



GUIDANCE NOTE
Level 3 assessment and
issue of a certificate of
competency or endorsement

Document No. **GOP-513**
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OPERATIONS – SEAFARER CERTIFICATION

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Content

GUIDELINES FOR THE CONDUCTING OF ORAL EXAMINATIONS
(STCW '95 CERTIFICATION)

GENERAL

The oral examination at any level is based on the subject matter appropriate to the syllabus in respect of which it is not possible to adequately examine the candidate's knowledge or ability in the written examination. The oral examination should therefore be, so far as possible, a practical examination and theoretical questions should be avoided, unless there are clear grounds that the candidate is lacking the theoretical knowledge in certain subjects. An example of this would be the candidate expressing a distinct lack of knowledge in, for example, stability in a particular situation or, from the engineering perspective, a lack of knowledge of the pressure/volume/temperature relationships in turbo-chargers when the examiner has asked for a practical answer.

Oral examinations are only to be conducted once the candidate has completed all the requirements in terms of the Merchant Shipping (Safe Manning, Training and Certification) Regulations, 2013 and completed the required application form, completed his/her qualifying service correctly assessed and so forth. Under no circumstances is an appointment of an oral exam to be confirmed until such time these requirements have been met.

ASSESSORS

Oral examination must be conducted by an examiner and in the presence of an assessor. The role of the assessor is to observe that the examination is being carried out in a fair and correct manner in accordance with the oral examination syllabus guidelines (GOP-513.xx) for the various grades.

The assessor is to set him/ herself in a position where all questions and answers can be heard and observed but without distracting the candidate.

During the examination the assessor is to make notes on shortcomings in answers of the candidate and to the quality of the candidate's answers.

AT NO TIME IS THE ASSESSOR TO MAKE ANY COMMENT OR ASK THE CANDIDATE A QUESTION UNLESS REQUESTED TO DO SO BY THE EXAMINER.

Once the examination is complete the performance of the candidate is to be discussed in depth with the examiner on the basis of the notes made by the assessor and the examiner's notes within the guidelines as set out in the *aide de memoir* the examiner uses. In borderline cases the final decision should be made by the assessor with concurrence of the examiner. The reason for this is that the assessor has a more "objective" view in that he/she has heard both parties. This is especially important where there have been ambiguities, misunderstanding or for any other reason the question was not understood by the candidate.

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The assessor's notes and observations must be attached to the examiners report.

CONDUCTING THE LEVEL 3 ASSESSMENT (ORAL EXAMINATION)

The oral examination room should be set up before the candidate comes in so as not to keep him/her waiting unnecessarily. Furthermore examiners are encouraged to conduct the examination on time. It is well known that candidates are justifiably nervous, especially at the first examination, and this should be taken into account when conducting the examination. The longer a candidate waits, the more nervous he/she becomes.

Upon entering the examination room, the candidate should be made to feel at ease and the process of the oral examination explained clearly with emphasis on the fact that it is not a "catch you out" type of examination, but rather an exam to test the candidate's knowledge and experience in a fair and unbiased manner.

Examination guidelines for each level of examination have been drawn up. These serve a number of purposes which are as follows:-

- i) A record of the questions asked of the candidate;
- ii) A record of the questions where mistakes were made;
- iii) A record to be completed by the examiner on each section;
- iv) A record of the examination result;
- v) A record of any penalty and reason therefore in the relevant sections.
- vi) It is signed by both the examiner and the assessor

The most important part of the examiner's role is that he/ she has to be able to examine at the different levels of competency. This is especially true when sections on legislation and so forth are being examined. It is unfair that a candidate for the examination as Skipper (Port Operations) be examined at the same level as Master (Unlimited), or an Engineer Officer be expected to answer to the same level as a candidate for Chief Engineer.

The Level 3 Assessment syllabus guidelines for the various levels of certification will be reviewed by the senior examiners from time to time and are to be made available to training institutions and candidates at SAMSA offices.

Candidates for deck qualifications should be questioned on the section on Collision Regulations first. This is probably the most important section of the examination. The syllabus for this section is quite explicit in that only a thorough knowledge is good enough for any certificate of competence. However, having said that, it is not expected that the lower grades have as thorough a knowledge of the annexes and technical information of lights and so forth, as the higher grades.

The Collision Regulation "Topic" of the oral examination is broken up into a number of parts as detailed in the guidelines to examiners. It should be remembered that Parts 1 and 2 of the guidelines should be thoroughly examined in the candidate's first

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examination and the depth thereof for subsequent examinations is at the discretion of the examiner.

Bearing in mind that the main function of the officer of the watch or master of a vessel is to avoid collisions, should a candidate be poor at this stage of the examination, the examination is to be terminated.

A recent development in this part of the examination is that candidates paraphrase the collision regulations. This is considered to be a poor practice. This leaves very little doubt that the candidate has worked extremely hard but it is for the examiner to establish if the candidate has an understanding of the rules and does not just merely repeat them verbatim. If there is no understanding of the content of the rules, then the candidate is to be considered to be not yet competent on this part of the oral examination.

