

TraCen Cape May Education Update #353

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Congratulations!!

The following personnel in the Cape May area passed Coast Guard Institute end-of-course, AQEs, and other tests since the last update:

Name	Work Site	Test
GM3 Tobias Vick	TraCen (Armory)	GM2*

Well done, both of you!

And if you've just finished a degree program or have any other noteworthy academic achievement to brag about, please let me know so I can recognize you for it.

Question of the Week

Q: I've taken the SWE three times, but my score has been about the same every time. What am I doing wrong?

A: Without knowing more, I can't really tell you what (if anything) you're doing wrong. But consider this: if all things were the same from one test to the next, it's unlikely that if mere repetition (especially if there's six months or a year between each one) will improve your performance significantly. Questions change from one text to the next.

Also consider that studying for a SWE is different from studying for an EOCT. The first difference is that you're responsible for all information (practical and book-learning) applicable to the pay grade you're shooting for and all pay grades lower than that. Those of you who've never taken a SWE – and those who haven't done so well on previous SWEs – should try the following to prepare for it.

- The main thing to keep in mind is that the questions on the SWE are drawn from information and practices that underlie the EPQs (Enlisted Performance Qualifications) or – if you're an MST – RPQs (Rating Performance

Qualifications) and the E-PME Performance and Knowledge Requirements. You can download the current EPQ/RPQ Record (form CG-3303C) from the Learning Management System on the CGPortal.

- The information and practices underlying your EPQs are laid out in detail in your rate's Professional Qualifications Guides (PQGs) (or, if you're an MST, in the RPQs themselves) and the E-PME Study Guides. Unlike an EOCT or AQE, the SWE tests you on information and performance requirements for the pay grade you're testing for, your present pay grade, and all lower pay grades.
- The keys to effectively preparing for the SWE are to break down what seems to be an overwhelming job into smaller do-able jobs and to spread out those smaller jobs over a long enough period that you will finish before your SWE date. Rather than looking at the whole huge list of EPQs/RPQs and E-PME Performance and Knowledge Requirements, categorize them by subject.

Your SWE study preparation should have begun months ago (at least three months before the test date). Here are some tips to consider:

- Create a good study environment for yourself. Set aside a time and place that will be conducive to good studying.
- Form a study group and assign specific EPQs/RPQs to each member and exchange notes or let each member give a presentation on his/her specific EPQ/RPQ. Then have that person ask questions of all the other group members related to his/her assigned EPQ/RPQ.
- As you're researching an EPQ/RPQ, make index cards for yourself. Write a question related to that EPQ/RPQ on one side of the card and the correct answer on the other. You'll likely come up with a number of questions related to each EPQ/RPQ.
- Create audio tapes with questions and answers. Listening to the tape may help you remember.
- If you have a computer, create a study program using information you have gathered from the EPQs/RPQs.
- Consider printing out your EPQs/RPQs and E-PME requirements and using scissors to physically cut out each subject. You can then paste each to a separate file folder, inside of which are your notes on each item relating to that subject. Or paste them to individual 8½ x 11 pieces of light card board, which you put into a binder along with pages of notes, sections from your PQG, etc.

If you have a question you'd like answered as a Question of the Week, e-mail it to me at andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil.

Web Page in the Spotlight

There's a lot of stuff on the TraCen Cape May web site you might not check out if you didn't know it was there. So this week, I'm spotlighting **GI Bill – Overview** (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/gibill-o.asp>) and the other pages under it.

Grammar & Usage Corner

This feature will touch on grammar and usage questions as well as confused/misused words. This week, we'll look at *capital* and *capitol* (definitions are from *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*). The word *capital* has a number of meanings.

- An architectural term (noun) meaning the top-most part of a column. ("The capitals on the Supreme Court building are in the Corinthian style.")

- A noun meaning an upper-case letter of the alphabet. (“She’s gotten into the annoying habit of writing all words in her essays without capitals.”)
- An adjective meaning crime punishable by death. (“Murder is a capital offense in Texas.”)
- An adjective describing the most important. (“The capital point in his talk was that the total amount of hydrocarbons in the world is diminishing.”)
- A noun meaning assets which add to the long-term net worth of a corporation. (“The company’s market capital was in the billions of dollars” or “Marx wrote extensively about capital and its place in economics”.)
- An adjective describing goods which have a service life of five or more years. (“Capital expenditures for this fiscal year will be lower than they were last year.”)
- An adjective describing the largest class of warship. (“With the obsolescence of battleships, aircraft carriers have become the U.S. Navy’s capital ships.”)

