

# Oral Exams

## Teaching Guide for Higher & Professional Education

ZHAW Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (ZID)





# Contents

4	<b>1</b>	<b>SKILLS-BASED EXAMS</b>
7	<b>2</b>	<b>EXAM FUNCTIONS AND FORMATS</b>
8	<b>3</b>	<b>DESIGNING AN ORAL EXAM</b>
8	3.1	Preparations
8	3.2	During the Exam
10	3.3	Assessment
10	3.4	Special Features of Group Exams
11	3.5	Special Features of Online Exams
13		<b>REFERENCES</b>
14		<b>APPENDIX 1: ORAL EXAM CHECKLIST</b>
15		<b>APPENDIX 2: TEMPLATE FOR THE EXAM PLAN AND REPORT</b>
17		<b>APPENDIX 3: EXAMPLE OF AN EXAM REPORT FOCUSING ON PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE</b>
23		<b>APPENDIX 4: EXAMPLE OF AN EXAM REPORT FOCUSING ON METHODOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL COMPETENCE</b>

# 1 Skills-Based Exams

Exams are an integral part of university life. They can serve various purposes and have different objectives:

- Diagnostic exams precede the learning process. They allow learners to assess their skill levels (for instance, when choosing a suitable elective) and instructors to evaluate the learners and design appropriate classes to teach.
- Formative exams are process-oriented (see Gerick et al., 2018, p. 10). They are used to monitor student learning to provide ongoing feedback. Learners can use this

feedback to improve the learning process, and instructors to improve the teaching process.

- Summative exams are product- or outcome-oriented. They follow the learning process and are used to determine grades.

There are many different exam types. Written exams are the norm. The learner creates a written product – on paper or digitally – according to the assignment parameters and submits it for assessment. The product may be an essay written

**FIGURE 1: THE DIMENSIONS OF ACTION COMPETENCE**

(based on Euler and Hahn, 2014)



**Professional competence** consists of specific skill areas needed to deal with theoretically and practically relevant content.

**Methodological competence** (e.g., problem-solving, use of scientific methods, and managing information). Refers to skills that can be applied in multiple situations and are necessary for dealing with challenging professional problems effectively.

**Social competence** (e.g., written and oral communication, teamwork). Includes skills used to realize professional goals involving social interaction.

**Self-competence** (e.g., self-reflection, taking responsibility). This means having skills and attitudes (behavior) that make it possible to develop oneself in the context of professional activity and have an effect on one's professional environment.



in class or as a self-study assignment (i.e., either unsupervised or supervised), a multiple-choice<sup>1</sup> exam, or mathematical calculations. However, there are also oral exams, where the product consists of verbal statements.

For this Teaching Guide, oral exams are considered to be a results-oriented (summative) exam type. When choosing an exam type and designing a specific exam, consult the exam regulations of the respective institution. They will provide information on how the exam should be designed and what is and is not allowed.

If the learning outcomes and the study program are skills-oriented in how they are designed, an (oral) exam must generally also be skills-oriented. Just as there are different subjects, disciplines, study programs, and university profiles,

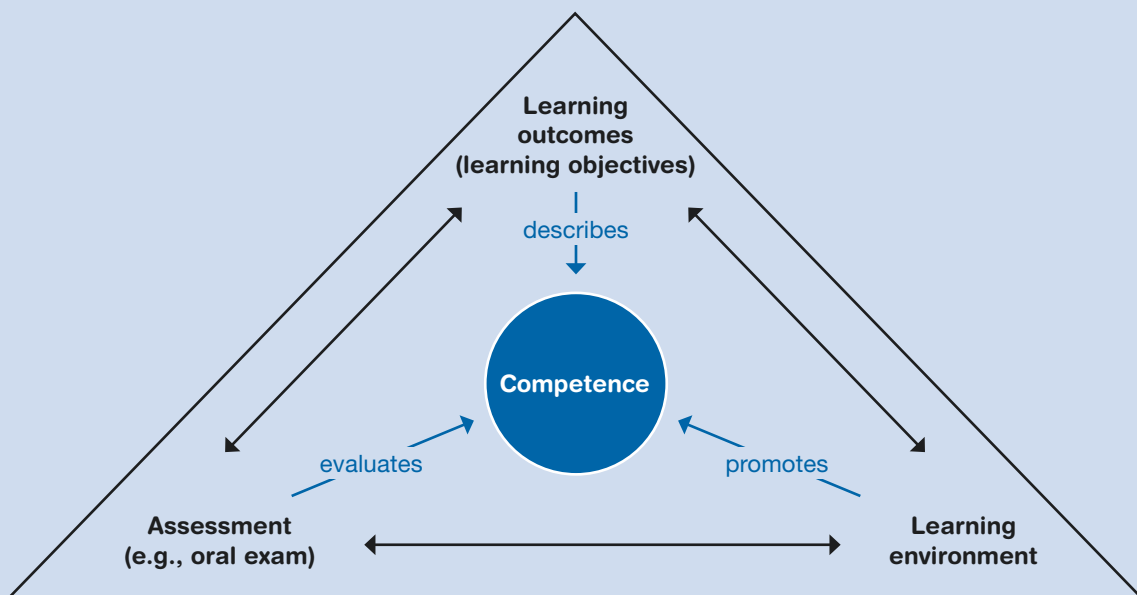
there are also different competency goals. This Teaching Guide is based on the concept of (professional) action competence<sup>2</sup>, as shown in Figure 1.

The format and content of an oral exam are determined by the learning outcomes of the course to be examined. Whether or not these outcomes are achieved is influenced by the teaching and learning activities provided in class or through the virtual learning environment of a platform (e.g., Moodle). This is also the basic idea of the **constructive alignment concept** (see Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2007) outlined in Figure 2.

The teaching and learning activities performed in class must prepare students for what they can expect in the (oral) exam. Example: If students are asked in the exam to demonstrate

**FIGURE 2: CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT**

(based on Biggs, 1996)



<sup>1</sup> See also our [Teaching Guide](#) on how to design multiple-choice tasks.

<sup>2</sup> A detailed description of the competences is made in the document [Innovation in Higher & Professional Education No. 4](#).

problem-solving skills by answering questions based on a short case study, they must have been allowed to deal with case studies and practice solving them.

