Officer of the Watch (OOW) Certificate of Competency – COLREGs Practice Test (Sample)

Study Guide

Everything you need from our exam experts!

Table of Contents

Introduction

Preparing for a certification exam can feel overwhelming, but with the right tools, it becomes an opportunity to build confidence, sharpen your skills, and move one step closer to your goals. At Examzify, we believe that effective exam preparation isn't just about memorization, it's about understanding the material, identifying knowledge gaps, and building the test-taking strategies that lead to success.

This guide was designed to help you do exactly that.

Whether you're preparing for a licensing exam, professional certification, or entry-level qualification, this book offers structured practice to reinforce key concepts. You'll find a wide range of multiple-choice questions, each followed by clear explanations to help you understand not just the right answer, but why it's correct.

The content in this guide is based on real-world exam objectives and aligned with the types of questions and topics commonly found on official tests. It's ideal for learners who want to:

- **Practice answering questions under realistic conditions,**
- **Improve accuracy and speed,**
- **Review explanations to strengthen weak areas, and**
- **Approach the exam with greater confidence.**

We recommend using this book not as a stand-alone study tool, but alongside other resources like flashcards, textbooks, or hands-on training. For best results, we recommend working through each question, reflecting on the explanation provided, and revisiting the topics that challenge you most.

Remember: successful test preparation isn't about getting every question right the first time, it's about learning from your mistakes and improving over time. Stay focused, trust the process, and know that every page you turn brings you closer to success.

Let's begin.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to help you study more effectively and approach your exam with confidence. Whether you're reviewing for the first time or doing a final refresh, here’s how to get the most out of your Examzify study guide:

1. Start with a Diagnostic Review

Skim through the questions to get a sense of what you know and what you need to focus on. Don’t worry about getting everything right, your goal is to identify knowledge gaps early.

2. Study in Short, Focused Sessions

Break your study time into manageable blocks (e.g. 30 – 45 minutes). Review a handful of questions, reflect on the explanations, and take breaks to retain information better.

3. Learn from the Explanations

After answering a question, always read the explanation, even if you got it right. It reinforces key points, corrects misunderstandings, and teaches subtle distinctions between similar answers.

4. Track Your Progress

Use bookmarks or notes (if reading digitally) to mark difficult questions. Revisit these regularly and track improvements over time.

5. Simulate the Real Exam

Once you're comfortable, try taking a full set of questions without pausing. Set a timer and simulate test-day conditions to build confidence and time management skills.

6. Repeat and Review

Don’t just study once, repetition builds retention. Re-attempt questions after a few days and revisit explanations to reinforce learning.

7. Use Other Tools

Pair this guide with other Examzify tools like flashcards, and digital practice tests to strengthen your preparation across formats.

There’s no single right way to study, but consistent, thoughtful effort always wins. Use this guide flexibly — adapt the tips above to fit your pace and learning style. You've got this!

Questions

1. In restricted visibility, you hear the fog signal of one prolonged blast followed by two short blasts. What type of vessel would sound this signal?

