

THE UNIVERSITY OF SWAZILAND  
DEPARTMENT OF ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION SKILLS  
FINAL (MAIN) EXAMINATION 2006

TITLE OF PAPER	ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION SKILLS
COURSE CODE	ACS1 (M)
TIME ALLOWED	THREE (3) HOURS
INSTRUCTIONS	<b>WRITE THE NAME OF YOUR FACULTY ON THE ANSWER SCRIPT</b>  ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS
TOTAL MARKS	100

This examination paper contains 7 pages including the cover sheet.

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## QUESTION 1

(30 marks)

## LETTER/MEMORANDUM WRITING

Answer *either* question (a) *or* question (b). Write at least one page but not more than two.

## (a) LETTER

Your community has seen an alarming increase in the number of orphans as a result of parental death through HIV-related illnesses. Write a letter to your Member of Parliament (MP) and make suggestions as to what your community can do to take care of the orphans.

## (b) MEMORANDUM

At the start of this session, many students experienced much delay in collecting their textbooks from the University Bookshop. Write a memorandum to the Dean of Student Affairs offering suggestions on how the situation at the Bookstore can be improved. Copy to the Dean of your Faculty and the Bookshop Manager.

## QUESTION 2

## SUMMARY

(20 marks)

*Study the following passage carefully, and in two paragraphs (one page or so), summarise (a) the reasons why the South African government wants to reappropriate the agricultural land, and (b) why the process has been slow. Use your own words, and do not copy sentences from the passage.*

### South Africa orders first farm seizure

For the first time, the South African government has said it will seize property from a white farmer under its land distribution laws, raising fears that the country could adopt a Zimbabwe-style policy of forced seizure. The country's Commission on Restitution of Land Rights said it had tried to negotiate with Hannes Visser for his farm for the past 30 months, and had no option now but to issue an expropriation notice.

The commission has offered Mr Visser 1.75m rand for his 500-hectare cattle and crop farm in the north-western Lichtenburg district. But Mr Visser says the land is worth twice as much, because he has invested more than 3m rand on the farm.

Blessing Mphela, the Claims Commissioner, said that because of the vast disparity of the two amounts, he had recommended that the Minister of Land Affairs, Thoko Didiza, expropriate the land "as a last resort".

He added: "The minister has approved the commencement of the expropriation and a notice of intention to expropriate will be served on Visser. The notice will run for 30 days."

The descendants of a black farmer, Abram Molamu, had lodged a claim for Leeuwspruit farm, claiming it was taken from them during the period of white rule. Mr Visser, whose family has owned the farm since 1970, says the black owners who sold it were paid above full market value. He asked the commission to subdivide the land so he could retain his home and continue the meat processing business on the farm, but that was rejected. He said he would fight any attempt to seize his land in court. "What is happening here is a self-enrichment scheme that needs to be challenged," he said. "No one should expect me to just fold my hands when something I struggled for is being taken away in this manner. I do not recognise the restitution claim on my land and can't be forced to sell at the government's price." The farmers' union AgriSA said the government was trying to make an example of Mr Visser, but other options had not yet been exhausted.

When the ANC was elected in 1994, 87 per cent of all agricultural land was owned by whites. The government started an ambitious land-reform programme aimed at restoring agricultural land to blacks forced off their farms during the apartheid era, and to provide the poorest in society with access to land. The aim is to hand over one third of white-owned farmland by 2014, but only 4 per cent has been redistributed. President Thabo Mbeki tried to reassure the international community that all land redistribution will be done on a "willing seller, willing buyer" approach, where white farmers are offered market prices. But in July, the new Deputy President, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, said the system was too slow, and some farmers were asking too much and dragging out negotiations. She hinted that the government could be coercive. White farmers have warned that attempts to seize land will send negative messages about the country's respect for property rights, and will scare away foreign investors.

Meera Selva, Africa Correspondent © 2005 Independent News & Media (UK) Ltd.

## QUESTION 3

## COMPREHENSION

30 marks

Read the following passage carefully and answer the questions that follow.