Once it has been determined what skills a class should promote, these skills must be clearly defined and communicated as learning outcomes. A good vehicle for this is a module or course description. Within the meaning of constructive alignment, skills-oriented learning outcomes guide the instructor in designing individual classes and the exam. They also provide transparency by telling students from the outset what they can expect from the final (summative) assessment at the end of the course. This knowledge enables students to structure their learning accordingly (see Brassler, 2022, p. 74). What they have actually learned is then reviewed in the (oral) exam.

Oral exams can test professional, methodological, and social skills (competence). In a face-to-face conversation, an examiner can expose students' strengths and weaknesses using targeted questions, and students can explain their thought

processes. Oral exams may be especially useful with problem-solving tasks because they give students greater freedom to demonstrate their skills (Schaper et al., 2013, p. 34). However, this flexibility comes at the expense of lower standardization. In addition, for oral exams taken by different examinees, the comparability (reliability and validity<sup>3</sup>) is lower than for written exams with multiple-choice questions, for example.

This exam type poses particular challenges for examiners (see Frölich-Steffen, 2019, pp. 61–63). For one thing, they interact directly with the examinees. While examiners have some flexibility in how to communicate with examinees, they must ensure that the individual exams are administered fairly and that comparisons are possible. They must be transparent and objective in their assessment and be aware of bias effects (see Section 3.3).

Care must be taken, therefore, to carefully design, prepare, and document oral exams (see the template in Appendix 2).

<sup>3</sup> Reliability measures the extent to which a measurement is trustworthy. It ensures that the exam questions measure the true performance level of examinees and that the results are not distorted by measurement errors (e.g., by an examiner's subjective assessment). An oral exam can be said to have validity if it reliably measures what needs to be assessed and nothing else. Reliability is, therefore, a prerequisite for validity.

## 2 Exam Functions and Formats

No matter what form it takes, an exam always has a purpose. Macke et al. (2016, p. 141 et seq.) identified various social and didactic functions. They suggested that, when designing an exam, the examiner be aware of which function(s) should be primarily addressed in each case. An (oral) exam can have the following didactic functions:

- Diagnostic function: Uses constructive alignment to determine the level of competency achieved by examinees.
- Feedback function: Provides examinees with information about the competency level they have achieved.
- Information function: Informs examinees about gaps in their knowledge or skills, which can guide their learning activities.
- Motivation function: Encourages examinees to continue their learning process.
- Disciplinary function: Gives constructive criticism by measuring an examinee's performance against expectations.
- Presentation: Students are asked to present a topic using an appropriate form and manner. They can either choose a topic freely, or a topic may be assigned to them; students may also be presented with a pool of options. A topic may be assigned a few days before the exam: If examinees receive their topics on the day of the exam, they may be assigned a room to prepare. After students have given their presentations, they may be asked questions about the presentation or their topic.
- Problem-solving task: Students are presented with a task and instructed to find a feasible solution. While they may be confronted with that specific problem for the first time, they have acquired the necessary knowledge, analytical instruments, and methodology to address it. Problem-solving tasks are particularly suitable for testing higher levels of cognition (i.e., higher than remembering or understanding).

An oral exam can take various forms, and combinations are possible. Possible forms include the following:

- Interview: Students' knowledge and skills are assessed in a structured interview. To this end, the lecturers prepare questions based on the topics and learning objectives of the course. The questions must be open and as short as possible so a conversation can develop and flow naturally. The students should do most of the talking. The competencies they must demonstrate can vary, as do the taxonomy levels of the questions or tasks<sup>4</sup>. A detailed course description serves as a guideline for the level that a student's learning must achieve.

Before choosing an exam format, examiners should consider the rationale for an oral examination. Ideally, it is chosen with the learning outcomes and the constructive alignment concept in mind. There are times when an oral exam format may be the only option, for example, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Alternatively, an examiner may not consider the effort required to prepare a whole written exam worthwhile. This may be the case where a re-sit or replacement exam is needed for just a few students. Nevertheless, examiners must ensure that the oral exam is equivalent to a written exam. The effort required to create an oral examination must not be underestimated.

<sup>4</sup> According to the revised Bloom's taxonomy by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), there are six levels of cognition: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

# 3 Designing an Oral Exam

Let us say that an oral exam has been chosen to test the learning outcomes based on preliminary considerations (i.e., the competencies to be tested and constructive alignment). The next step will be to prepare, administer, and assess the exam carefully. A short version of the following explanations can be found in Appendix 1. Examiners must also remember that an oral exam can be stressful for both students and examiners.

## 3.1 PREPARATIONS

Oral exams must be prepared systematically. In the first step, the scheduled time (e.g., 20 minutes) must be structured efficiently. In other words, examinees must have every opportunity to demonstrate their competencies in the various subject areas and at the cognition levels required. At the same time, the examiner must be able to assess the examinee's performance objectively. The content, tasks, and level of difficulty depend on the subject areas and learning outcomes to be tested. Students must be informed in advance of any permitted aids and resources they can use (e.g., a calculator), create (e.g., a handwritten formulary), and practice using.

To implement their exam strategy, examiners must prepare possible questions for all subject areas to be examined. Questions or impulse statements should be formulated for all previously defined learning outcomes; otherwise, the exam's validity may be affected. Experience has shown the benefit of working primarily with open questions, impulse statements, and statements inviting reflection. These generally require longer answers, which provides an examiner with insights into an examinee's range of competencies.

Next, the exam questions are systematically compiled into an exam series (see Metzger & Nüesch, 2004, p. 105 et seq.), which must have a logical sequence and allow comparisons. In the relatively short time span of an oral exam, it is usually impossible to cover all topics (equally). Examiners can, therefore, set priorities. In preparing an exam series, it is helpful to rely on an exam plan (see Appendix 2). The exam plan helps examiners to prepare and later issue carefully worded instructions and to ask precise questions during the exam. The assessors or recorders (if any) can focus on recording observations and answers.

Suppose an oral exam is to be administered to more than one student. In that case, it is impossible for all students to take it simultaneously. In that respect, it is different from a written exam. While an exam series can be used for two students in direct succession, different exam series must be developed for the other examinees, which must be comparable.

Students should be told where to wait before the exam. If necessary, a separate waiting room or waiting area may be arranged. The exam room should be reasonably comfortable and free of disruptions. The seating must be arranged in advance. For example, in the case of a case study, examinees must be able to prepare it. For that purpose, notepaper and pens might have to be provided.