A. A power-driven vessel engaged in fishing

B. A sailing vessel under sail

C. A power-driven vessel underway, making way

D. A vessel at anchor

2. What are the requirements for spacing and minimum visibility of additional lights on fishing vessels?

A. 150 meters apart, visible for 2 nautical miles

B. 200 meters apart, visible for 3 nautical miles

C. 100 meters apart, visible for 1 nautical mile

D. 250 meters apart, visible for 4 nautical miles

3. What is contained in the 'Weekly Notices to Mariners'?

A. Updates on weather conditions

B. New charts and navigational warnings

C. Vessel inspections

D. Maritime laws and regulations

4. What does the term 'whistle' mean in maritime context?

A. A device used for signaling

B. A type of horn

C. A type of fog signal

D. A type of light signal

5. What is the minimum visibility of a towing light on a vessel of 20m in length?

A. 1 nautical mile

B. 2 nautical miles

C. 3 nautical miles

D. 5 nautical miles

6. What size is the shape used to indicate a cone on a vessel?

A. At least 0.5 meters

B. At least 1 meter

C. At least 0.4 meters

D. At least 0.2 meters

7. How should you conduct your passage in a narrow channel or fairway?

A. By ensuring to keep to the right side

B. By maintaining your speed while avoiding other vessels

C. By navigating with caution and being ready to take evasive action

D. By using radar to track all vessels

8. What should a vessel do to keep clear of another vessel?

A. Slow down and wait for the other vessel to pass

B. Look for signals and follow them

C. Take early and substantial action to keep well clear

D. Only act if a collision seems imminent

9. What is the minimum visibility of all the navigation lights on a vessel of less than 12m in length?

A. 2 nautical miles

B. 1 nautical mile

C. 3 nautical miles

D. 4 nautical miles

10. What lights should a vessel not under command (NUC) exhibit when at anchor?

A. Red and white lights

B. Normal anchor lights for a vessel of her size

C. Flashing amber lights

D. Flares

Answers

1. C
2. B
3. B
4. A
5. A
6. A
7. C
8. C
9. B
10. B

Explanations

1. In restricted visibility, you hear the fog signal of one prolonged blast followed by two short blasts. What type of vessel would sound this signal?

A. A power-driven vessel engaged in fishing

B. A sailing vessel under sail

C. A power-driven vessel underway, making way

D. A vessel at anchor

The correct answer indicates that the signal of one prolonged blast followed by two short blasts is used by a power-driven vessel that is underway and making way through the water in restricted visibility. This sound signal is specified in the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs) under Rule 35, which deals with the use of sound signals in restricted visibility. When a power-driven vessel is underway and making way, it must signal its presence to other vessels to prevent collisions in conditions where visibility is limited. The prolonged blast serves to alert other vessels of its presence, while the two short blasts further communicate that it is a powered craft that is actively navigating. The other vessel types mentioned in the options do not use this specific signal under these circumstances. For instance, a fishing vessel would sound a different signal, and a vessel at anchor would sound yet another distinct signal. Similarly, a sailing vessel under sail has its own prescribed signals that differ from those of a power-driven vessel underway. Each category of vessel has sound signals designed to convey specific meanings and intentions, emphasizing the importance of understanding these regulations for safe maritime navigation.

2. What are the requirements for spacing and minimum visibility of additional lights on fishing vessels?

A. 150 meters apart, visible for 2 nautical miles

B. 200 meters apart, visible for 3 nautical miles

C. 100 meters apart, visible for 1 nautical mile

D. 250 meters apart, visible for 4 nautical miles

The requirements for spacing and minimum visibility of additional lights on fishing vessels are essential for safe navigation and collision avoidance. According to the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs), the proper spacing of additional lights is specified to ensure that they are sufficiently recognizable to other vessels. In this context, the correct choice indicates that the additional lights should be spaced 200 meters apart and have a visibility range of 3 nautical miles. This distance between lights ensures that they can be easily distinguished from one another, which helps in identifying the size and type of fishing vessel, and reducing the risk of collision during the night or in conditions with reduced visibility. The requirement of 3 nautical miles for visibility helps ensure that other vessels have adequate time to perceive the lights from a significant distance, providing an added layer of safety in navigation. This visibility range is important for various operational considerations, including the speed and maneuverability of approaching vessels. By meeting these specifications, fishing vessels enhance their visibility and safety while at sea, helping to prevent dangerous situations.

3. What is contained in the 'Weekly Notices to Mariners'?

A. Updates on weather conditions

B. New charts and navigational warnings

C. Vessel inspections

D. Maritime laws and regulations

The 'Weekly Notices to Mariners' is a vital publication that serves to provide critical updates regarding navigational safety. This includes new charts and navigational warnings that are essential for mariners to receive in order to navigate effectively and safely. The notices may include information on changes to existing nautical charts, new hazards that have been reported, and any alterations to navigational aids that could affect a vessel's passage. The importance of this publication lies in its role in ensuring that mariners have the most up-to-date information available, which is essential for safe navigation. Regularly reviewing these notices enables officers of the watch to stay informed about changes that could impact the safe passage of their vessels.