### Keep taking the tablets

*The British Government drugs watchdog says that doctors are over-prescribing antidepressants. Not so, says Virginia Ironside*

1. It's a pity that we only have one word for depression - because true, full-blown, suicidal depression bears no relation at all to normal depression, or sadness, misery, melancholy or the blues. As anyone who has suffered will know, true depression is quite different. I have often said that I would prefer to suffer from cancer than depression. I know cancer patients who want to live. I don't know anyone suffering from real depression who doesn't want to die.
2. This is why the argument about the over-prescription of anti-depressant pills such as Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) is so difficult. On the one hand there is the point made last week, by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, that antidepressants should be prescribed with greater caution by doctors to those suffering from mild depression, like bereavement or job loss or divorce, because of the small - but crucial - risks associated with them for some people. Some young people, after just one panic attack, are prescribed SSRIs like Prozac and Seroxat, and spend weeks suffering horrible feelings of going mad. Some, indeed, have actually committed suicide.
3. On the other hand, there is no doubt at all that antidepressants have saved thousands of people's lives. Only the other day I had a phone call from someone who a month before had told me he wanted to die, and now wanted to tell me, after a course of antidepressants, that he had woken that morning to find that life was worth living after all. A veil had been lifted. He was back in the real world. I was given four different types of antidepressant during a four-week stay in hospital. None worked and I felt terrible. The fifth perked me up within two hours. It worked and got me back on track.
4. Antidepressants are certainly something of a mystery. "The problem is that if you have low blood pressure or a broken leg, this can all be recorded objectively," says Dorothy Rowe, the psychologist author of *Depression: The Way out of Your Prison*. "With depression there is no objective test. You just have to rely on what people tell you. It's interesting that there is no scientific research that shows that any kind of chemical imbalance is responsible for depression. The idea that there is a lowered level of serotonin in the brain when people are depressed is entirely mythical."
5. But what about the "mild depression" for which antidepressants are so often prescribed? After all, there are whole housing estates in which large percentages of the inhabitants are on Prozac. Are we actually more gloomy than we used to be? Or do we just think we're more gloomy?
6. It's very easy to find reasons why we feel low, generally, at any time in our history. Today we could argue that though we in Britain are all more prosperous and live, generally, far easier lives than in the past, the devil does make work for idle hands. The more leisure and unemployment we have, the more isolated we become from one another, the more hopeless we feel.
7. Many people today complain of a feeling of powerlessness, which makes them feel low and frustrated. They have little faith in a government that appears not to listen, and feel that

there is no point in protesting about it. Lack of religion creates an empty space in a lot of people's lives, too. I'm no fan of religion, but there's no question that going out once a week with a community of people from different backgrounds, and sitting still together for an hour concentrating on things other than achievement, can't fail to steady the wobbling or fragile personality.

8. Today, we have many unrealistic expectations of happiness, as well. We are bombarded with television shows that show us that a bigger house, a cleaner kitchen, a better sex life will bring us rewards and, no less, that this is what we deserve. I had an e-mail from a friend in America, just out from being sectioned recently, and she ended her message with "Peace. Life is good. Enjoy." Total rubbish, of course. Life is not good. Life is sometimes good and sometimes bad. If you set yourself up to believe in happiness, you're bound to be depressed.

9. The whole present cultural mentality, too - that there is some kind of norm of mental health as opposed to dysfunctionality - is entirely unrealistic. And, on the whole, counsellors don't help, getting their clients to concentrate on the worst aspects of their childhoods, a sure-fire way of feeding depression rather than eliminating it, "ruminating" being one of the symptoms of depression that should not be encouraged.

10. A climate in which we feel that everything is fixable when in fact it is not, is one to make us unhappy. There is some way in which a sense of unrealistic hope can make us depressed, whereas a realistic assessment of a situation as horribly unavoidable may be tough, but at least more easy to cope with.

11. So, are we really more unhappy or not? Well, we are and we aren't. "We are not more depressed than we used to be," says Professor Simon Wessely of the Institute of Psychiatry in London. "There have been two reports by the Office of National Statistics, one in 1992 and one in 2000, and there has been no increase in the prevalence of depression at all."

12. But if you look at depression among adolescents, particularly male ones, you see a different story. It's rising fast - and could create a generation of depressed adults in the future. Emotional problems and depression have risen in adolescents by 70 per cent in the last 25 years, according to a report by the Institute of Psychiatry. And it's not, according to Eric Taylor, the professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at the institute, quite the same kind of depression suffered by adults, in that it doesn't respond as well to antidepressants and that it appears to be due less to genetic factors than environmental and social ones. The rise could be partly due to the fact that while in the 1970s, 70 per cent were in work and earning money, today 70 per cent are in dubiously useful further education, with many unable to get the vocational training they need. More than a quarter, at 16, have no prospects of work or training open to them.

13. "But I think the biggest factor is the increase in drug-taking," says Professor Taylor. "And this big increase of depression in adolescents does raise the possibility that the depression is going to be translated into adult life, implying that there will be a general build-up of depression in the adult population in future."