Both the examiners and the examinees need to be able to prepare. This is why examinees should be informed in advance not only about the time, place, and scope of the exam but also about how the exam is structured and how it will be administered (Rawls et al., 2015).

## 3.2 DURING THE EXAM

An oral exam consists of three phases: an introductory phase, an active phase, in which the actual exam takes place, and a closing phase, which formally ends the exam.

In the introductory phase, the examiner welcomes the examinee and introduces the assessor(s). The examiner should briefly describe how they will proceed according to previously defined criteria (time, content). They provide the framework for the proceedings and can also prevent misunderstandings (e.g., concerning the agreed exam topics and method of examination).

To ensure that examinees' thorough, targeted preparation can pay off, examiners must make an effort to conduct the oral exam fairly. The main principle should be for examiners to act as they wish their examiners had behaved when they were still students. As a general rule, an oral exam should be a conversation that allows for some flexibility. Questions should be learning-outcome-oriented, brief, and flow naturally.



In administering the exam, examiners can be guided by a template allowing some flexibility, as shown in Figure 3.

The examiner should take care to speak at an appropriate pace and volume. With an oral exam, examinees usually cannot study the questions, underline key words, or use a highlighter to help them understand. The questions must, therefore, be as brief, clear, and concise as possible.

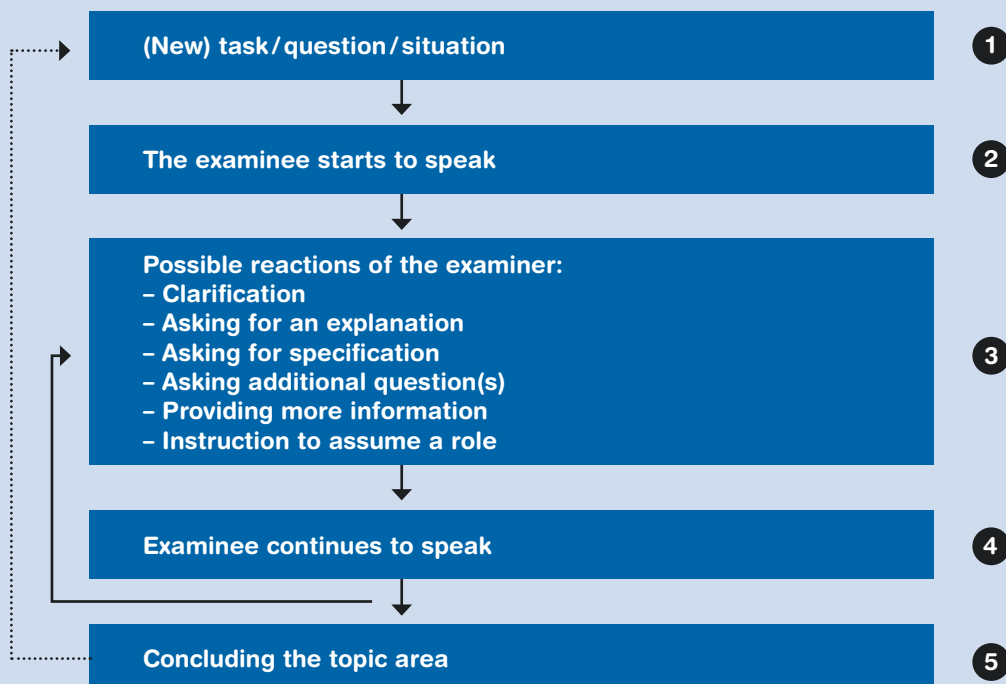
Examiners can deviate from the prepared questions to make the conversation flow more naturally. For example, they can react to aspects of an answer and ask additional questions (e.g., “What do you mean by...?”). They can also provide a hint to steer an examinee in the right direction. Once an examiner realizes that the examinee is unlikely to score a point, a change of topic area may be needed. However, examiners

must ensure that the exam is equally challenging for all examinees. On the other hand, the examinees should be able to give complete answers without being interrupted by the examiners. If an answer is too detailed, the examiner must exercise time management by intervening in a friendly but firm tone.

Examiners must remember to allow examinees to do most of the talking during an oral exam. They should not comment on whether an answer is right or wrong, as this might be unsettling. Instead of using words such as “good” or “nice,” the examiner should use neutral language (e.g., “Thank you. Let’s move on to the next topic.”). Both examiners and assessors should always keep their facial expressions and gestures neutral.

**FIGURE 3: TEMPLATE FOR ADMINISTERING AN ORAL EXAM**

(Walzik, 2012, p. 62, based on Metzger & Nüesch, 2004, p. 117).



When the time allotted for the oral exam is over, it must be brought to a formal conclusion. The examiners inform the examinees that the exam is over, thank them for being there, and provide information on what happens next. For example, the examiner may communicate when and by what means the results will be announced or ask students to wait outside until the assessment is complete.

### 3.3 ASSESSMENT

The processes of administering and assessing an oral exam cannot be kept entirely separate. Compared to a written exam, examinees' performance must be observed, recorded, and assessed continuously. By the end of the oral exam, the overall assessment has been made. An examinee's performance must be assessed based on the task to be accomplished and compared to the performances of the other examinees in that group before the final grades are awarded.

After each oral exam, examiners should reflect on the following questions: Where did problems arise for me during the exam? How can these be avoided next time? What worked well for me, and what should I do again in future exams? What would I like to do differently next time?

Examiners must be familiar with the typical patterns to avoid assessment errors (also known as rater bias) in oral exams. Here are some potential sources of bias (see Stary, 2016, p. 11):

- **Primacy effect**

First impressions influence later impressions. If the initial question is answered well, later answers are perceived as better than they are (or vice versa).

- **Recency bias**

The final impression has a lasting impact. If the final question is answered well, earlier, weaker answers are perceived less strongly (and vice versa).

- **Halo effect**

One dimension of the exam situation outshines everything else like a halo. Example: A business student gives a presentation in a suit and tie – his appearance distracts from his performance.

- **Prejudice/preliminary information**

This bias refers to advance praise (positive) or prejudice

(negative). Example: A student has made a good impression in class. The examiner is inclined to perceive her exam performance “through rose-colored glasses” (or vice versa).

- **Likeability bias**

If an examiner likes (or dislikes) an examinee, this may affect the outcome of the exam.

- **Generosity error**

Examiners do not want to make too negative an assessment for various conscious or subconscious reasons, such as concern about making students sad.

