United States Coast Guard Captains License Practice Exam (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. What does "CMS" stand for in vessel stability?

A. Center of Mass

B. Computed Margin of Stability

C. Coastal Management System

D. Center of Maneuvering Stability

2. A 95-meter vessel aground must sound which fog signal?

A. A rapid ringing of a bell for 5 seconds every two minutes

B. A whistle signal of one short, one prolonged, and one short blast

C. A long blast of the whistle at intervals not to exceed one minute

D. A rapid ringing of a bell for 5 seconds, preceded and followed by three separate and distinct strokes on a bell

3. Which of the following items is not considered part of basic safety equipment on a vessel?

A. Fire extinguishers

B. Life jackets

C. Fishing rods

D. First aid kits

4. What does the green light over a white light indicate for a trawling vessel?

A. The vessel is fishing

B. The vessel is operating in a restricted area

C. The vessel is low on fuel

D. The vessel has right of way

5. The purpose of displaying navigation lights is to:

A. Ensure the vessel is visible to others

B. Attract attention from other vessels

C. Reduce the risk of collision

D. Both ensure visibility and reduce collision risk

6. What does "VHF" stand for?

A. Very High Frequency

B. Variable Harmony Frequency

C. Visual Height Frequency

D. Vessel Humidity Frequency

7. What should a power-driven vessel do when it is overtaking another vessel in a narrow channel?

A. Proceed around the other vessel without any signal

B. Sound a two-blast signal

C. Wait for the vessel to yield

D. Pass only when clear

8. What does an alternating red and yellow light on a vessel indicate?

A. In distress and need of assistance

B. Fishing with lines extending out over 150 meters

C. Engaged in public safety activities

D. Restricted in its ability to maneuver

9. Seeing another vessel approach with a compass bearing that does not significantly change indicates what?

A. You are the stand-on vessel

B. Risk of collision exists

C. A special circumstances situation exists

D. The vessel is dead in the water

10. What should be included in a pre-departure safety briefing?

A. The crew's personal goals for the trip

B. Emergency procedures and equipment

C. The captain's leadership style

D. Details about the vessel's interior design

Answers

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

Explanations

1. What does "CMS" stand for in vessel stability?

A. Center of Mass

B. Computed Margin of Stability

C. Coastal Management System

D. Center of Maneuvering Stability

"CMS" stands for "Center of Mass" in vessel stability, which refers to the point where the total mass of the vessel can be considered to be concentrated. Understanding the position of the center of mass is vital for assessing a vessel's stability, as it influences how the vessel reacts to forces like wind and waves. For a vessel to be stable, its center of mass must be located appropriately in relation to its buoyancy center. If the center of mass is too high or improperly positioned, it can lead to instability and increase the risk of capsizing. In the context of vessel stability, knowing the center of mass helps in determining the right weight distribution and the placement of cargo, which ultimately affects the overall performance and safety of the vessel. Properly managing the center of mass is crucial for maintaining balance and heavy seas, as well as for ensuring safe operations while maneuvering or during adverse conditions.

2. A 95-meter vessel aground must sound which fog signal?

A. A rapid ringing of a bell for 5 seconds every two minutes

B. A whistle signal of one short, one prolonged, and one short blast

C. A long blast of the whistle at intervals not to exceed one minute

D. A rapid ringing of a bell for 5 seconds, preceded and followed by three separate and distinct strokes on a bell

A vessel that is aground is required to use specific sound signals to indicate its situation. The correct option involves a rapid ringing of a bell for 5 seconds, preceded and followed by three separate and distinct strokes on a bell. This sound signal is indicative of a vessel that is not able to maneuver and is also not under command. The reason this option is correct is that it aligns with the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs), which outline the sound signals for various conditions at sea. The distinct pattern of sounds communicates to other vessels in the area that the aground vessel is unable to move and is presenting a navigation hazard. The other choices, while they contain elements of sound signals, do not adequately convey the specific combination required for a vessel aground. For example, rapid ringing of a bell for 5 seconds every two minutes does not include the necessary sequences of distinct strokes that communicate the grounding situation. Similarly, whistle signals do not apply to an aground vessel, as these signals are more relevant for vessels that are able to maneuver. Thus, the selected answer reflects the correct action required by a vessel that is aground to ensure safety and awareness in the surrounding marine environment.

