SOM Examiners Report N2025 Draft

General

A new year brings a new examiner's report, but it contains little new information. Examiners evaluate many papers, and most can tell when a candidate has reviewed previous reports. Such candidates are usually praised and rewarded, while those who haven't will likely need to retake the exam. **Understanding what is required helps you meet those expectations.**

All candidates should be confident in using the blank maps provided to demonstrate their knowledge when instructed. You must know the major ports of the world, and where appropriate, the map should always show these along with the routes between them and geographical features such as canals, capes, seas, oceans, and particular areas affected by weather, currents, or hazards. Avoid spending time on irrelevant details, such as distant seas and countries, as they do not earn additional marks.

Q1 Registry is a four-part question popular among many candidates, testing their knowledge of different types of Registry and their pros and cons. Open registries received some criticism related to crewing, but most answers highlighted the benefits of each type. Part D required listing five certificates issued by the Flag State or under its authority. While many of these certificates are issued by Class, only the Certificate of Class is issued by the Classification Society, confirming the vessel meets its standards regardless of the Flag. Other certificates are usually acceptable, but understanding their Validity and Survey Cycle is important when choosing.

Q2 Ship description. Candidates are assumed to be familiar with the various sizes of vessels in the tanker, bulk carrier, and container sectors, although it is accepted that a few additional types are emerging with the Panama Canal changes. However, the choice of vessels this time should have been straightforward. An Ultramax is the largest of the Handy Size vessels, limited by the old Panamax beam, with a length of around 200 m and a draft of about 13.5 m, while a Suezmax tanker generally can load a maximum of 1 million barrels ±10% and has a DWT of about 145-165 KMT. As for the Ultra large container vessel, candidates should be familiar with these after recent well-publicised incidents.

This was a popular question, as always. Unfortunately, some of the drawings merely attempted to replicate sketches of vessels from the Institute Books, showing no awareness or understanding of the vessels themselves. Others were too small, showed little detail in the bow and stern areas, and demonstrated limited real knowledge. However, it is an opportunity to score well with high-quality drawings, attention to detail, and reasonable part naming. Accurate characteristics are important because they indicate knowledge, not just a range of figures. A Suezmax DWT is about 145-165 KMT, not 120-200KMT. Some candidates confused the Ultramax with a VLOC, giving the vessel nine holds and hatches like a Capesize and a DWT in excess of 400 KMT.

Q3 Calculation. There was a pleasing increase in the number of candidates attempting the calculation, and their success is reflected in the highest average marks for this question. In fairness, it was relatively easy, with a straightforward calculation, to determine the maximum cargo the vessel could load before cubing out, which also allowed for ample spare deadweight, so bunkers and the constant were not an issue. When it came to bunkers, the choice was simple and obvious; it was merely a matter of how much to take at New Orleans to finish at Genoa, ready for the next employment, with the minimum required in question. The final calculation of the daily running cost was simple.

Few candidates showed any effort to use a tabular format for the complete voyage. Using this means you avoid pages of writing out your calculation with all the attendant opportunities for error

b. Only the bunkers USED **during the voyage** should be in the expenses of the voyage, not the cost of all the bunkers taken (a common mistake), and those used should be as per FIFO.

c. When you have calculated the maximum cargo you can take by dividing the Grain CC by the SF and getting a figure of **61,925 MT** you check it is within the CP Range. It is. So that is the max cargo. What is the spare dwt. It is 15,291 MT (SDWT – 61,925). You are free to take whatever bunkers you want; there are no restrictions or draft issues. This is the quantity to load.

d. When calculating the Port usage, remember SSHEX means Saturdays, Sundays, and Holidays excluded, which means they don't work these days, so you have to allow for this by multiplying your time and usage by 1.4.

e. Rather than checking each leg of the voyage for the consumption and cost, a tabular form will produce a total figure which is easier to work with.

Q4 Bunkers. This was an easy two-part question that has been asked in many ways before. It asks
a) what you, i.e. your company and your ship, can do to get the best bunkers at the best price.
and
b) the factors that make a bunker port successful, illustrating this with a port of your choice.

This was quite a popular question and was generally answered well, earning high marks, particularly among candidates who realised that the two were linked. The best bunker at the best price is always linked to a successful bunker port.
In answering the first part, it is not enough to say I will look around and buy the best bunkers at the best price. How do you do this? How do you know what the best price is? What are your sources of information? Who can provide this? Where is this port? Is it on your route, and does it have what you want?
How do you know they are the best bunkers? How can you check their quality and quantity? Who can help you do this? What can your ship staff do to get the best? They are at the front line on this; they should know and have the tools to do this.