- **Strictness bias**

Examiners tend to assess examinees harshly for conscious or subconscious reasons, such as to motivate students to perform better in the future or avoid being considered “too lenient.”

- **Central tendency**

Examiners give neither very high nor very low grades but tend to stay in the middle range.

- **Contrast effect**

Examiners' assessment is influenced by assessments given to the students examined before. In other words, if a student's performance was rated highly, the performance of the following student may be rated poorly and vice versa.

- **Fatigue effect**

Examiners who notice that they are losing their concentration may rate the examinees' performance more highly.

Examiners must do their best to be aware of these potential sources of error to make the most objective competency assessment of the students being examined.

### 3.4 SPECIAL FEATURES OF GROUP EXAMS

During an oral group exam, several students will be in the same exam room simultaneously. However, if they are examined individually, the situation is more like an individual exam.

A group oral exam can take different forms. Students may receive an assignment to solve as a group. The group will present their solution or topic to the examiners, for example, as a poster or slide presentation (Billerbeck & Hammer, 2018,

p. 149) before being questioned by the examiners. Role play is also conceivable in which students simulate realistic situations – for example, a business meeting in which contract negotiations or the future strategic orientation of a company are discussed. The examiners act as observers and do not become involved in the events. If a press conference is simulated, the examiners may ask questions posing as journalists.

In addition to specific professional knowledge, students in such group exams also demonstrate methodological competence and social competence, such as teamwork and oral communication skills. Students usually receive a group grade for parts of the examination performance (group assessment) and individual grades for others (individual assessment).

All examinees must be given an equal opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned. If, for example, linguistic competence is assessed in a presentation, the speaking time of all examinees must be similar. Students must know in advance if they can volunteer information or should only respond to the examiners' prompts and questions.

Like individual oral exams, group exams are also prepared and documented using an exam plan. One or more assessors support the examiners. They take the minutes and help assess the examinees' performances.

### 3.5 SPECIAL FEATURES OF ONLINE EXAMS

During the COVID-19 pandemic, oral exams were conducted online. After the pandemic, this should be the exception rather than the rule. An online exam might be indicated if there is a tangible link between the learning outcomes and the digital format. On-site exams are preferable because they enable face-to-face interaction. With online exams, there is the potential for technical problems that can complicate the administration and assessment of the exam, which causes stress for all involved. If an oral exam is, nonetheless, conducted online, examinees, examiners, and assessors should address technology issues in advance. The following checklist can help:

- **Video conferencing tool:** What tool (e.g., WebEx, MS Teams, or Zoom) should be used, and how can those in-

involved log in (e.g., using the institutional username/ password of those involved)? Each tool has benefits and drawbacks. Examiners may wish to check with their organization's IT consultant.

- **PC, laptop, or tablet:** The device used should have enough memory. The use of a keyboard and mouse may be helpful. Theoretically, an exam may also be administered via smartphone, but this practice is not recommended.
- **Internet connection:** Internet speed (bandwidth) requirements may vary depending on the video conferencing tool used and the number of participants. Video-conferencing using a mobile network (i.e., via a cell tower) is susceptible to interference. Apart from the available bandwidth of the connection, the strength and stability of a Wi-Fi connection depend on the distance between the device and the Wi-Fi router and the number of users (e.g., when dialing in via the Wi-Fi of a café or library). Connection via LAN cable is the least susceptible to interference.
- **Webcam:** A webcam of sufficient quality may be integrated into or connected to the device. Image quality, the actual image shown, and the background must be checked and adjusted accordingly.
- **Headset:** For good audio quality, it is recommended not to use the device's built-in speaker and microphone but rather headphones with a microphone (headset or smartphone headphones).
- **Interference:** Everyone involved in the exam should have a separate room available without interference for the duration of the exam. All sources of interference on the laptops or tablets should be switched off (e.g., programs where calls can come in or audio signals announce incoming chat messages).

An online oral exam follows the same procedure as one conducted on-site. The students to be examined dial into the virtual examination room via the link provided. If several students are examined one after the other, a virtual waiting room can be set up so that only one student is in the virtual examination room at a time, even if there are delays. It must be ensured that the correct candidates are examined (presentation of proof of identity via the webcam). If necessary, the

examiner can ask the examinee to use the webcam to give them a tour of the room. This proves that the examinee is alone in the room and that they cannot consult any unauthorized aids. Examiners can use the tool's chat feature to provide examinees with a case study text.

Oral online exams can be recorded via the video conferencing tool if there are not enough assessors available to take notes and provided the organization's guidelines allow this. However, the examinees must expressly consent to be recorded in advance. Consent can be obtained electronically (e.g., by email). In any case, consent must be traceable and documented. The recording must be deleted as soon as its purpose permits. As a rule, this will be after the expiry of the appeal period.

