Cambridge Professional Development Qualifications
Academic Skills

This fact sheet details the key academic skills that are required for a candidate to pass a Cambridge Professional Development Qualification. Programme Leaders can use this information to help them design the content of their programme plan. These skills are ideally introduced early on in the programme.

Programme leaders will have carried out an initial assessment of their candidates which may have highlighted areas of development regarding academic skills. Where there are general areas, an early session exploring these issues with the candidates can be beneficial. If they have identified individual support needs, these could be met, for example, by additional academic skills sessions, signposting candidates to additional resources or creating study support pairs from your candidate group.
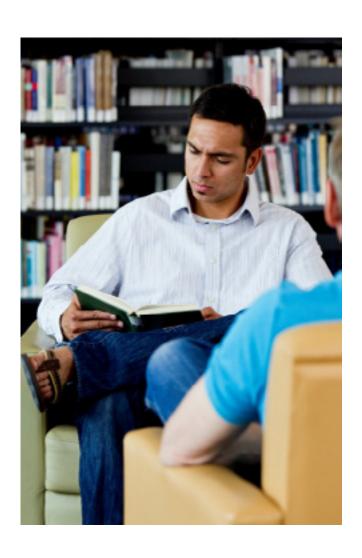
When formatively assessing the candidates portfolios it is good practice to use the assessment criteria and this guide to base the feedback on.

- They should consider carefully which educational theories to include in their written assignments. It is important to create clear links between the research of others and their role as an educator – avoid superficial references to educational theory

- Candidates should identify theoretical underpinnings which have made a direct and discernible impact on their professional development, and provide evidence for how these have transformed their professional practice*.

To pass at level 5, the bullet points marked with * should also be addressed

Theoretical underpinning

- Candidates should show understanding of how different theories, concepts and principles apply to their professional practice

- They should engage with current educational theories; move beyond description of each theory to explain the reasons why it influences their approach to teaching and learning

- Candidates should give details and examples of how aspects of their professional practice have been influenced or changed by the educational theories they have studied

- When referencing an educational theory or approach, candidates should give full details of the author(s) and the source of their information

- Candidates are free to explore all educational theories which inform their practice. While many current influential theories originated in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, candidates are encouraged to explore local and cultural theories which underpin practice in their region

Critical evaluation

- In order to evaluate critically, candidates should make judgements about the significance, effectiveness and impact of the decisions they make in their professional practice

- When evaluating practice, candidates should use, and engage with, feedback from a variety of sources to identify strengths and areas for further development in their professional practice

- Part of critical evaluation is to view professional practice through multiple lenses: in addition to their own perception. Candidates need to see their instructions and actions in the classroom through their students' eyes. They should also explain how this encourages them to modify their practice

- If candidates discuss aspects of their educational philosophy or professional practice with colleagues, they can critically reflect on how these discussions impacted their thinking and include a summary of their influence in the portfolio

- Candidates should consider how the learning environment they create impacts on the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning*

- To be truly critical in their evaluation, candidates should address the implicit moral, ethical and political assumptions which underpin their own core ideas about education and critically reflect on how they influence their own practice, both positively and negatively*

- Candidates might reflect on the ways in which 'power' undergirds and frames educational processes and interactions*.

Reflective writing

- Reflective writing requires the candidate to discuss their personal experiences – e.g. how they conducted a lesson, how they responded to particular questions and incidents which arose in the process of teaching and learning

- Candidates are encouraged to use words like 'I', 'me' and 'my'

- It is a good idea for candidates to use a recommended reflective cycle to help organise their reflections about their actions and experiences (e.g. Kolb 1984, Gibbs 1988)

- Candidates may need guidance to ensure they do not use their word limit just telling the reader the story of what happened ('what' and 'how')

- Allow enough space to talk about 'why' they felt that way – it is the 'significance' of these events on which they ought to be reflecting

- Candidates should be selective: identify a small number of relevant examples which illustrate their engagement with the reflective process. They should include only the most challenging/puzzling/successful incidents and, after reflecting deeply on them, explore why they are interesting and what they have learned

- It may be useful for candidates to include a plan for next time identifying what they would do differently, their new understandings or values and unexpected things they have learned about themselves

- **Successful reflective writing integrates theory and practice.** Candidates should identify important aspects of their reflections and write these in conjunction with appropriate theories and academic research to explain and interpret their reflections. Candidates can be encouraged to use these experiences to evaluate the theories - can the theories be adapted or modified to be more helpful for their situation?*

- Candidates should reflect on their journey to being a professional educator and identify what impact this professional development qualification has had on their identity as an educator e.g. how do you view your role in the school*.