The second part asked you to demonstrate your understanding of why your chosen port was successful. Location is a big factor, but so are others such as multiple suppliers, efficient administration, low port fees, ancillary services, and a good reputation for integrity.

Q5 Incident

This kind of question has been asked before, and often, like this, it has more than one part. The first a) is what immediate action should be taken onboard the vessel. In many previous reports, I have made it clear that while the safety of the injured is very important, it is of little value if, while everyone deals with this, the ship sinks beneath them. The ship is the main concern. What is your immediate action? You have been told the problems, and you must prioritise securing the vessel, quite literally to the jetty using the tugs and lines, while checking the holds and tanks for water ingress and stabilising the situation. Yes, send a small team to the injured, but everyone else should be focusing on the ship.

Once this has been completed and the situation is clear, begin taking notes, inspecting for damage, and recording what has occurred so you can contact your owner or manager to clearly report what happened. You should be aware of the insurances you hold, such as Hull and Machinery, P&I Club, and Cargo Insurers, but simply knowing about them is not enough; it is not the ship's responsibility to contact these insurers, so leave that to your office, which handles these matters daily.

The immediate local help available b) is the local Agent and the Port Authority. Involve the former to arrange hospitalisation, oil spill response if needed, and possibly the local P&I representative, while the latter handles jetty damage, extra tugs if necessary, and any casualties ashore. Simultaneously, contact your office, the DPA or crisis team, and then prepare a detailed report of what has occurred. They can assist by alerting the Flag, Class, Insurers, and Repair yards, and by providing expert guidance, with Marine Superintendents attending the vessel. Your P&I Club will be a priority, as there will be much to do to protect the vessel and its owners from potential predatory claimants.

6. IMSBC. This four-part question on the International Maritime Solid Bulk Cargo Code was the least popular, and those who answered it should have read it carefully, as it was not a general question about the Code but rather specific to a particular type of cargo and its hazard.
Part a) asked about Mineral Ore Concentrates, a Group A hazard of Liquification. Candidates should have mentioned and explained specific expressions such as Moisture Content and Transportable Moisture Limits TML and why these were important. **Part b)** asked about the information that should be available to the ship, and again, terms like BCSN should have been mentioned. **Part c)** was more specific as it required information from the shore terminal about the cargo, its validity and the importance of these Certificates. **Part d)** required the Candidate to know what the ship could do to check the Shore information and was unambiguous regarding the sanctions the Ship could take.

7. Ship Management. A question that comes up occasionally requires some knowledge of a ship management office and its responsibilities. A close study of the Shipman contract would have provided sufficient information to create the basic framework, and a little imagination would have done the rest. For example, if the office has technical management, this implies Marine Superintendents, a spare and storing department, bunker and Lubricant management, technical support, contact with Class and Flag for Surveys and Certificates, HQSE ensuring standards, a travel department and so on. The organisation chart should be used to do this, so that each part is fully explained. It is not good enough to have a drawing with the CEO at the top and three boxes below labelled Commercial Manager, Technical Manager, and Operational Manager, with little else. There were some good papers showing real knowledge, but in general, the Organisation Charts could have been improved.

Q8. Cargo.

A cargo of Grain from the world's largest grain export port, New Orleans, to a major European importer, Hamburg, should have been straightforward. Overall, it was executed well, but some candidates still struggle with maps, either ignoring them altogether or showing unfamiliarity with the locations. First, the IMSBC does NOT cover the carriage of grain, which is governed by other regulations. A four-part question asked: **a)** for the information required from the port before arrival, including details about the cargo, as well as essential information such as berth, draft, ETAs, agents, berthing, cargo quantity, and other factors like weather. While loading grain involves standard precautions, all other measures will likely be different and more critical. **Part b)** asked for precautions to be taken during loading and upon completion, which was answered quite well since most points are highly relevant to the cargo. **Part c)** examined the situation on the ship after sailing, mainly concerning cargo safety and ventilation control. **Part d)** requested analysis of likely weather and climatic conditions. Late October typically marks the end of hurricane season, but these days, hurricanes can still occur. Once out into the North Atlantic, it becomes more certain that temperatures will fall, and weather conditions will worsen, making ship checks more critical.