# References

- Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R.** (2001). *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Longman.
- Frölich-Steffen, S.** (2019). Zwischenfazit: Mündliche Prüfungen im Prüfungsalltag erfolgreich einsetzen. In S. Frölich-Steffen, H. den Ouden & U. Gießmann (Eds.), *Kompetenzorientiert prüfen und bewerten an Universitäten: Didaktische Grundannahmen, rechtliche Rahmenbedingungen und praktische Handlungsempfehlungen* (pp. 61–63). Verlag Barbara Budrich.
- Biggs, J. B.** (1996). Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment. *Higher Education*, 32, 347–364. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00138871>
- Biggs, J. B., & Tang, C.** (2007). *Teaching for quality learning at university* (4<sup>th</sup> edition). Open University Press.
- Billerbeck, K., & Hammer, M.** (2018). Mündliche Gruppenprüfung in Problemorientierten Lernformaten. In J. Gerick, A. Sommer & G. Zimmermann (Eds.), *Kompetent Prüfungen gestalten: 53 Prüfungsformate für die Hochschullehre* (pp. 149–153). Waxmann.
- Brassler, M.** (2022). Die Prüfung von interdisziplinären Kompetenzen im Rahmen des Prinzips des Constructive Alignments. Prüfen im Kontext kompetenzorientierter Hochschulbildung. *Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung*, 17(1), 69–86.
- Euler, D., & Hahn, A.** (2014). *Wirtschaftsdidaktik* (3<sup>rd</sup>, revised edition). Haupt Verlag.
- Gerick, J., Sommer, A., & Zimmermann, G.** (2018). Kompetenzorientierte Prüfungsformen – Eine praxisorientierte Hinführung. In J. Gerick, A. Sommer & G. Zimmermann (Eds.), *Kompetent Prüfungen gestalten: 53 Prüfungsformate für die Hochschullehre* (p. 9–17). Waxmann.
- Macke, G., Hanke, U., Viehmann, P., & Raether, W.** (2016). *Kompetenzorientierte Hochschuldidaktik*. Beltz Verlagsgruppe.
- Metzger, C., & Nüesch, C.** (2004). *Fair prüfen: ein Qualitätsleitfaden für Prüfende an Hochschulen* (Vol. 6). IWP-HSG.
- Rawls, J., Wilsker, A., & Rawls, R. S.** (2015). Are You Talking to Me? On the Use of Oral Examinations in Undergraduate Business Courses. *Journal of the Academy of Business Education*, 16, 22–33.
- Schaper, N., Hilkenmeier, F., & Bender, E.** (2013). *Umsetzungshilfen für kompetenzorientiertes Prüfen. Konzepte und gute Praxis für Studium und Lehre*. <http://www.hrknexus.de/fileadmin/redaktion/hrknexus/07-Downloads/07-03-Material/zusatzgutachten.pdf>.
- Stary, J.** (2016). "Doch nicht durch Worte allein..." – Die mündliche Prüfung. In *Neues Handbuch Hochschullehre* (H 2.1). DUZ Verlags- und Medienhaus.
- Walzik, S.** (2012). *Kompetenzorientiert prüfen: Leistungsbewertung an der Hochschule in Theorie und Praxis*. Verlag Barbara Budrich.



# Appendix 1: Oral Exam Checklist

## **THIS CHECKLIST IS ADAPTED FROM METZGER & NÜESCH (2004, P. 101):**

### PREPARATIONS

- Are the exam topics and their weighting appropriate, and are they aligned with the topics of the course?
- Are the questions' difficulty levels congruent with the learning outcomes of the course to be examined?
- Do the questions have appropriate cognition levels, and are there various levels, if appropriate?
- Is the wording of the questions concise and accurate?
- Does the exam plan include expected responses and assessment criteria?
- Is the exam series organized systematically?
- How many examinees are there?
  - What is the timing (e.g., in the case of a 20-minute individual exam? Example: Two students per hour with a 10-minute break between exams for the examiners and assessors.
  - What is done to prevent communication between examinees? Example: Four students will be in a supervised waiting area at a time.
  - Are there enough exam series to allow comparison?
- Has the exam plan (Appendix 3) been prepared sufficiently? Can examiners (or assessors) use it to create an exam report and record their observations?
- Is the examination room comfortable? Are examiners and examinees seated at an appropriate distance from each, and is conversation still easily possible? For the special features of an online exam, see 3.5.
- Can the exam take place without disturbances? If necessary, the room should be locked, or a "Do not disturb" sign should be placed on the door. Cell phones must be switched off.
- Were students adequately informed about the exam's format and how it will be administered?

### EXECUTION

- Am I, as an examiner, sufficiently aware of rater bias (see 3.3), and have I done enough to avoid it where possible?
- Do I greet examinees in a friendly, relaxed manner?
- Do I contribute to a calm, pleasant exam atmosphere?
- Is the tone of my voice appropriate and my pronunciation clear?
- Are my questions short and comprehensible?
- Is the exam conversation sufficiently flexible?
- Do I use both open and closed questions?
- Does the conversation flow naturally?
- Do I respond appropriately to the answers provided by the examinees?
- Are my gestures and facial expression neutral?
- Are the answers provided by the examinees sufficient to be assessed?
- Do I say too much, or does the examinee do most of the talking during the actual exam?
- Do I conclude the exam appropriately and say goodbye to the examinees in a friendly but efficient manner?

### ASSESSMENT AND REFLECTION

- Is my assessment of the examinees' performance task-related and objective?
- If there are several examinees: Do I compare the examinees' performances and use criteria to ensure fair assessment?
- Do I discuss my assessment with the assessors?
- Where did problems arise for me during the exam? How can these be avoided next time?
- What has worked well for me, and what do I want to do again? What would I like to do differently next time?

# Appendix 2: Template for the Exam Plan and Report

Each oral exam must have an exam plan with questions to be asked during the exam and the ability to become an exam report after the questions have been asked. It contains an outline of what to examine about each topic. It lists individual tasks and questions using key words and phrases. The plan must give examiners the necessary flexibility to adjust what they say to fit in with the course of the conversation. After the exam, the same document is used to create a record of the exam that has been administered. This has several advantages: It helps examiners prepare for the exam. In particular, it gives them a script to follow during the exam procedure to ensure that the assessment is as clear, error-free, and fair to all examinees as possible. It is also an important document in the event of an appeal and can serve as a template for future exams.

Our example of an exam plan and report template is based on Metzler and Nüesch (2004, p. 108 et seqq.) and contains several columns:

## **COLUMN 1: TOPIC AREAS AND QUESTIONS FOR EACH TOPIC AREA**

This column is for planning the exam content. Remember: A well-prepared exam plan makes it easier for the assessors to record the exam. If the questions are noted in the first column, the assessors need only to note deviations, such as changes in the order of the questions or topic areas, or follow-up questions based on an answer the examinee gave. Once the oral exam is over, it is no longer important how the exam was planned. What is important is how the examinee performed. Therefore, the document must be “cleaned up” after the exam. For example, questions that were not asked can be deleted.

## **COLUMN 2: ASSESSMENT CRITERIA**

This column is used for the answers examinees are expected to give. Again, key words and phrases are sufficient. The information provided will have to be used to assess the answers given. It will also help examiners elicit answers from the examinees and make it easier for the assessors to record the answers given.

## **COLUMN 3: TIMING**

This column can be used to determine how much time is spent on individual exam topics. By monitoring the time, assessors can help examiners to keep on track. Any imbalance in the time spent on individual topics may have to be taken into account in the assessment.

## **COLUMN 4: EXAMINEE’S ANSWERS AND ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

In practice, a full exam report is impossible, partly because the examinees speak too quickly or say too much, and the assessors cannot keep up. However, depending on what is asked or what answers are expected, this is usually not necessary. An assessor can, for example, indicate with a tick which of the expected answers (second column) were given and only write down additional answers. Answers can be written down in two ways: either by focusing on the main content using key words and phrases or by taking notes as quickly as possible and summarizing them immediately after the assessment. Example: “All elements of the model were listed correctly and explained using appropriate examples.” Any assistance or guidance by the examiners can also be noted in this column.