The questions relating to this part of the exam, and indeed subsequent parts, should always be reasonable and practical for the position that is being examined. It is accepted that promotion to the next rank, especially in the case of Master, is not a given fact upon passing the examination. However all questions relating to the level of the grade being examined are to be for that grade, not one lower. For example it would be incorrect to examine a Chief Mate as to the duties of a Deck Officer because he has sailed as a Deck Officer and will continue to do so until he is promoted to Chief Mate.

As far as any management level examination is concerned, it is for the examiner to determine if that person is confident and can make a correct decision in a short period of time based on “pressure type situations”, i.e. decisions made *in extremis*. Candidates who hesitate, and who have to think for a long time before answering such questions, should raise doubts in the mind of the examiner if indeed they are ready for a management position.

It is not good policy to ask questions in isolation but rather to introduce hypothetical situations where the candidate will reveal his/her knowledge on several aspects of the “Topics”. Quite often the candidate will lead the examiner in a particular direction and depending on the answers, the oral may deviate completely from what the original question/situation was. However this is not a bad thing as the examiner can quickly establish if the candidate knows what he/she is talking about or floundering around in the vain hope that words will somehow answer the question. When this happens, it is a good example to see if theoretical knowledge can be applied to practical situations.

Candidates are not expected to have a definitive knowledge of regulations, acts, conventions and so forth. However they should be expected to know where to find this information and have a broad knowledge of the contents of the more important conventions and regulations. The level of knowledge of these regulations and conventions is to be more defined with the grade of the examination.

As far as “topics” dealing with safety and emergency procedures are concerned, candidates should be able to answer decisively and quickly without having to be prompted. Once again, the answers should be commensurate with the rank and the

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level being examined. The role of the Master or Chief Engineer is different to that of a junior officer and this should be taken into account when assessing the answer.

The length of time devoted to the oral examination is dependent on the candidate. It is not a requirement that every single item in each “Topic” be asked, apart from the collision regulations. Certain questions from each topic need to be answered and these are at the discretion of the examiner. Generally one can obtain a good assessment of a candidate within 30 to 45 minutes.

Once the examiner is satisfied as to the competence of the candidate, the oral examination can be terminated. Results of the oral examination should be given to the candidate once the examiner and the assessor agree on a result. Prior to the issue of the “Certificate of Pass” **FOP-513.3**, the examiner is to peruse the application documentation one more time to ensure that all is in order, and if so, issue the candidate the certificate.

COMPETENT OR NOT YET COMPETENT IN THE ORAL EXAMINATION

In both deck and engineering orals, there are aspects of the examination where there is very little compromise, such as the Collision Regulations where only correct answers will suffice.

However the examiner must exercise discretion in the more theoretical side of all parts. One should not dismiss a candidate who answers incorrectly, questions about arc of visibility, range and positioning of lights. In such cases the examiner may request that the candidate brush up on these parts and return at a later date. Misidentification of one type of vessel should not be considered incompetence but two or more should. A collision or placing a ship in grave danger is considered incompetence. Some candidates solve all collision situations by stopping for everything. This is not acceptable even though technically he/she is not wrong apart from one or two situations. As far as action to avoid a collision is concerned, the rule should always be the safest option when two or more options are available. Generally the safest approach would be “never turn towards the danger or create a close quarter’s situation if it can be avoided”.

Depending on the grade of the examination, there are other “failing” issues. These would be, for example placing one’s ship and crew in grave danger and weakness in areas such as watch-keeping practices, entry into enclosed spaces, IMDG cargoes, fire fighting, groundings, collisions and action in emergency situations. The same approach is to be adopted in terms of engineering level 3 assessments.

ADDITIONAL SEA SERVICE

The regulations allow the examiner to “penalise” a candidate whose answers reveal a serious deficiency in the knowledge required for the grade of certificate being examined. This can be up to six month’s sea service. This ‘penalty’ should only be given to candidates whose knowledge is of a standard where they are considered to be unsafe as officers and particularly as watch-keepers. It should be also given to candidates

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whose practical knowledge is so poor that further sea service to gain more experience is considered the only remedy.

In the past, extra sea service was seen as a punishment. However this is not the case today with accelerated training and reduced sea service requirements. Companies seem to forget the second part of the sea service training in that a candidate must have completed training, not merely the minimum sea service requirements. As such extra sea time is deemed to be to the benefit of the candidate and the company in that the candidate gains more experience and hence will be a better officer.

The amount of extra sea service given is at the discretion of the examiner but in general should not be more than three months unless the candidate is so poor, especially on a second or third attempt, then the maximum of six months should be given.

OBSERVERS

There is no harm in observers attending the oral examination but this is solely at the discretion of the examiner. However this should be viewed as privilege and is not to be abused.

Under no circumstances whatsoever is the observer to interfere with examination and this is to be clear before the examination begins.

Furthermore, the observer has no right to participate in the final post examination summary of the candidate and must not be present while the examiner and the assessor are discussing the outcome of the examination.

WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EXAMINATION

If a candidate voluntarily withdraws from an examination or does not arrive for the examination without good cause, this is considered to be not yet competent and is to be recorded as such. Any subsequent attempt to do the examination is to be preceded by a new application and fee.