3. Which of the following items is not considered part of basic safety equipment on a vessel?

A. Fire extinguishers

B. Life jackets

C. Fishing rods

D. First aid kits

Basic safety equipment on a vessel is essential for ensuring the safety of the crew and passengers during emergencies or unexpected situations. Items classified as basic safety equipment typically include items that help prevent or respond to emergencies at sea. Fire extinguishers are crucial for handling onboard fires, providing a means to extinguish flames to protect lives and property. Life jackets are vital for flotation and personal safety, ensuring that individuals can remain afloat in the water should they fall overboard or in the event of a capsizing. First aid kits are important for administering medical treatment in case of injuries or health issues that may arise at sea. Fishing rods, while they may be used for leisure or recreational fishing activities, do not contribute to the safety of the vessel's operation or the well-being of its occupants. They do not provide safety or emergency support, which is why they are not classified as part of the basic safety equipment.

4. What does the green light over a white light indicate for a trawling vessel?

A. The vessel is fishing

B. The vessel is operating in a restricted area

C. The vessel is low on fuel

D. The vessel has right of way

The correct answer indicates that the trawling vessel is actively engaged in fishing operations. In maritime navigation, the display of a green light over a white light signifies that the vessel is using gear for trawling, which is a method of fishing that involves dragging a net through the water. This configuration is an important visual cue for other vessels to recognize that the trawler is occupied with fishing activity and may not be maneuvering as quickly or readily as a vessel not engaged in such operations. Recognizing this signal is essential for safety at sea, as it helps prevent collisions and allows other vessels to navigate accordingly. The importance of understanding these light configurations is emphasized within the context of the "Rules of the Road," which outline navigational protocols and responsibilities for vessels operating in shared waters.

5. The purpose of displaying navigation lights is to:

A. Ensure the vessel is visible to others

B. Attract attention from other vessels

C. Reduce the risk of collision

D. Both ensure visibility and reduce collision risk

Displaying navigation lights is crucial for both ensuring a vessel's visibility to others and significantly reducing the risk of collision. Navigation lights are designed to indicate a vessel's position, heading, and status to other vessels in various conditions, particularly at night or in reduced visibility. When vessels display the correct navigation lights as required by maritime regulations, they provide essential information to other mariners, allowing them to ascertain the type of vessel, its direction, and any potential actions they may need to take to avoid a collision. For instance, the color and arrangement of the lights can signal whether the vessel is at anchor, underway, or engaged in fishing, among other statuses. Therefore, the dual purpose of navigation lights—ensuring visibility and aiding in collision avoidance—validates the selection of that particular answer choice. This understanding is fundamental for safe navigation and compliance with maritime rules and regulations.

6. What does "VHF" stand for?

A. Very High Frequency

B. Variable Harmony Frequency

C. Visual Height Frequency

D. Vessel Humidity Frequency

"VHF" stands for "Very High Frequency." This term is essential in maritime communication as it refers to a specific range of radio frequencies that are commonly used for ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore communications. The VHF radio band typically operates between 30 MHz to 300 MHz and is crucial for ensuring effective communication over distances that are significant in maritime contexts. This frequency range is particularly utilized because it allows for line-of-sight communication, making it suitable for navigating vessels and coordinating with other ships or shore stations. Understanding the purpose and the technology that lies behind VHF communications is critical for any captain, as it holds the key to safety and operational efficiency on the water. The other options listed do not accurately reflect the standard definition used in marine communication or radar technology, as they refer to unrelated concepts or create terminologies that are not recognized in the context of marine electronics. Therefore, recognizing "Very High Frequency" as the correct definition underscores the relevance of communication systems essential for modern navigation and safety.

