ACCA-OBU Degree
The Top 5 Reasons for Failure

With a global pass rate of 50%, many students find the ACCA-OBU degree a challenge to attain.

After years of mentoring students of varying backgrounds and abilities, we have become acutely sensitive to the common patterns and weaknesses shown by students. The Learning Luminarium mentor's focus on ensuring the following 5 reasons are avoided will enhance a student's chance of a first-time pass. While we try to keep the explanations light, these points have heavy implications.

Poor Topic Selection

There are certain topics that should not be selected unless you have access to a business' private information. For example, Topic 9 discusses the planning and implementation of an information system in an organization. This would be a near-impossible topic to undertake if you do not have access to private information. For such cases, information available on the internet is insufficient.

There are many other topics that usually require private data in order to write a 7,500 word report that can pass. Your mentor will walk you through them.

Occasionally, we have students who approach us after having failed for the first submission. When we look at the topic they had chosen and the lack of information available, it is with great regret that we have to advice the student to change his topic. This means all the time and resources spent on the earlier topic were wasted.

Aside from data availability, a topic that plays to the strengths of a student is also to be considered. Certain topics are perfect for students with strong writing abilities, others are for those with better numerical competencies. A mentor that assesses your abilities will be able to help your topic selection.

Poor Company Selection

After selecting the topic, some students stumble on the company selection. This is usually because a student gravitates towards selecting companies that they are familiar with or interested in. If that leads the student into selecting a multi-national company (like Lenovo), it can still work. Regrettably, we have seen students select smaller, local companies (like local engineering firms) and that results in their inability to create substantive reports. They fail and some have to change companies (this means redo-ing the whole report!).

The essential criteria in selecting a company are

1) *Is there sufficient public information on the industry?*
2) *Is there sufficient public information on the company itself?*

Taking a few hours to do a Google search on the above two points can save days of pain and a potentially devastating overhaul of the project.

Insufficient Referencing

Students are occasionally confused about the role of referencing and its extent. Some reason that "If I reference too much, it shows that I don't have anything original to say". The first thing we must get out of the way is this – at the undergraduate level, nothing really original is expected from you. In fact, if you interpret things in a certain way, it's good that you have references to back your idea up. So keep referencing!

Also, it is vital to note that **common sense can be wrong**. For example, we might write *"The electric car of Anonymous Ltd is targeting environmentally conscious customers"*.

It might seem common sense as electric cars have lower emissions. However, it is good to get a reference to back this up. As you do more research, you may find out that making the car alone created more emissions than a regular car – and Anonymous Ltd doesn't really target the ones who truly care about the environment but instead, targets those who wish to look cool and sophisticated.

The second pitfall within referencing is relying too much on just one source. You may find a great book or a wonderful website that seems to provide all the information you need. You then start referencing to it 6 to 7 times within the report. Is that good? No. Without you knowing, that source may be slightly biased. It is thus important to have a diversity of sources to present a viewpoint that is as independent as possible.

The final pitfall is the use of sources with lesser credibility. Some students select Wikipedia.com or www.superacca.blogspot.com. These are sources that don't fit the criteria for academic writings and should not be used as it shows a lack of academic maturity in the student. Examples of credible sources are *Banks, Brokerages, Government Agencies, Universities, Consulting Firms & Newspapers and Journals like The Wall Street Journal, The Economist, The Financial Times.*

Side Tip: The Information Pack encourages students to reference to recent events (ie within the past 3 years). Without being dogmatic and saying that all references must be within 3 years, (e.g. there may be important information go beyond 3 years) - do try to have most sources to be as recent as possible!

Structuring & Focus

It is tempting to just get excited and hammer away at the report. You think that 'the faster I type, the faster I am done with this'. Little, or even no, time may be spent on structuring the report.

Structuring the report involves deciding how you wish to develop the report.

It can involve things like
- What models do you wish to use? When will you like to use them? What points would you like to make with them?

to things like
- My report is on evaluating the Corporate Social Responsibility practice and its impact on shareholders. Should I state ALL the practices first, evaluate them THEN talk about stakeholder impact?
or should I state a practice individually, evaluate it and its stakeholder impact THEN move on to the next practice?

Creating a structure for your report helps to ensure that you are writing in a lucid manner.

A big component of structuring is ensuring that focus is kept. Sadly, some students write their report like a child in a candy store. Without coherence, they just run around from one big thing to another. There is no focus and direction. At the end of the day, they find themselves exhausted and with a failing grade as their achievement.

Focus involves concentrating on

1) What is the title of the report? What are the key points within it that must be answered?
2) How am I going to answer them? To what extent will I answer them?
3) What conclusions will I hope to draw from the report? And how is my conclusion related to the title of the report?

Tip: Take the title of your report and hang it above your computer as a reminder.

Lack of Analysis

We leave the best for last. This is the most common reason for failure. Students describe instead of analyse. If we were an examiner, we would be happy to see a student who merely describes. This is because we would just need to spend 10 minutes to read the report, quickly fail the student and collect the marking fee. It is a clear, no-brainer failure.

Describe is explaining "WHAT", analysing is "HOW and WHY".

A common example:

Sales of JustCo has increased by 10% in 2011, 12% in 2012 and 18% in 2013. This is good.

Examiner's thinking – I could see that from your graph. Even my 12 year-old daughter could tell me that and know it is good. Also, this is boring.

Analysis would instead be

There has been a steady increase in sales for the past 3 years as JustCo has read the market conditions very well. It has been the first to introduce an online ordering platform and is able to send targeted advertisements to its customers. This would definitely lead to an increase in sales. In fact, in USA, there was a similar company who was the first to launch an online platform and saw their sales increase strongly too (Reference,XXXX)

However, it must be noted that investing in such technology would mean that costs should increase. It thus is worth examining whether the profit margins are preserved.

Examiner's thinking – Great! You told me something that I could not have known just by looking at the numbers. You also showed that you understand the relationship between sales, costs and investments. If only all students were like this.

As many students are unfamiliar with such techniques of analysis, a competent mentor will be a valuable helper. He would be able to spot areas that can be further analysed and suggest ways to do so.

BONUS TIP – Writing in Your Own Words

OBU absolutely hates it when students copy and paste from their sources. (This is even when the student referenced the source within the report) OBU will assume that the student did not understand the source and penalize them accordingly. We have had a few fail sheets citing this as a reason for failure.

The key is to: Write the idea <u>in your own words</u> and then reference it too.

Before We say Good Bye..

This article highlights the 5 + 1 most common mistakes made and if you digested what you just read, you would have significantly increased your chances of passing first time! If you did not digest it, read it again! Or, even better, drop us an email at admin@learningluminarium.com. We are happy to help answer your questions!