4. What does the term 'whistle' mean in maritime context?

A. A device used for signaling

B. A type of horn

C. A type of fog signal

D. A type of light signal

In a maritime context, the term 'whistle' refers to a device used for signaling. Whistles are commonly employed to communicate important information or instructions between vessels or between a vessel and shore facilities, especially in situations where visibility is limited or where other forms of communication may not be effective. Their primary function is to enhance safety by providing a clear auditory signal that can be recognized over distances, particularly in busy harbors or during adverse weather conditions. The use of a whistle is important in maintaining awareness of the movements and intentions of vessels in the vicinity. While the other choices involve forms of signaling, they do not specifically address the definition of 'whistle' in the maritime context. A type of horn can indeed be a signaling device, but it typically refers to a broader category of sound-producing apparatus, which may include whistles. A type of fog signal specifically refers to signals designed for use in foggy conditions, which could include whistles or horns but is not limited to them. A type of light signal pertains to visual communication methods used in maritime environments, further distancing it from the definition of a whistle.

5. What is the minimum visibility of a towing light on a vessel of 20m in length?

A. 1 nautical mile

B. 2 nautical miles

C. 3 nautical miles

D. 5 nautical miles

The minimum visibility of a towing light for a vessel that is 20 meters in length is indeed 1 nautical mile. According to the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs), specifically Rule 24 regarding the lights and shapes for towing vessels, it stipulates that vessels engaged in towing that are less than 50 meters in length must show their towing light, which should be visible at a minimum distance of 1 nautical mile. This regulation is designed to ensure that other vessels in the vicinity can easily identify a towing vessel and take appropriate actions to prevent collisions, especially in conditions of reduced visibility. The specification of visibility for light signals is critical for maintaining safety at sea, ensuring that the operators of nearby vessels have sufficient warning to navigate safely around a towing operation. The other visibility distances listed exceed the minimum requirement established for a vessel of this size, which is specifically addressed in the regulations. It is essential for mariners to be familiar with such regulations to ensure compliance and the proper operation of their vessels in different scenarios.

6. What size is the shape used to indicate a cone on a vessel?

A. At least 0.5 meters

B. At least 1 meter

C. At least 0.4 meters

D. At least 0.2 meters

The correct answer is that the shape used to indicate a cone on a vessel must be at least 0.5 meters in size. According to the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs), the specifications for shapes, including the cone used to signify a vessel that is restricted in its ability to maneuver, require a minimum height for visibility and identification purposes. This dimension ensures that the signal is effectively recognized by other vessels in various conditions, meeting the safety requirements for navigation. The size of the shape is critical for clear communication between vessels, which helps prevent maritime accidents. Understanding these specifications is essential for anyone involved in maritime operations and navigation. The other options reflect different sizes that do not meet the COLREGS requirements for visibility and effectiveness in signaling. Hence, they do not fulfill the criteria necessary for the cone shape used on a vessel.

7. How should you conduct your passage in a narrow channel or fairway?

A. By ensuring to keep to the right side

B. By maintaining your speed while avoiding other vessels

C. By navigating with caution and being ready to take evasive action

D. By using radar to track all vessels

When navigating in a narrow channel or fairway, it is essential to navigate with caution and be prepared to take evasive action. This approach is crucial due to the confined space and the increased risk of encountering other vessels. The potential for unexpected maneuvers or situations, such as a vessel experiencing difficulty or another vessel breaching the safe passage distance, necessitates a vigilant and adaptable mindset. Maintaining a heightened level of awareness allows for timely responses to any changes in traffic or navigational conditions. Being ready to take evasive action includes understanding the limitations of your own vessel, the possible actions of other vessels, and the navigational aids in the area. This proactive attitude ensures not only the safety of your vessel but also the safety of other vessels navigating the channel. Options that focus solely on keeping to one side, maintaining speed, or relying solely on radar, while important aspects of navigation, do not sufficiently address the dynamic and often unpredictable nature of a busy narrow channel scenario. Therefore, prioritizing caution and readiness enables a more effective and safe transit through these challenging waters.