14. Depression is, as I know, the worst illness to suffer from in the world. It is clear that there isn't just one way to tackle it, nor, indeed, even 10 or 20 ways to tackle it. For mild depression in people whose depression isn't caused mainly by environmental problems, there are dozens of remedies that doctors could offer - from short-term cognitive therapy (very effective), to fish-oil supplements, exercise, cutting down on alcohol and caffeine, doing relaxation exercises, yoga and voluntary work.

15. For major depression, the big stuff, the suicide business, people such as Professor Wessely believe that some doctors are actually under-prescribing. On the whole, antidepressants are non-addictive, pretty safe, if properly prescribed, with proper warnings of the side-effects. Even though they can seem to work differently for different people at different times, and can seem for some people to be unreliable, at least you'll know within six weeks whether they are actually working or not. And if they can transform people's lives from total misery to optimism, from wanting to die to wanting to live (or, rather, not wanting to die), then it is surely worth giving them a go.

16. But as for the growing trend of young depressed adults, ground down by a sense of despair and hopelessness, for whom many of the above remedies would be ludicrous, there is hardly anything on offer. It's a very depressing prospect. And it looks as if it's only going to get worse.

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### Questions

(2 marks each)

For each of the following questions, there are five possible answers: TRUE (T), FALSE (F), PROBABLY TRUE (PT), PROBABLY FALSE (PF), or NOT AVAILABLE (N). Write the numbers 1-15 in a column on your answer book, and next to each write the answer which applies. For example, write 0 – PF.

A From the above passage, we can say that the writer

- 1 is female.
- 2 has suffered from depression.
- 3 is medically qualified.
- 4 is an adolescent.
- 5 has tried to commit suicide.
- 6 knows how to cure depression.

B from the above passage, we can learn that:

- 7 There are different kinds of depression.
- 8 There is nothing that can be done to treat depression.
- 9 SSRI's can help.
- 10 The prescription of SSRI's should be restricted.
- 11 Young people suffer from depression more than adults.
- 12 There is something wrong with the Higher Education offered in England.
- 13 The search for happiness is a waste of time.
- 14 Medical experts disagree about prescribing antidepressants.
- 15 In future, things will get better.

## QUESTION 4

## Cloze test

20 marks

Write the numbers 1-20 in a column on your answer sheet, and next to each write ONE word which will correctly fill the corresponding gap in the passage below.

### The Dying art of Letter Writing

Something really terrible has happened to the quality of formal education we receive. The World Bank has reported in a study that the graduates of our universities are of lower quality [1 .....] those in other countries. They are either unemployable [2 .....] they have to be retrained to equip them to compete in a skills-dominated work environment. [3 .....] is no university in Nigeria that ranks among the best 400 universities in the world.

Our academic journals, with some few exceptions, [4 .....] sub-standard. School enrolment figures have been dropping, while class sizes have been rising. The education sector is [5 .....] crisis on a daily basis. My experience of the results has been in the form of meeting graduates at all levels who [6 .....] fine-looking certificates and the right kind of ambitions, but are unable to write a simple letter of job application.

It is part of my work to screen job-seekers and help them to find employment, or [7 .....] kind of industrial attachment. All I can do is to [8 .....] a door. What happens then is beyond my control, and the success or failure of their application depends [9 .....] them and the circumstances.

Sometimes, applicants have asked me to be a referee. I ask to [10 .....] at their letter of application, and I almost start screaming. "My friend, is this what you want me to support with a [11 .....] of reference? This is uninformative, incomprehensible and illegible. Go away and don't [12 .....] my time."

In the old school curriculum, there [13 .....] a great emphasis on letter-writing. It was recognised that the [14 .....] is a major tool of communication and social development. It was the mark of civilisation to be [15 .....] to write a letter. In the old days, in our traditional communities, the letter-writer was a professional. He was the link [16 .....] the village and the city, he would write letters for illiterate parents who needed to contact [17 .....] children, and so on. He might once have [18 .....] a teacher or a court clerk. Now he was a wise man, a kind of priest. In [19 .....] days, people celebrated the word, and anyone who could master its secrets, could put it down on paper, was a special being.

Nowadays, when I meet these "educated" but unemployed and maybe unemployable young [20 .....], I am reminded of the past. They may have university degrees, but they remain somehow illiterate. They cannot write a business letter. One I saw just made me laugh. The format was wrong, the language was needlessly flowery, a spelling mistake in every line! It would give his prospective employer a headache.

Of course times are changing. The cell phone, Email, internet, are overshadowing the written word. *But it remains an essential part of our education.*

Reuben Abati