

TraCen Cape May Education Update #322

In this Update:

- Question of the week
- Web page in the spotlight
- Grammar & usage corner
- Unpredictable schedule keeping you from earning a degree?
- New enlisted rating advancement training system
- More scholarship opportunities
- Updated New (Post-9/11) GI Bill pages on TraCen Cape May web site
- Coast Guard Foundation scholarships
- Thinking about Ashford University?
- May SWEs
- Excelsior College Exams
- Striker programs update
- Reservists & tuition assistance
- Best colleges for women and minorities in STEM
- Continuing education courses
- New amounts for Coast Guard Foundation grants
- Learning a second language
- Re-taking ASVAB tests
- TraCen Cape May testing calendar
- Thinking of teaching?
- Leaving the Coast Guard?
- Miscellaneous

Question of the Week

Q: I'm on the list for "A" school and since there's a long waiting list, I'm thinking about taking a college class. How do I get credit for boot camp so I can use them toward my degree?

A: First off, before you do anything related to college right now, talk with your chief. Most units won't approve tuition assistance for non-rates who haven't already passed the E-PME-4 test and become qualified for whatever watches you have to stand.

Also, if you graduated from boot camp any time since June 2009, you won't be able to get an assessment of credit earned there at the moment. The Coast Guard recruit training curriculum went through a major change then and the American Council on Education (ACE), which evaluates military courses for college credit equivalency, hasn't yet published the evaluation it completed last month. Because of this, you won't be able to get a transcript of boot camp-earned credit right now. (Instead of requesting an assessment now, you should wait until you've completed "A" school.)

This fact doesn't prevent you from taking college courses, however, because the credits earned in boot camp will likely not replace any specific courses you'll have to take to earn your degree. That is, they'll most likely fill free electives slots. (For definitions of *free electives* go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/glossary.asp>.)

This assumes, of course that your command is OK with you taking a college course and that you'll be able to finish the course before you go to "A" school. If you don't finish the course and have to withdraw from it or if you fail it, you'll have to repay the Coast Guard for any tuition assistance paid for the course that the college doesn't reimburse.

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 **ACT**, **SAT**, and **Comparison: The SAT Reasoning Test and the ACT**

(<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/act.asp>, <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/sat.asp>, and <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/comparison.asp>).

Grammar & Usage Corner

This feature will touch on grammar and usage questions as well as confused/misused words. This week, the often-confused words are *ensure* and *insure*.

Ensure is a verb meaning to make certain, sure, or safe, to guarantee. “To ensure we receive your application, send it by overnight delivery.”

Insure is a verb meaning to provide or obtain insurance on or for. “She insured her plane for \$2 million.”

NOTE: *ensure*, *insure*, *assure*, and *secure* can be used interchangeably in many contexts where they indicate making an outcome certain or inevitable. There are slight differences, however. When in doubt, check a dictionary.

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.

Unpredictable Schedule Keeping You from Earning a Degree?

A lot of people attached to operational units or who otherwise can’t predict when they’ll have free time to study are frustrated by traditional term-based colleges. (By “term-based” I mean schools that run on fixed terms such as semesters and quarters.) Often times, an assignment is due or a test must be taken on a certain date but you get called away by official duties.

There’s an easy fix to this dilemma: take courses from a school that offers self-paced courses.

All the schools listed on my web site (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/schools.asp#self-paced>) offer such courses. Most have whole degree programs via self-paced courses, some only offer a few courses. You can start a course at any time – there are no fixed deadlines for registering, completing lessons, taking tests, or even finishing the course. You can register at any time of the year and work at your own pace.

Some schools require you to complete their courses in four months, but most give you nine months, and a few give you a year or even two years. Those with shorter time frames grant extensions. Most of these schools allow you to complete these courses in as little as six weeks and some have no minimum time requirement at all.

An added benefit of these programs is that in most cases tuition is lower than the maximum tuition assistance will cover. (The lower the tuition, the more courses per year you can take using tuition assistance.) And these are not just for military personnel.