8. What should a vessel do to keep clear of another vessel?

A. Slow down and wait for the other vessel to pass

B. Look for signals and follow them

C. Take early and substantial action to keep well clear

D. Only act if a collision seems imminent

The most effective way for a vessel to keep clear of another vessel is to take early and substantial action to keep well clear. This proactive approach aligns with the principles outlined in the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs), which emphasize the importance of avoiding situations that could lead to close quarters or potential collisions. Taking early and substantial action means identifying potential conflicts well in advance and maneuvering accordingly—this could involve altering course, changing speed, or employing both tactics to ensure a safe distance is maintained. By doing so, a vessel reduces the risk of misunderstanding or miscommunication that might arise from more reactive measures. In situations where signals from other vessels are present, while they are important to acknowledge and follow, relying solely on them without preemptive action might not sufficiently ensure safety. Waiting until a collision seems imminent is contrary to the COLREGs' emphasis on prevention and can lead to dangerous scenarios due to late responses. Thus, taking early and substantial action establishes a clear standard for safe navigation and responsible seamanship, which is why this approach is the preferred method for keeping clear of other vessels.

9. What is the minimum visibility of all the navigation lights on a vessel of less than 12m in length?

A. 2 nautical miles

B. 1 nautical mile

C. 3 nautical miles

D. 4 nautical miles

The minimum visibility for navigation lights on a vessel of less than 12 meters in length is indeed 1 nautical mile. This standard is established under the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs), which specify requirements for all vessels regarding the visibility of their navigation lights to ensure safe navigation and to prevent collisions. Vessels that are less than 12 meters are typically smaller craft, and the regulations indicate that their navigation lights should be visible at a distance of 1 nautical mile under normal visibility conditions. This is crucial for facilitating the recognition of these vessels by others, especially in crowded or constrained waterways, where the risk of collision is elevated. In contrast, larger vessels are required to have a greater visibility range for their lights, reflecting their size and the potential for higher traffic scenarios in which they operate. Therefore, the specific requirement of 1 nautical mile for smaller vessels balances necessary visibility for safety while considering their operational contexts.

10. What lights should a vessel not under command (NUC) exhibit when at anchor?

A. Red and white lights

B. Normal anchor lights for a vessel of her size

C. Flashing amber lights

D. Flares

A vessel not under command (NUC) is required to exhibit specific lights to ensure it is visible to other vessels and to communicate its status. When a vessel is at anchor and classified as NUC, it must show normal anchor lights appropriate for its size. This typically includes a white light situated at the stern and a second white light at the bow, ensuring that other vessels can identify its position clearly, particularly in the dark. The designation of 'not under command' is crucial, as it signifies that the vessel is unable to maneuver due to exceptional circumstances. By exhibiting the appropriate anchor lights, the vessel provides essential information to nearby mariners, helping to prevent collisions and promoting navigational safety. Other options do not correctly represent the necessary signaling for a NUC vessel at anchor. For instance, red and white lights, flashing amber lights, or flares do not align with the COLREGs regulations for displaying lights when at anchor. Thus, the proper indication for a NUC vessel at anchor is to use the standard anchor lights relative to its size.

Next Steps

Congratulations on reaching the final section of this guide. You've taken a meaningful step toward passing your certification exam and advancing your career.

As you continue preparing, remember that consistent practice, review, and self-reflection are key to success. Make time to revisit difficult topics, simulate exam conditions, and track your progress along the way.

If you need help, have suggestions, or want to share feedback, we'd love to hear from you. Reach out to our team at hello@examzify.com.

Or visit your dedicated course page for more study tools and resources:

https://oowcoloregs.examzify.com

We wish you the very best on your exam journey. You've got this!