind.

### **Write neatly**

There is high possibility of being misunderstood, or not understood completely if an answer script is not well and neatly written. A neatly answered script attracts and motivates markers to their job.

### **Use relevant examples as much as possible**

Using relevant example can help explain your answer and ensure that you get full marks for points made. Examples should refer to real situations encountered.

### **Make reference to relevant authority for the answer, if any**

Where there are relevant authorities to an answer especially on questions on current controversial topics, quote them. When answering a question, try to relate your answer to your study sources. It may help you to remember more points. Furthermore, this will impress the examiner and therefore award you more marks.

### **Beware of tendency to give detailed procedures**

Where the question asks for general concepts, you should not waste time giving unnecessary detailed procedures for which you will not get extra marks.

### **Beware of discussing general problems**

Where you are required to discuss a particular situation given in the question, then concentrate on the required situation only. It will not help you to discuss a situation not required in the question.

The NBAA examiners reports contain several complaints on these points.

What is required of you is to understand the concepts raised by the question, and strictly answer the question in regard to these concepts.

### **If figures are given in the question use them in your answers**

Use ratios, comparisons, etc where relevant in the analysis of your answer. Do not spend time getting to the fifth decimal point of accuracy, but being in the right ball park can help tremendously. Some figures are also given in the question with no relevance to the answer but to throw you away. So be careful.

### **Be careful when you read dates and numbers**

It is far too easy under pressure to misread a date or to mistake a profit for a loss. It could cost you dearly. In standard costing questions for example, too many times candidates have mistaken favourable variances for unfavourable variances.

### **You are not the fraud squad**

In examination like Auditing or investigation, most candidates mistake them to mean fraud or errors. As a result they lose time answering wrong concepts of the subject matter.

### **List as many points as you can**

Remember that most people know at least half of the basic procedures or alternative techniques. To pass, you have to put down more points than most of the other people. You may be required to give more than one point for each mark.

### **Use short cuts wherever possible**

As much as possible use short cuts in answering questions but do not sacrifice format and content. Remember that the easier it is for the maker to follow your thoughts, the more marks you will get even if your mechanical answer is incorrect. In other words, leave a discernible trail in your answer.

### **Use a check list**

It is always advisable to use a check list of points or areas to be covered under each topic if one is to have maximum marks.

### **Do not panic**

Panic is the worst enemy in the examination. When you panic you forget all the other caution to an extent of forgetting even the knowledge you came with to the examination room. Just cool down. After all, your fellow candidates are faced with the same examination condition. Do not overwork yourself / brainstorm the night before the examination. Come to the examination relaxed and things should proceed well if you were well prepared.

### **Common faults in writing the examination**

Failure to comprehend and appreciate the Requirements

Failure to properly organize the answers and the questions are not followed logically.

Tendency to assume that the requirements are always difficult to comprehend. Candidates think themselves weak

Poor planning and budgeting of examination time.

Tendency to look for fewer marks at the expense of the rest of the paper.

Failure to consider all the aspects of the question and over concern with minor discrepancies (remember the first marks on each question are the easiest to earn)

Misinterpreting the requirements of a question and therefore answering the wrong question (answering a question other than the question asked)

Repetition of the same thing over and over again.

Inability to communicate (poor in language). This is the biggest problem of candidates.

### **CAUTIONS IN PREPARING FOR PROFESSIONAL EXAMINATION.**

NBAA conducts professional examinations which are of different procedures from institutional examinations. While NBAA examinations are set based on a whole syllabus and by setters other than those who have taught the subject matter, institutional examinations are set from topics taught in class and by the very same person who taught the students in that particular subject. Institutional examinations are marked by the setter of the question paper who happens to be the one who taught the particular subject.

The other major difference of NBAA Examinations and institutional examinations is on the mode of evaluation and grading system. In the NBAA examinations, only the examinations papers are what matters in determining a pass or a failure. One has to score a pass mark for each paper of examinations while under institutional examinations candidate final assessment is a combination of course work to final examination performance. The ratio of course work to final examination differs from institution to institution e. g 50: 50, 40 : 60 etc.

What these differences mean to the candidates is that it is more difficult for them to pass NBAA examinations as compared to the institutional examinations. It further means that candidate's strategies in preparing for NBAA examinations should be slightly different from those used in institutional examinations.

#### **When preparing for professional examinations, the following cautions should be observed:-**

- (a) Candidate should never specialize in certain (Specific) topics as the examination can test you on any part of the syllabus. Specializing on topics means speculating the examination.
- (b) Candidates should not waste their time hunting for examination questions prior to the Examination as it is not possible for one to secure the questions.
- (c) Candidates should not waste precious time by looking for possible examination setters for even The examination themselves do not know which of their questions will be examined if they will be examined at all.
- (d) Candidates should desist from the habit of shunning away from tests and mock examinations before the examinations. Though the marks scored in such tests/ examinations do not have a direct relationship to one passing the final examination, they are a good measure of one's ability to successfully tackle the final examination.

- (e) Candidates should retain from such laissez – faire attitudes such as, the CPA is a going concern  
Candidates should instead be more devoted to their studies than it has been previously. To date  
over 6,889 CPAs have already been produced. Why not you?

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