New Enlisted Rating Advancement Training System

ALCOAST 033/11 (published on 04 February 2011) announced the transition from the current way enlisted personnel demonstrate their qualification for advancement to a new way. As noted in the message, “The basic advancement requirements listed in [the Personnel Manual] remain unchanged, though certain training resources have been renamed to more accurately reflect their intent.”

The new system (which, of course, will have its own acronym – ERATS) will include three components:

- **Rating Performance Qualifications (RPQs)** will replace Enlisted Performance Qualifications (EPQs, formerly known as practical factors or pracs). RPQs will be the basis for all rate-specific training: the “A” school curriculum, rating courses, and advancement exams. RPQs will “provide more specific guidance and direction to both the performer and the supervisor than . . . EPQs. In addition to the task to be performed, the RPQ includes required steps to perform the task, conditions under which the task must be performed, and the standard to which the task must be performed. References required are linked to each step of each task.”

- **Rating Courses** will, as noted above, be based on the RPQs and will reflect the tasks and performance for demonstrating mastery of each task called for by each RPQ. “Rating courses . . . will undergo a significant transformation as part of ERATS, becoming more relevant and making better use of available technology, including real-time performance support via online delivery. . . . It must be strongly emphasized that the best way to prepare for the RAT is to perform the RPQs as indicated, using the references associated with each enabling objective.”
- **Rating Advancement Tests (RATs)** will replace end-of-course tests (EOCTs) and will incorporate four major changes:
 - Tests will be based directly on the RPQs, not the course. If you can successfully perform the RPQs for the next higher pay grade, you should be able to accurately answer the questions on the RAT.
 - When new RPQs are published, a corresponding replacement RAT will be published and distributed to ESOs.
 - When taking a RAT, you may use references you normally use to perform an RPQ (task) on-the-job.
 - RATs will be administered on-line using a completely new system than the one currently in use.

As is currently the case with EPQs and EOCTs, you must complete all RPQs before you will be eligible to take a RAT.

This new format will be put into effect this FY for the MST rating, as detailed in ALCOAST 033/11 (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/ALCOAST033-11.pdf>).

More Scholarship Opportunities

- The Jersey Cape Military Spouse’s Club is offering four \$1,000 scholarships to deserving dependents of Cape May-area uniformed personnel. Its purpose is to help meet post-secondary educational expenses. The award will be made on the basis of scholastic abilities, character, leadership, and extracurricular activities.

Eligibility requirements and the application are available from <http://coastie2coastie.net/jcmsc/index.xhtml>. Don’t be surprised if you’re asked to complete a survey. The survey is just the gateway to the application form. **The deadline for submitting applications via this web site is 31 March 2011.**
- The Wildwood chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) is offering a \$500 scholarship for seniors at Wildwood High School or Wildwood Catholic High School.

For more information, contact Mr. John Burgin (TraCen Cape May Facilities Engineering) at 609-898-6948 or 609-536-2754.
- Also, the director of the Tillman Foundation is hoping more eligible Guardians will apply for the Tillman Military Scholarship program this year than in the past. So far, no Guardians have been chosen to receive one of these scholarships. Applications for the 2011-2012 academic year open on 07 March 2011. Check out the foundation’s web site for eligibility criteria and other application information: <http://www.pattillmanfoundation.org/tillman-military-scholars/apply/>.

Updated New (Post-9/11) GI Bill Pages on TraCen Cape May Web Site

I’ve completely revised the pages on the TraCen Cape May web site that pertain to the new GI Bill and changes to it which were signed into law on 04 January (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/gibill-33o.asp>). Please check it out and let me know if you have trouble navigating it.

Coast Guard Foundation Scholarships

ALCOAST 007/11 was published last Friday, announcing six different scholarships open to dependent children of active duty, retired, or deceased Coast Guard enlisted personnel, and dependent children of enlisted personnel in the Coast Guard Reserve currently on active duty. The application deadline for these is **01 April 2011**.

The Coast Guard Foundation also has two other scholarships. One is open to employees of the Aviation Logistics Center in Elizabeth City, NC (active duty officers and enlisted personnel, federal civil service employees, and their dependents). The deadline for this scholarship is **15 March 2011**.