The word *capitol* is a noun meaning the building in which a state or the federal legislative body meets. (“New Congresses convene in the Capitol on January 3rd of each odd-numbered year.”)

If there are any word usage, grammar, or similar issues you’ve encountered, please e-mail them to me at andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil.

Staying Current with Deck Watch Officer Test Requirement

If you’re in a billet that requires you to remain current with respect to a Deck Watch Officer test, you can find a synopsis of the policy, a link to the COMDTINST 16672.5C, and a link to some sample test questions at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/nrt4.asp>. (If you’d like a hard copy of the COMDTINST, drop by the Education Center.)

Also be aware that if it’s been less than five years since you last passed either the DWINTO (closed-book) or the DWINTR (open-book) test, you can take either test (subject to the prohibition against re-taking the same test title more often than every three weeks).

If you’re looking for a way to study for the test besides the NavRules course from the Coast Guard Institute (which is available through your ESO), you might want to consider investing in a copy of RulesMaster Pro software from Australia (<http://www.rulesmaster.com/>). This program makes the nautical rules of the road come to life, with sound signals and lights as you’d see them underway at night from all angles.

Tuition Assistance for FY12

Currently, the Coast Guard Institute is authorized to process tuition assistance (TA) requests for courses beginning in both October and November 2011. You can use eTA/WebTA (<https://eta.cnet.navy.mil/>) to apply for a course that begins before the end of November 2011.

Remember: requests submitted via eTA expire after two weeks. So if you want to apply for a course that begins later than October, you’ll need to use the PDF application form (http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/cgi/forms/CG_Form_4147.pdf) rather than eTA to submit your TA request. The Coast Guard Institute will keep your PDF request on file and process it as soon as funds become available, in the order in which it was received.

Keep in mind that ESOs may not process TA requests for any course that begins more than three months from today.

Interested in Working in the Health Information Technology Field?

Estimates from government agencies and independent studies indicate a need for 50,000 to 80,000 more health IT workers so health care facilities can implement and maintain electronic health records (EHRs) and meet meaningful use requirements.

Included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 were grants to community colleges to be used to train “health information technology professionals”: people qualified to support information exchange among health care providers and public health authorities and to redesign of workflows within the health care settings to gain the quality and efficiency benefits of EHRs.

If you’re interested in finding out more about opportunities these grants create, information on colleges providing this training, their admission criteria, their tuition structures, etc. check out the fact sheet at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/HIT.pdf> and one of the participating consortium’s web sites at <http://hitregiond.pittcc.edu/index.html>.

Foreign Language Proficiency Pay

If you’re proficient in a language other than English and are assigned to a designated interpreter or linguist billet, you may be eligible for Foreign Language Proficiency Pay (FLPP). The Coast Guard recently changed its policy on who’s eligible for FLPP.

Until the end of FY11, there were only two categories: Interpreter and Linguist. Individuals who received a score of at least 2+ on both the listening and reading portions of the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) were entitled to the higher FLPP of a Linguist. Those who received a score of at least 2 on both tests were entitled to Interpreter FLPP. The revised policy created four Interpreter categories and two Linguist categories. Which level you qualify for depends on your DLPT scores, and whether you’re assigned to an Interpreter or Linguist billet.

For more information about the DLPT and to see what the payment rates are for the different Interpreter and Linguist categories, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dlpt.asp>.

Learning Another Language & Foreign Language Testing

There are a number of software applications that help you learn a foreign language. “Tell Me More” (http://us.tellmemore.com/free_demo) and “Rosetta Stone” (<http://www.rosettastone.com/>, which everyone’s seen on TV) are but two of these.

But don’t go out and buy one just because everyone’s talking about it. Before you order the software, do some research, including <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/LanguageLearning.pdf>.

- **Check the price.** The only direct Coast Guard-related funding available to reimburse you language software you buy on your own is the Coast Guard Foundation grant – which is only available to regular Coast Guard enlisted personnel and Reserve enlistees on active duty (i.e., not drilling Reservists or officers).
- **Ask around; see if you can find others who have it.** Find out if it helped them learn what they need to know to talk about Coast Guard-related matters (e.g., law enforcement) in the target language. Unless you just want to learn another language for fun, if the software doesn’t help you learn what you need to learn it’s probably not worth buying.
- **Foreign Language Proficiency Pay (FLPP).** If you want to earn FLPP as one of your unit’s designated interpreters, it’s highly unlikely a commercially-available language course will give you the proficiency needed to get the necessary rating on the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT, see <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/dlpt.asp>). And keep in mind that even if it does, your unit has to have designated interpreter billets *and* you have to be formally assigned to one of those billets. (Most operational units have only two or three interpreter billets.)