**COLUMNS 5 AND 6: ASSESSMENT**

The assessment does not have to be made during the exam. To avoid assessment errors (see 3.3), this can wait until the examiners and assessors have a chance to discuss their views, the report has been finalized as far as possible, and various candidates have been examined.

A uniform grading scale is applied to the sum of the achieved and the maximum number of points for all examinees to determine the exam grade. Ideally, the maximum possible score should be approximately the same for examinees. However, in some situations, the examiners may have to intervene in the exam process. For example, if a long, detailed answer is given, the examiner must interrupt and say something like, “Thank you, let’s move on to the next question.” Otherwise, there is a risk that too few questions can be asked in the allotted time to enable a fair assessment.

**EXAM PLAN/EXAM REPORT**

Topic (content, processes, situation, resources) Tasks / Questions	Assessment criteria	Time (t)	Description / Remarks	Max. no. of points possible	Total no. of points achieved

# Appendix 3: Example of an Exam Report Focusing on Professional Competence

The following example of an oral exam refers to a course entitled “Introduction to Business Administration” in the first semester of a Bachelor’s (BSc) degree program. It fulfills the requirements of constructive alignment. This course aims to give students an in-depth understanding of the key interrelationships in business and the ability to think holistically and in an integrated manner. The St. Gallen Management Model is used to explain the wide range of issues with which business administration concerns itself. One priority is the teaching and application of the most important instruments, models, and concepts of strategic, financial, market, process, and employee-oriented corporate management. The course also includes content in the subject areas of entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility. The learning outcomes are defined as follows:

## **STUDENTS...**

- are able to deal with key issues of business administration in the areas of finance, human resources, processes, strategy, and marketing.
- can explain how companies and their core processes operate.
- develop possible solution approaches for interaction topics at the intersection of companies and their environmental spheres.
- develop a readiness to explore problem areas of business administration continuously.
- recognize ecological and social problems and take them into account appropriately in a business context.

The achievement of these learning outcomes relies on a constructive learning environment. Through a flipped-classroom approach, knowledge acquisition and consolidation occur independently and in an asynchronous learning environment using learning videos, texts, and questions to check learning. Knowledge transfer and consolidation take place synchronously in small classes. In class, questions are clarified, and learning is checked using formative methods. Case studies are worked on and discussed in small groups. Students also take part in a corporate simulation. The following oral exam determines the competencies the students have acquired in the course using an application-oriented method (i.e., a case study).

## Situation: Café Badilatti in Zuoz, Switzerland

Badilatti is the leading coffee company in the Swiss canton of Grisons and the “highest” coffee roasting company in Europe in terms of location. It is a fourth-generation family business (since 2019) that was founded in 1912 and currently employs 12 people. Café Badilatti roasts and processes selected coffee beans, which are turned into high-quality coffee at 1,716 m.a.s.l. using traditional methods. Thanks to many years of experience, global business relationships, and a passion for coffee, the specialists at Badilatti know the entire coffee value chain: from the coffee farmers and their conditions in the beans’ country of origin to international trade and the roasting facility in Zuoz. Due to its expertise and intensive quality assurance, the family-run business offers coffee blends that are full of character and offer the ultimate in coffee enjoyment. Badilatti products are distributed through the traditional retail trade and, to some extent, through its own channels (direct delivery to hotels, restaurants, and bars in Grisons, a factory shop, an online store, etc.). Anyone who wants to survive in the coffee market, characterized by the strong presence of large global corporations, must be innovative and occupy niche areas. Café Badilatti, for example, was the first company to use the trademark rights for the ski resort of St. Moritz to leverage the fame of a location to open up new markets with its “St. Moritz Café” product.

La Bastilla Anniversary Coffee: “Rist-Retro” is marketed as an anniversary coffee made with 100 percent of high-quality coffee beans from the renowned coffee plantation of La Bastilla in Nicaragua. It is located about 20 kilometers from the city of Jinotega and borders a nature reserve called Datanli el Diablo. La Bastilla currently uses 160 hectares of the 311-hectare area for coffee production. The altitude, the natural conditions, excellent plantation management, and ecological cultivation allow La Bastilla to produce coffee with a uniquely balanced taste.

Support project: La Bastilla is more than just a coffee plantation. It supports the local coffee farmers in every respect by providing fair working conditions, free housing for the farmers and their families, and education for their children. This project is financed with the help of an additional price per kilo. Swiss coffee expert Markus Fischer in Costa Rica monitors the project, the fair treatment of coffee farmers and employees, and the coffee quality.

Helping by donating: By buying a bag of «Rist-Retro» coffee, Badilatti customers support young people through the La Bastilla aid project. In addition, Badilatti has been supporting students directly since 2016.

Source (image and text): >>> <https://www.cafe-badilatti.ch/cape-badilatti/portraet/>



**EXAM PLAN/EXAM REPORT**

Topic (Issues, Processes, Situation, Resources), Tasks / Questions	Assessment Criteria	t	Course of Exam / Comments	Max. No. of Points	No. of Points Achieved
<p><b>St. Gallen Management Model</b> [Students are given a text to read describing the situation or case, or a text is sent to them (online)]</p>					
<p>Name one example for each of the seven possible stakeholder group categories for Badilatti according to the SGMM.</p>	<p><b>Stakeholder group/interest/lever (0.25 points each)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Employees / safe workplace / striking</li> <li>– Authority / following the law / food safety inspection</li> <li>– Customers / quality / cutting consumption</li> <li>– Capital providers / safety of loans / termination</li> <li>– Competitors / fair competition / code of conduct</li> <li>– Suppliers / compliance with contracts / delivery stop</li> <li>– The public / CSR / Social media storm</li> </ul>	5		[7 x 0.75] 5.25	
<p>What interests do they pursue (one for each stakeholder group)? What possibilities do they have to enforce their interests (one possibility for each stakeholder group)?</p>	<p><b>Criterion:</b> Naming six stakeholder groups and clearly distinguishing between interest and lever</p>				
<p>The model proposed by Minzberg [see the document you have received describing the situation] distinguishes stakeholder groups based on their will (low or high) to exercise power. What accounts for the difference?</p>	<p><b>Criterion:</b> Satisfaction with the company, its products and services, and its exponents must be identified.</p>			1.25	
<p>Can you give me an example of a normative / strategic / operative management activity at Badilatti?</p>	<p><i>Normative:</i> Decision in favor of La Bastilla / Nicaragua project <i>Strategic:</i> Decision to develop an online store <i>Operative:</i> QA of the coffee roasting process</p> <p><b>Criterion:</b> Distinguishing the three levels correctly <i>Normative:</i> Focus: Legitimacy <i>Strategic:</i> Focus: Effectiveness <i>Operative:</i> Focus: Efficiency</p>			1.5	