The other program is open to dependent children of Coast Guard personnel who lost a parent in Coast Guard operations. Applications for this program are accepted at any time.

For more information about these scholarships, see ALCOAST 007/11 at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/doc/ALCOAST007-11.pdf>.

Thinking about Ashford University?

(from Rob McKee, full-time ESO at Sector San Juan)

If you're considering getting a degree from Ashford University and received your high school diploma in Puerto Rico be aware that you will have to take the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language, <http://www.ets.org/toefl/>) before you will be admitted – even if you're in the Coast Guard or one of the DoD services.

May Servicewide Exams

If you met all the qualifications for advancement by 01 February 2011, PSC will automatically send a SWE for you to the ESO at the examination board listed on the Personal Data Extract (PDE). ***Your ESO has nothing to do with PDEs and you cannot request a SWE.***

When your PDE is made available (on DirectAccess in the next few weeks, in hard-copy format a few weeks later via your SPO), make sure you check **everything** on it carefully – including your examination board name and OPFAC.

- Are you going to be on leave or TAD on the date of your SWE?
- Will you be in-transit due to a PCS move on the date of your SWE?
- Are you going to be away from the unit listed on your PDE for any other reason on the date of your SWE?

If so (and if you want to take the SWE), do the following:

- find a unit you know you'll be geographically near on your SWE date,
- contact the ESO at that unit and ask if it's OK to take your SWE there,
- assuming the ESO says "yes", ask for the unit's OPFAC,
- let your SPO know what the name and OPFAC of that unit so the info on your PDE is changed.

PSC will automatically send your exam to the unit list as your exam board on your PDE.

Substitute exams are authorized ONLY in emergencies. Regular leave (even if you scheduled a Caribbean cruise six months ago) is not an emergency. A wedding – even your own – is not an emergency. For more information on just what circumstances justify requesting a substitute exam, see Article 5.D.3. of the *Personnel Manual*.

If you change the Exam Board on your PDE and later find out you won't be able to take your SWE at that location, let your ESO know immediately.

For info on studying and test-taking skills, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/studying.asp>.

Excelsior College Exams

Excelsior College Exams (ECEs, <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/ece.asp>) have long been available to uniformed personnel (regulars and Reservists) in paper-and-pencil format through many ESOs free of charge.

As of the beginning of FY12 (01 October 2011), DANTES will no longer pay for ECEs. Also on that date, paper-based tests will become a thing of the past and all ECEs will be administered only in a computer-based format.

If you want to take an ECE, your DANTES Test Control Officer must request it before Wednesday, 01 September 2011 and it must be returned for scoring no later than Friday, 30 September 2011.

Striker Programs Update

ALCOAST 591/10 announced that the BM, DC, MK, and SK striker programs have been reinstated indefinitely. However, the EM3 and YN3 striker programs have been terminated because most EPQs for those ratings can't be completed outside of "A" school or the YN3 distance learning program.

Reservists & Tuition Assistance

Reservists may be unaware that they may use Coast Guard tuition assistance (TA) to pay for courses which meet the eligibility and use rules laid out in the Performance, Training, & Education Manual (COMDTINST M1500.10 (series)). These rules are summarized at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/ta.asp#eligibility>.

The PT&E Manual states that "TA is not authorized for reservists who have not met participation standards for the 12 months immediately prior to application or for reservists who are more than six months out of compliance for readiness metrics." However, Reservists who have not served for a year are presumed to be in compliance with the readiness criteria set forth in the Reserve Policy Manual (COMDTINST M1001.28 (series)). That means that Reservists who just graduated from boot camp may apply for TA.

Best Colleges for Women and Minorities in STEM

(from Forbes magazine)

An article in the 15 December 2010 issue of Forbes magazine lists "schools [which] help underrepresented groups succeed in science, technology, engineering and math" and describes why these fields are the key to higher salaries (<http://www.forbes.com/2010/12/10/best-colleges-minorities-women-science-lifestyle-education-stem.html>).

However, before jumping into a major which you're not all that keen on just so you can make more money, be sure to check the long-term prospects for people with a degree in these majors. The Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (<http://www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm>) is the best source of information on trends in the employment market.