If you really need to know a second language for work, the Coast Guard will probably pay for you to learn it. But a method other than software may be more effective. That is, if all you can do after months of using a computer program is make small talk that helps you locate a good restaurant, it’s probably not worthwhile for Coast Guard purposes.

Check around to see if there are any intensive language training courses available in your area through a college/university, a commercial language school, or a government agency. For example, now that the Coast Guard and the Customs and Border Protection agency work for the same cabinet secretary, you may find that you can get into a CBP language training program that either the Department or Coast Guard will pay for.

And, of course, you can always take college courses in the target language. Tuition assistance will pay for them and you'll also earn college credit from them.

You can also find loads of (mostly) free resources for learning foreign languages at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/languages.asp>.

On-line College Language Courses

If you're interested in taking one or more language courses on-line and either don't want to or can't afford to use those which are commercially available, check out the dozens of courses available from many different regionally-accredited colleges and universities throughout the country.

The DANTES Independent Study Catalog (<http://www.dantescatalogs.com/DISCSubjectAreas.aspx?MajorSubjectArea=PC>) lists them, gives a short description of what they entail, and lists all costs associated with them. Tuition assistance (TA) can be used to pay for all or most costs of all these courses and you'll earn college credit for them as well.

If you're specifically interested in Spanish, another option comes from Ms. Kristi Hilton (full-time ESO at Sector Columbia River). She found courses offered by the University of Texas at <http://courses.webhost.utexas.edu/dec/college/searchresults.cfm>. You'll also earn college credit for these courses and the cost is only \$147.60/credit. If you want to use TA, there's a "Military Tuition Assistance" option on the payment page. If you run into snags trying to use TA to pay for the course, the school's Registrar, Ms. Carol Tremaine (at 512-471-2906), will answer any questions you have about the procedure.

Thinking of Applying for an Officer Program?

If you're considering applying for one of the Coast Guard's officer programs, be sure to give yourself plenty of time to complete all the required documents and steps. You can't get everything done in a manner that will give you a good shot at being selected if you spend less than six months on the application process.

Keep in mind that you can't just request an interview and expect everyone will be able to drop everything on a moment's notice to do it. You need to plan ahead so that whomever is charged with setting up interviews can find officers of the required ranks who can all meet in the same place (availability of which must be worked out) at the same time to interview you. For example, TraCen Cape May, CGAS Atlantic City, and Sector Delaware Bay only interview applicants once a quarter in rotation according to a schedule published a year in advance (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/interview.asp#sked>). This gives applicants plenty of time to schedule an interview.

Remember that the date of your interview is **completely** unrelated to dates published in the most recent ALCGRECRUITING message (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/alcgreuiting010-11.pdf>): not the date your application has to be completed and submitted, not the date the selection board meets. You can (and should) schedule your interview relatively early in the process so you're not under the gun to get it done before the submission deadline. But bear in mind, too, that certain things have to be done in a certain order.

For example, your application folder's not complete unless a report from the interview board is in it. You have to provide a number of documents to the interview board before your interview, one of which is your current CO's endorsement of your narrative memo. Most commands require applicants to forward a draft of the CO's endorsement up through the chain of

command – which can take as much as a month. And your chain of command can't revise the draft endorsement unless it has your narrative memo done.

For information on the officer program application process, go to my web site at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/oapp.asp>.

Future-Proof Your Education

“How do you prepare for uncertain career paths where technical knowledge doubles every two years? You pay attention to the skills that surround the content: Interact, Flex, Learn, Explain, Analyze, and Focus.” Check out “Future-proof Your Education” at http://prezi.com/gsoot_1arnmk/future-proof-your-education/.

For best viewing, roll your cursor over "More" (in the bottom right corner) and select "Fullscreen". Then, use your keyboard's left/right arrow keys (or click on the arrows) to go forward or backward in the presentation. If a small window entitled “Hups. Bzzr.” appears in the middle of your screen, you'll need to view the presentation/video on a computer other than your CG workstation.

Career & Education Planning Tools

Many people in the Coast Guard – military and civilians alike – are unsure of what career fields best match their personal interests and abilities. While you might be extremely competent at what you're doing in the Coast Guard, you might have skills you'd rather put to use in some other field. ESOs throughout the Coast Guard (including TraCen Cape May's) have access to many different tools you can use to assess your interests and possible ways to earn a living while pursuing those interests.

