



Subject N211

Communications Syllabus

For the 2022 Examinations

October 2021

The Actuarial Society of South Africa
Subject N211 — Communications Syllabus

Aim

The aim of the communications subject is to ensure that successful candidates have ability to present fundamental actuarial ideas and arguments to others outside the profession. The subject does not cover matters relating to professionalism, analysis of complex situations or ability to apply actuarial judgement. These skills are covered elsewhere.

Links to other subjects

Subject A302— Communications: links to all the other subjects as candidates need to be able to communicate their answers in all subjects. It is based on the material taught in the Foundation and Intermediate Technical subjects – Part A1 and A2. Students are therefore advised not to attempt the subject before they have completed studying these subjects and have completed, or are concurrently studying, A311.

Objectives

To gain a clear pass in the examination, a candidate will be required to draft communications primarily intended to be read by a non-actuarial person. A specified technical actuarial person may occasionally be addressed. Such communications are to be of a standard where (bearing in mind that it has been produced under examination conditions) the drafts would:

- be acceptable as final documents without major changes or rewriting, though a moderate number of more minor changes might still be required,
- be to a standard which might be appropriate for a newly qualified actuary, rather than a specialist experienced actuary,
- convey the most important points clearly and contain no major mis-statements of fact or omissions or unsupported opinion.

Examination

The questions will be set on material that is either fully covered in the Foundation and Intermediate Technical subjects - A100 & A200 series (CT1–CT8) or else would be readily understood by an actuarial student who has passed the A100 and A200 series.

The questions will be relatively straightforward in order that the examination is a test of communication skills and not of detailed technical knowledge. Questions will be set in a context in which actuaries are accustomed to operating and will require *written, computer based*, communication in different formats e.g. drafting a letter, report, memo, e-mail, drafting a slide or visual presentation, or re-writing or correcting a poor draft.

Candidates will be expected to concentrate on the issues raised in the question. No additional credit will be gained for comments on peripheral matters. In particular, candidates are not required to take into account any features specific to South African or other local practice. It may be assumed that no further relevant information will be available. Similarly, speculation on details not set out in the question is not expected.

The Actuarial Society of South Africa
Subject N211 — Communications Syllabus

The marks for the paper will be allocated for content, presentation and meeting objectives.

The marks for **content** (typically 40%) will be given for:

- stating the main messages clearly and prominently,
- addressing the areas that are relevant to the audience and to the points that need to be made,
- describing simple concepts with no misleading or inaccurate statements or significant omissions,
- using appropriate examples, where necessary, to enhance the audience's understanding,
- selecting the relevant information which should be communicated to *this* audience,
- screening or filtering out irrelevant information and / or information that does not belong in the communication to *this* audience.

The marks for **presentation** (typically around 40%) will be divided broadly between the following items and there will be some variation depending on the format of the communication:

- Planning
 - specific questions asked are answered,
 - ideas are grouped logically,
 - appropriate use is made of paragraphs and headings,
 - no repetition,
 - no irrelevant detail,
 - information is properly used,
 - any assumptions made are clearly set out,
 - sentences are kept brief,
- Format of answer
 - appropriate address, subject heading, sign off,
 - appropriate opening and closing,
 - appropriate labelling of graphs,

The Actuarial Society of South Africa
Subject N211 — Communications Syllabus

- appropriate layout and contents of presentation slides.
- Language used
 - appropriate tone and level for the nature of the audience specified ,
 - appropriate level of complexity and detail for the audience specified,
 - assumes that the recipient as specified by the wording of the question is reasonably intelligent but not a specialist (unless otherwise stated),
 - clear explanation of technical terms,
 - avoidance of jargon,
 - correct grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- Length of answer

It is possible to pass Subject A302 if answers are shorter than the guideline length given in the question. The important thing is for the answer to contain adequate, clear and precise information. Candidates who believe they have reached such a stage in their piece of communication should not then add words just for the sake of reaching the guideline length and, indeed, may worsen the clarity of their communication in so doing.

The word count (which includes numbers)¹ is stated in order to help the candidates give an answer with the appropriate depth. A solution above or below the stated word count will not result directly in failure but it may result indirectly, for example:

- If the answer is much shorter than the stated target, the candidate may have skipped over the explanation and not made each point clearly.
- If the answer is much longer than the stated target, the candidate may have included additional information that really isn't needed or the answer may be rather repetitive.

¹ The word count for e-mails, letters and memos is from the subject line to the closing sentence without counting addresses, addressee/writer details, salutations or complementary closes/signatures. The word count for reports is all inclusive (from the title to the end of the conclusion).

The Actuarial Society of South Africa
Subject N211 — Communications Syllabus

The marks for **meeting objectives** (typically around 20%) will be given for:

- ensuring that the recipient is likely to understand clearly the written communication,
- ensuring that the recipient will be satisfied that the issues raised have been answered,
- ensuring that the recipient is happy with the way in which the messages have been communicated.

The “meeting objectives” marks are split between the communication and presentation aspects of the communication.

End of Syllabus