Continuing Education Courses

Cape May County Technical School District, at the Technical Center for Continuing Education (TCCE, exit 11 on the Garden State Parkway), offers dozens of courses in topics as varied as:

- NJ licensing (e.g., Black Seal, dental radiology, wastewater, cosmetology, etc.)
- General interest technical (e.g., auto repair, cabinetmaking, woodturning, etc.)
- Job/business technical (e.g., HVAC, art metal work, electrical house wiring, masonry, upholstery, welding, etc.)
- Ballroom dancing
- Special training (e.g., defensive driving, digital photography, dog obedience, genealogy, financial education, etc.)
- Computer applications
- Cooking/baking
- Languages
- Health and fitness
- Office, business, and careers

These courses are all extremely reasonably priced, with classes generally meeting in the evenings.

In addition, the TCCE has on-going **free** GED preparation courses and testing, adult basic education courses, ESL courses, citizenship courses, and computer literacy courses running continuously throughout the year.

For more information, drop by the Education Center for a course booklet or go to Cape May Tech's web site at <http://www.capemaytech.com/2011winterspringbrochure.pdf>.

New Amounts for Coast Guard Foundation Grants

The Coast Guard Foundation announced earlier this month that it has increased the maximum grant available from \$350 to \$500 per calendar year. At the same time, the Vander Putten grant has been reduced from \$500 to \$250 per calendar year, available if you have received the maximum available under the Foundation grant.

Note that these amounts are maximums and that there are no guarantees that you will receive a grant just because you applied for one. Although the Coast Guard Institute is now accepting applications for Coast Guard Foundation and Vander Putten grants, be aware that there is currently no funding for these grants. The Institute estimates that funding will be available in March, but there is no guarantee this will be the case.

Remember: funding for these grants comes from individuals (civilian and military) who contribute money when they can

For more information (including a link to the current application form), go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/grants.asp#cgf>.

Learning a Second 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.

- **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>.

Re-taking ASVAB Tests

Are you interested in going to “A” school for a particular rate, but realize your ASVAB scores aren’t high enough? You may be unaware that at any time you can re-take one or more of the tests which comprise the AFCT (Armed Forces Classification Test) – the version of the ASVAB available only to military personnel.

Before you pick up the phone to call your ESO to schedule a test, however, keep in mind two things. First, whatever score you get on the re-test (higher, lower, or the same) it becomes your new official score. Second, if you’re unsatisfied with the score you get on a re-test, you must wait six months to take that test again.

Other Considerations

- The VE score represents a scaled composite of the scores on two separate tests: PC and WK. You can’t take a single test to improve your VE score.
- The WK test is a vocabulary test and, as such, is virtually impossible to prepare for. If you’ve become an avid reader since you took the ASVAB at a MEP Station or have memorized a dictionary, you may improve your WK score greatly. But if not, you should think twice about re-taking it – especially if your existing score is relatively high.
- You can qualify for five ratings’ “A” schools (AET, AMT, AST, ET, IT) either by getting the required composite score or by getting an AFQT score of at least 65. (Your AFQT score is equal to $AR + MK + (2 \times VE)$.) To qualify for these schools via the AFQT score, you do *not* have to have a minimum AR score of 52.

For more information about the AFCT/ASVAB, each of its tests, and how to prepare for them, go to <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/capemay/Education/asvab.asp>.

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.

Thinking of Teaching?

Are you interested in teaching after you leave the Coast Guard? Troops to Teachers also provides counseling and referral services to military personnel interested in beginning a second career in public education as a teacher. And the DANTES Troops to Teachers office will help you identify teacher certification requirements, programs leading to certification, and employment opportunities. The main web site

(http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes_web/troopstoteachers/index.asp) has all kinds of information about the program.

Including a new on-line way to determine if you’re eligible to participate in Troops to Teachers:

http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes_web/troopstoteachers/eligibility.asp.

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>).

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 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/0,13373,,00.htm>).

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.

Quick Reference Study Guides

The TraCen Education Center also 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>.

Education Center Library

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) 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.