For more information, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/discover.asp> and <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/sitest.asp>.

Is Distance Learning for You?

Because of its convenience (no need to leave the house to attend classes), distance learning appeals to working people – especially to military personnel. This fact means many Coast Guard personnel (who are often not near large population centers) have opportunities for higher education they might not have had in the past.

But before you plunk down the application fee for a distance learning course, check out the information about distance learning at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/distance.asp>. And before you hop on the on-line course bandwagon, spend a little time with the University of Georgia's on-line assessment tool to help you determine if computer-based distance learning is for you (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/distance.asp#01>).

Reserve Resource Guide

In addition to the web site of the Coast Guard Office of Reserve Affairs (<http://www.uscg.mil/reserve/>), Reservists should also check out TraCen Petaluma's Reserve Resource Guide (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/tracenpetaluma/RRG/>). Together, these provide info on and links to info on every facet of Coast Guard affairs related to service in the Reserve.

TraCen Cape May Testing Calendar

Tests at TraCen Cape May are administered by appointment according to the following schedule:

Mondays (0800): Defense Language Proficiency Tests

Tuesdays (0800): EOCTs and AQEs*
Thursdays (0745): college tests, CLEP tests, DSSTs, SATs, ACTs

* If operations or your work schedule make it impossible for you to take an EOCT or AQE on a Tuesday morning, you can take it on a Thursday morning.

This schedule leaves most of the day on Tuesdays, as well as all day on Wednesdays, Fridays available for other occasional tests, counseling, and other face-to-face interactions with you. When no one is taking a language test, the doors to the Education Center are open on Mondays, as well.

If you call and I don't answer the phone, I'm usually administering a test (and, because of the noise, can't talk on the phone) or otherwise busy with someone in the office. E-mail is the best way to get in touch with me at andrew.g.webb@uscg.mil.

Leaving the Coast Guard?

If you're leaving the Coast Guard within the next twelve months (whether through retirement, resignation, or expiration of your enlistment), you should be making plans for what you'll be doing after you take off your uniform for the last time. Check out the information on my web site related to career transition (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/careertrans.asp>).

Also, stop by the Education Center to check out the (small) supply of booklets related to rejoining the civilian work force. Here are the topics of the booklets:

- Jobs With a Future
- How to Develop Job Resources
- The Resume
- The Cover Letter: A Resume Should Never Stand Alone
- The Mature Resume: The Resume with Experience
- The Follow-up Letter
- The Interview
- How to Choose a Career: A Guide to Self-Assessment
- Civilian Again
- Leaving the Service ... and Beginning Your Next Career
- Military to Civilian: Your Resume and Job Hunt
- Effective Goal Setting: How to Reach the Goals You Set for Yourself

You should also request an education assessment from the Coast Guard Institute (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/collegefaq.asp>) to get a transcript of college credit you've acquired through your service in the Coast Guard. ***If you don't request an assessment before you leave active duty, you can't get one (or a transcript) later.***

If you're not planning to go to school right away, you'll probably need to find work. Here are two excellent resources for finding a job – or even a second career. Also, Military.com has a very good series of web pages devoted to veterans (<http://www.military.com/Careers/Home>).

And don't discount the idea of working in the public sector. Not only are there thousands of jobs in the federal government, identical to private-sector jobs in which you can put your skills, knowledge, and experience to use while maintaining job security unavailable in the private sector (<http://www.fedjobs.gov/>), governmental entities at all levels – state, county, municipality, school district, port district, etc. – provide similar benefits.

ACCC's Library Open for Studying

One more thing: the new campus's classrooms, labs, and library are all state-of-the-art. Even if you're not ready to register for classes right away, you should take the opportunity to visit the campus and look around. The Director of Academic and Student Services has extended a personal invitation to anyone who'd like to use the library to study, for research, or for pleasure reading. It's very quiet, well-lit, and has very comfortable furniture.

Education Center Library

The TraCen Education Center has a binder full of SparkCharts Quick Reference Guides on almost 40 subjects. You're welcome to use these in the Education Center or make copies to take with you. You can check out the subjects available at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/books.asp#spark>.

In addition to SparkCharts, the Education Center also has a library of books on leadership, management, Coast Guard history, and other topics. Also in the library are the latest Professional Qualification Guides (PQGs) and Enlisted Performance Qualifications (EPQs) for each rating.

The Education Center also has dozens of brochures and books on college, financial aid, the officer program application process, and other things. If there are multiple copies, you're welcome to take one.