7. What should a power-driven vessel do when it is overtaking another vessel in a narrow channel?

A. Proceed around the other vessel without any signal

B. Sound a two-blast signal

C. Wait for the vessel to yield

D. Pass only when clear

When a power-driven vessel is overtaking another vessel in a narrow channel, the proper conduct according to maritime navigation rules is to sound a two-blast signal. This signal is a standard communication method that indicates the intent to overtake and is essential for ensuring safety on the water. The two-blast signal alerts the other vessel of the overtaking maneuver, fostering awareness and coordination between vessels in close quarters, particularly in the confined space of a narrow channel. This rule serves to prevent collisions and maintain a clear understanding of navigational intentions among vessels. In addition to using sound signals, it's important for the overtaking vessel to ensure that it executes the maneuver safely by assessing the situation and ensuring that there is adequate space to pass the other vessel.

8. What does an alternating red and yellow light on a vessel indicate?

A. In distress and need of assistance

B. Fishing with lines extending out over 150 meters

C. Engaged in public safety activities

D. Restricted in its ability to maneuver

An alternating red and yellow light on a vessel signifies that the vessel is engaged in public safety activities. This type of light is used to alert other vessels and mariners that the vessel is performing functions related to safety and may be operating under specific regulations or protocols that require caution from others in the area. For instance, vessels displaying this light may be involved in search and rescue operations, law enforcement activities, or emergency response tasks, where their presence is crucial for public safety. Recognizing such a light allows navigators to understand the situation and take appropriate actions, such as maintaining safe distances or providing assistance if necessary. Understanding the specific meaning of light signals on vessels is essential for safe navigation, as it helps prevent accidents and ensures that all maritime activities are conducted responsibly. Thus, knowledge of these signals contributes significantly to overall maritime awareness and safety.

9. Seeing another vessel approach with a compass bearing that does not significantly change indicates what?

A. You are the stand-on vessel

B. Risk of collision exists

C. A special circumstances situation exists

D. The vessel is dead in the water

When observing another vessel approaching with a compass bearing that does not significantly change, it suggests that the two vessels are on a converging collision course. This is an important safety consideration in maritime navigation. If the bearing remains constant, it means that the distance between the vessels is decreasing, which indicates that a risk of collision exists. Understanding this principle is critical for navigational safety, as proper action must be taken to avoid a collision. In situations where the relative bearing is changing, it may not necessarily indicate a collision risk, allowing for the necessary maneuvers to establish safe navigation between the vessels involved. The other options do not accurately represent the implications of a steady compass bearing. The option about being the stand-on vessel typically pertains to a situation where one vessel is required to maintain its course and speed, but that becomes irrelevant if a collision risk is present. A special circumstances situation would involve unique navigational challenges not indicated simply by a constant bearing. The notion that the vessel is dead in the water does not relate to the dynamics of approach bearing; it would not have a steady bearing while in that condition.

10. What should be included in a pre-departure safety briefing?

A. The crew's personal goals for the trip

B. Emergency procedures and equipment

C. The captain's leadership style

D. Details about the vessel's interior design

In a pre-departure safety briefing, it is essential to cover emergency procedures and equipment. This is vital for ensuring the safety and preparedness of everyone on board. The briefing should inform the crew about the specific actions to take in emergencies, such as man overboard situations, fire, or flooding. Additionally, it should detail the location and proper use of safety equipment like life jackets, fire extinguishers, first aid kits, and distress signals. This knowledge empowers the crew to respond effectively in critical situations, potentially saving lives and minimizing risk during the voyage. Including personal goals, leadership styles, or vessel interior details may foster team rapport or enhance morale but does not prioritize the immediate safety and preparedness of the crew in emergency scenarios.

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://uscoastguardcaptains.examzify.com

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