Analysis

- Analysis involves careful study of something to learn about its parts, what they do, and how they are related to each other. Candidates should break down the key elements of their professional practice and examine why they are important to their development as an educator

- Candidates need to avoid simply gathering and sharing information in an unfocused way. They should seek to provide valid and reliable evidence from different information sources and explain its relevance and significance to their assignment

- They are encouraged to analyse the similarities and differences between the ideas they are reading about and their own professional context

- Successful analytical writing often involves synthesis. Synthesis means bringing together different sources of information to serve an argument or idea you are constructing. Candidates should make logical connections between the different sources that help them shape and support their ideas

- Candidates should provide relevant examples from their professional practice to support their analysis

- From the wide reading they have done on educational theory and research, identify ideas and practices which they

think will continue to inform, develop and improve their professional thinking

- Based on their analysis of research and practice, candidates should identify further professional development opportunities for themselves and for others, including through cross-curricular collaboration*.

Academic conventions

For a guide to citation and referencing, see https://www.citethisforme.com/harvard-referencing

- Candidates need to avoid contractions. Instead, they should write in full words like 'did not' and 'is not' (rather than 'didn't' and 'isn't')

- They should not use popular phrases or clichés in their portfolio e.g. 'at the end of the day'; 'in a nutshell'; 'when it comes to the crunch'. Replace with: 'finally', 'in summary', 'in a crisis'

- Avoid casual everyday words such as 'really', 'okay' and 'maybe'

- Where abbreviations and acronyms are required to avoid repetition, they need to make sure that, on first mention, the unabbreviated term appears together with the abbreviation or acronym, for example:

  First mention: "An article in the Cambridge Journal of Education (CJoE) reported…"

  Subsequent mention: "Writing in the CJoE, Brown concluded that…"

- Words such as 'people' and 'ideas' have the potential to be vague. Candidates should avoid saying: 'according to many people'. Rather, they should explain which individual people and/or which specific ideas

- When writing about their reflections candidates should use the past tense as they are referring to a particular moment (I felt…). When referring to theory they should use the present tense as the ideas are still current (Kumar proposes that…)

- Candidates should not be tempted to use complex language or expressions that are not their own, just to make your writing appear "academic". Instead, they are encouraged to use straightforward language. Their reader needs to understand the information or ideas that they are conveying

- Good writing makes a point clearly and may use examples or evidence to improve the reader's understanding. To avoid rambling, candidates should plan the points that they wish to convey. They should include only those details which are necessary.

Suggestions for further reading

Brookfield, S. (1995) Becoming a critically reflective teacher, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986) Becoming Critical. Education, knowledge and action research, Lewes: Falmer Press.

Everitt, A. and Hardiker, P. (1996) Evaluating for Good Practice, London: Macmillan.

Gibbs, G. (1998) Learning by doing: a guide to teaching and learning methods, Oxford: Further Education Unit, Oxford Polytechnic.

Kolb, D. (1984) Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rosenwasser, D. (2010) Writing analytically, Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing.

Schön, D. (1983) The Reflective Practitioner. How professionals think in action, London: Temple Smith.

Wyse, D. (2012) The good writing guide for education students, Sage publications, London.

Videos

Cambridge University Press Academic Writing Skills 1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ux6Jxd9RkHU

University of Leicester/British Council Academic Writing lectures http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/eltu/insessional/el7030

Harvard Graduate School of Education, The value of self-reflection https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/14/10/value-self-reflection

Academic word list

http://www.uefap.com/vocab/select/awl.htm