**EXAM PLAN/EXAM REPORT**

Topic (Issues, Processes, Situation, Resources), Tasks / Questions	Assessment Criteria	t	Course of Exam / Comments	Max. No. of Points	No. of Points Achieved
<p><b>Structure / Organizational Structure</b></p> <p>What organizational structure is most suitable for Badilatti?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Describe and explain.</li> <li>– Give two benefits and two drawbacks for each.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Naming and describing (1 point):</i> Functional/line organization (maybe staff line organization), traditional SME organization, Badilatti has 12 employees. One manager and several subordinate functions.</p> <p><i>Benefits (2 points):</i> Task specialization combined with extensive knowledge in specialized areas. No redundancies. Cost benefits due to specialized machinery, human resources, and work methods. Effective and efficient problem-solving. Taking into account specific preferences and abilities. Fast decision-making.</p> <p><i>Drawbacks (2 points):</i> Limited perspective. No thinking outside the box. Large leadership scope. Funnel effect. Management has too much to do.</p>	5		5	
<p><b>Processes / Process Organization</b></p> <p>Is Badilatti a full-service provider, a specialist provider, or a solution provider? Briefly explain your answer.</p>	<p><i>Naming (1 point):</i> Specialist provider Reasons (1 point): R&amp;D, own production. Cultivation of raw materials, transportation, quality assurance, distribution entirely or mainly external</p>			2	
<p><b>Value Creation:</b></p> <p>Give an example of each of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Horizontal backward integration</li> <li>– Horizontal forward integration</li> <li>– Vertical integration/diversification</li> <li>– Lateral integration/diversification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Cultivating their own coffee beans</li> <li>– Opening their own coffee shop in St. Moritz</li> <li>– Takeover of similar competitors</li> <li>– Offering trips to Nicaragua professionally</li> </ul>			[4 x 0.5] 2	
<p><b>Marketing</b></p> <p>What is the difference between B2B marketing and B2C marketing?</p>	<p>Different target groups (end customer vs. corporate client)</p> <p><i>Different customer approach</i> (emotionality/pleasure, etc. vs. price certainty, quality, adherence to delivery dates, reliability)</p> <p><i>Different pricing models</i> (B2C small amounts, more expensive, direct payers; B2B large amounts, discounts, scales, monthly invoice)</p>	4		2	

**EXAM PLAN / EXAM REPORT**

Topic (Issues, Processes, Situation, Resources), Tasks / Questions	Assessment Criteria	t	Course of Exam / Comments	Max. No. of Points	No. of Points Achieved
<p>What could the 4 Ps look like in Badilatti's end-customer business in its home canton and in the Zuoz region (Oberengadin)?</p>	<p><i>Product (1 point):</i> High-quality coffee, various blends, high-grade packaging, comprehensive product declaration, certifications</p> <p><i>Place (1 point):</i> Direct sale to hotels and restaurants, distribution via local retailers, distribution via wholesalers (e.g., Coop), own online store, factory outlet, etc.</p> <p><i>Price (1 point):</i> Premium positioning (with a brief explanation)</p> <p><i>Promotion (1 point):</i> Point of sale advertising (Rotairs, flyers); newspaper / magazine advertising; sponsorship of regional sporting events; outdoor advertising (posters, vehicles); social media, etc.</p>			4	
<p><b>Strategy</b> Explain Michael E. Porter's 5-forces model in your own words.</p>	<p>Model to evaluate the appeal of a market (0.5 points). It is characterized by the five forces (0.5 points for each force named correctly): 1. Competition in the industry; 2. Potential of new entrants into the industry; 3. Power of suppliers; 4. Power of customers; 5. Threat of substitute products.</p>	4		3	
<p>Apply Porter's 5-forces model to Badilatti and draw your own conclusions from this analysis.</p>	<p><i>0.5 points for each correct statement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Coffee is a growth market, but already has a large number of suppliers (especially globally)</li> <li>– Danger from new entrants is relatively high, as entry barriers tend to be low</li> <li>– Market transparency is high, and customer loyalty tends to be low</li> <li>– Many substitute products: coffee capsule products, tea, energy drinks, others</li> <li>– Dependence on nature, the danger of crop failures, worldwide, but suppliers are in a good negotiating position (longterm partnerships).</li> </ul>			3	
	<p><i>Conclusions (0.5 points):</i> The market is rather challenging; Badilatti, as a niche player, has to focus on quality / customer loyalty</p>				

**EXAM PLAN/EXAM REPORT**

Topic (Issues, Processes, Situation, Resources), Tasks / Questions	Assessment Criteria	t	Course of Exam / Comments	Max. No. of Points	No. of Points Achieved
<p><b>CSR</b> Badilatti pays coffee farmers more than the market price. What approach of business ethics does the company follow here (corrective, functionalist, integrative)?</p>	<p><i>0.5 points:</i> Functionalist because the topic is also used in advertising and public relations.</p>	2		3	
<p>Which ethical approach acc. to the model of Sustainable Corporate Responsibility does Badilatti follow here (utilitarian ethics / deontological ethics or virtue ethics)?</p>	<p>Utilitarian ethics, a cost-benefit calculation is made.</p>				
<p>We talked about "moral places" (according to Peter Ulrich) in class. Badilatti considers the fair treatment of farmers to be an issue of corporate ethics. What other "places" might also be appropriate and in what way?</p>	<p>Other places: <i>2 x 0.5 points:</i> Part 1: The state of Nicaragua (= order ethics) Part 2: Legislation and law enforcement (e.g., minimum wage, social systems)</p> <p><i>2 x 0.5 points:</i> Part 1: Reflected consumer (= citizen ethics) Part 2: Coffee drinkers can make a strong point with their choices (e.g., boycotting brands, social media activity, etc.)</p>				
<b>Total</b>		20 min.		32 points	points

# Appendix 4: Example of an Exam Report Focusing on Methodological and Social Competence

The following example of an oral exam is fictitious and based on a business skills course in the first year of a Bachelor's degree program (BSc). The main topics are scientific work and project management. Professional competence, methodological, social, and personal competence are also promoted. Students apply what they learn, among other things, to prepare a proposal for a research project and develop a project plan in a business context, in each case as a group assignment. The learning outcomes are defined as follows:

Students complete weekly self-study assignments that relate to the materials provided. In this asynchronous learning environment, they work independently to acquire knowledge that they then apply in a group assignment. All groups are offered several individual coaching sessions. The subsequent oral exam, which takes the form of a presentation, checks the examined group's competencies in an application-oriented manner.

Students...

- can work constructively with others and be goal-oriented.
- can develop their own questions, taking into account scientific quality criteria, and answer them using the stages of a research cycle.
- can develop, justify, and present a project idea.
- can plan, structure, and reflect on their actions and learning processes.
- can present their findings clearly, concisely, and compellingly both orally and in writing.
- can develop an effective project plan.



**EXAM PLAN/EXAM REPORT**

Group Name or Group Number (Group Performance):

Name of Student (Individual Performance):

Topic (Issues, Processes, Situation, Resources), Tasks/Questions	Assessment Criteria	t	Course of Exam/Comments	Max. No. of Points	No. of Points Achieved
<p>Initial situation: During the course of the semester, the students work in groups of four on a project plan for a project of their choosing. Before the project plan is submitted in writing, each group presents it to an audience (i.e., the examiners). The examiners take on the role of members of the management team of the (real or fictitious) company for which the group has created its project plan. The project plan must be compelling in terms of content and methodology, and the group members must also convey their ability to realize their project.</p> <p>Finally, the examiners ask each group member a question about the project plan. Duration: 8 to 10 minutes</p>	Project plan – group assessment		Assessment according to assessment grid	45	
	Presentation – group assessment		Assessment according to assessment grid	36	
			Group performance	81	
	Oral communication – individual assessment		Assessment according to assessment grid	21	
	Question – individual assessment		Assessment according to assessment grid	18	
			Individual performance	39	
			Total assessment	120	

**PROJECT PLAN – GROUP PERFORMANCE**

		0	1	2	3
<b>Situation</b>	The background and framework conditions of the project are presented in a comprehensible manner.				
	The project's aims and purpose are clearly formulated.				
<b>Content and scope</b>	The main stakeholders have been identified appropriately.				
	The work breakdown structure has been fully developed in terms of the main deliverable.				
	The work breakdown structure is technically correct.				
	The project scope is well-defined with out-of-scope elements.				
<b>Schedule</b>	The schedule is clearly presented as a Gantt chart for the timeframe of the project.				
	The schedule contains realistic work packages, dependencies, and milestones.				
	Sequential and parallel execution of work packages is explained comprehensibly using one example each.				
<b>Project organization</b>	The project organization is appropriate for the type of project and its general framework conditions.				
<b>Costing</b>	There is a fully developed cost plan which covers the main deliverable.				
	Risk and management reserves are reported convincingly.				
	Estimation methods and assumptions are reported in a comprehensible manner.				
<b>Risks</b>	Risks have been identified sufficiently.				
	Appropriate risk management strategies are proposed.				
<b>Total</b>					
<b>Total number of points for the project plan (group assessment)</b>					

## PRESENTATION – GROUP PERFORMANCE

		0	1	2	3
<b>Organization</b>	The presentation has a logical structure. A common thread is recognizable.				
	The introduction is suitable for the target audience and grabs the audience's attention.				
	The conclusion is strong, and the closing summarizes the key points.				
<b>Visualization</b>	Slides are appealing and designed clearly.				
	Pictures, graphs, and tables support understanding.				
	Other aids (flipchart, whiteboard, etc.) are used appropriately.				
	The group deals efficiently with the technology and aids used.				
<b>Group</b>	The speakers collaborate well.				
	Transitions are smooth.				
	The speakers present themselves as a motivated team.				
<b>Format</b>	The group has used time management effectively.				
	The speaking time of all speakers is similar.				
<b>Total</b>					
<b>Total number of points for the presentation (group assessment)</b>					

Notes on the course of the presentation:

<b>Speaking time in minutes</b>	Student A	
	Student B	
	Student C	
	Student D	
	Total time	

**ORAL COMMUNICATION – INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE**

		0	1	2	3
<b>Verbal expression</b>	The choice of words and sentence structure are appropriate.				
	The pace is appropriate.				
	The student speaks freely and confidently for the most part.				
<b>Non-verbal expression</b>	Gestures and facial expressions are used to support what is being said.				
	The student maintains appropriate eye contact with the audience.				
	The student's stance is open and friendly.				
	The student has dressed appropriately for an actual or fictitious target audience (e.g., type of company).				
<b>Total</b>					
<b>Total number of points for oral communication (individual assessment)</b>					

**QUESTION – INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE**

	Max. No. of Points	No. of Points Achieved
<p><b>Question to student:</b> Write down the question here.</p> <p>(Question pool – for examiners only: e.g.,  – What is a stakeholder? How is stakeholder X affected by your project proposal, and what reactions do you expect?  – What is meant by "critical path"? What activities are on the critical path?  – What is the difference between bottom-up and top-down cost planning? How would you proceed with your project?)</p>		
The answer is given confidently.	3	
The answer corresponds to the question.	3	
The definition or explanation is correct.	6	
The answer is correct concerning the project.	6	
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	
<b>Total number of points for the question (individual performance)</b>		



**Published by**

ZHAW School of Management and Law

**Edited by**

Andreas Butz, Reinhild Fengler, Patrik Scherler

**Translated and adapted to English by**

Danielle Adams, John Christian

**Design**

ZHAW School of Management and Law

**Images**

Beat Märki

>>> [www.bilderhaus.ch](http://www.bilderhaus.ch)

**Contact**

ZHAW School of Management and Law

St.-Georgen-Platz 2

P.O. Box

8401 Winterthur

Switzerland

Zurich University  
of Applied Sciences

## School of Management and Law

St.-Georgen-Platz 2  
P.O. Box  
8401 Winterthur  
Switzerland

[www.zhaw.ch/sml](http://www.zhaw.ch/sml)



swissuniversities

