

LINER TRADES NOVEMBER 2025

EXAMINER 'S REPORT

Liner shipping continues to fluctuate amid ongoing geopolitical events that alter business dynamics. This has been the case for the past 5-6 years, and it is encouraging to see many students demonstrating this understanding in their approach to less textbook-style questions on trade, etc. There were again some very strong papers in this round, and many were well written.

It can be expected that in an exam environment, some gaps can occur in answers. In this report, we hope to address these.

Q1. Container trades continue to evolve at a fast pace, and with it, the demands on service. Explain how Consortia, Vessel Sharing Agreements and Alliances each operate and the specific differences between them.

A summary of each structure, with specific reference to its differences, was required for this question. Most students explained the differences between Consortia, VSA, and Alliances, with the latter two concepts being much better explained than consortia. It would have been beneficial to see students refer to a specific example, but this was rare. The Gemini Cooperation (Maersk/Hapag-Lloyd) was mentioned by several students, but in the other alliances listed, there were errors. A good narrative is required, which in theory should conclude that consortia have a chance to exist [like conferences], whilst VSA and Alliances will evolve strongly, expanding into greater co-operation, and less choice as commoditisation continues with carriers looking at all means to save costs, etc.

Q2 – Answer BOTH parts of the question

Bunker costs for liner trades have become the key cost component of the voyage cost due to high price of marine fuel oil in recent years.

[A] Identify TWO trades of your choice, suggesting where you would bunker on these trades and explaining the benefits of the chosen bunker ports.

[B] Low Sulphur fuel rules are increasingly impacting various regional sea areas and the use of low sulphur fuel oil has helped how carriers combat this. Discuss the impact of these rules and what measures carriers take to deal with this.

A good, clear, reasonable narrative to back up part [A] was required. Several trades were selected, and some good examples were used. The main criterion for this part is sensibly selecting the right trade and the right bunker port[s] for this. Considerations can include fuel availability, on-board weight, which could affect draft in some ports, and the cargo that could be loaded.

Europe and the USA are specifically affected by part [B], which includes further restrictions on the ETS in Europe. Therefore, this will dramatically affect the cost of bunker fuel on all Europe and USA container trades, which will either be covered by passing on the cost via surcharge to clients or carriers absorbing even more costs. The use of scrubbers [large today] has helped balance fuel costs between LSFO or VLSFO and HSFO or IFO, although the price differential is narrowing. The mention of the recent drive towards alternate fuels would have been useful, as this is gathering momentum.

Q3. Container vessels and Specialised [conventional] Reefer vessels compete in the perishable products trades, with container vessels now carrying the larger share of this growing global business.

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using each mode of transport, using TWO key trade lanes as an example.

Allows for an expansive answer, and generally students have a good understanding of the container mode, but it is less clear with specialised mode, yet this is an important and well-managed sector of reefer trades, especially bananas and fresh fruit [there are many examples]. Two trades were asked for as examples, but only one was used in some answers, and this cost a lot of marks.

Overview of global trade and size, with key routes [long, thin traditional routes such as ECSA-Asia/Europe and RSA-Europe, etc.] contrasted with continued massive growth in protein trade intra-Asia/Asia-Europe, etc. Advantages and Disadvantages of both modes. It is essential that students study a little more on how specialised reefer trades work [there is a lot of information available in the media and on the Web]. Their greatest advantage over a container carrier is that they are exactly what they are called: specialised, delivering top-class service in many sectors. They do have a future, but they also have disadvantages, which can be mentioned in an answer.

Q4. The use of IT systems and technology have rapidly been employed in the container industry in a variety of roles and are now essential for the successful running of large container liner companies due to the sheer size of transactions taking place.

Explain in detail how the use of different IT systems has helped with this growth, and outline what the benefits have been to carriers, shippers, consignees, and any other parties.

Where this has helped in the area of:

- Container control
- Carrier Documentation production [mention back offices/bills of lading/arrival notices/invoicing etc]
- Ship planning
- Websites
- EDI to and from ports and government bodies [customs etc]
- Management systems [contribution models etc]

Answering the above should allow for a sensible approach in which benefits accrue to shippers and others. The area is extensive, and this was generally well addressed, but many points were overlooked due to a lack of broader specifics about their use.

Q5. The Asia to USA East Coast Trade is highly competitive given that it competes against the Asia - US West Coast [then road/rail] but also via the Panama and Suez Canal/Cape of Good Hope routes.

[A] Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the three routing options.

[B] Discuss the likely developments of trade on these routes in the next five years.

Part A of the question was answered much better than Part B, which required the students to think of the future. Interestingly, most students identified the Panama Canal and Suez Canal options; they failed to explain why the latter had shifted to Cape of Good Hope routes despite near-daily coverage in the maritime press. Strangely, the use of intermodal rail services to/from Pacific coast ports in the US, Canada, and, more recently, Mexico was not discussed very well.

For each canal mode [and the land bridge via a Transpacific rail gateway], it is important to highlight ship systems and their roles. We are also looking for the thought process into:

- Ship size
- String Size
- Economy of Scale
- Exposure to low sulphur costs
- Size of trade
- Details of canals
- Distance via Suez vs. via Panama
- Double Stack trains [Intermodal etc]
- Port capacity and congestion

For Part B – The Panama Canal widening changed the economics, and the via Suez routing [now COGH] also changed factors, seeing a swing back to Transpacific USWC, mainly. However, there are numerous factors influencing how this is achieved. There is no rigid and definitive rule, just looking for some interesting thought processes.

Q6. Select two of the following cargoes and identify two major trade lanes on which they are shipped. Describe in detail the main loading and discharge ports, the type of container needed to carry them, and any special requirements or precautions needed to protect the cargo.

- (A) Chemicals**
- (B) Coffee**
- (C) Citrus**
- (D) Fishmeal**

Most answers could have been improved, given that a cargo-related question crops up in most exam papers. Those students who attempted the question could have improved their results by demonstrating knowledge of the selected cargoes, the types of containers needed to move them, and the cargo care considerations and hazards to be aware of when transporting them. Once again, selecting two trade lanes may have been a challenge for some students. A quick breakdown below covers the main points of each cargo:

Chemicals

Mention hazardous and non-hazardous

Dry and wet

20ft and 40ft standard dry freight, including high-cubes, and tank containers

Packing and labelling requirements

Wide range of trades, but a general decline in Petrochemical exports out of Europe since Covid-19.

Coffee

Mainly shipped in 20ft containers

The importance of vents needs to be mentioned because of sweating/condensation, and of checking cargo to avoid damage claims

Main export trades feature Brazil, Vietnam and East Africa

Citrus

40ft reefer containers

Controlled temperature regime

Phytosanitary checks

Many trade lanes, but with large exports out of Argentina, China, Egypt, Morocco, South Africa and Turkey

Fishmeal

20ft and 40ft containers

Hazardous Class 9 labelling needed in several markets

Chile and Peru are the main suppliers of the commodity, with Europe and China the main consuming nations.

Q7 – Answer BOTH parts of the question

A) Draw a profile and cross-section of ONE of the following types of vessels and highlight within the drawing the main features of the vessel. Using the world map provided, describe two trade routes where the chosen vessel would operate and the main types of cargo it would carry.

- i. 2000-3000 Teu Containership**
- ii. Conbulker**
- iii. 10000 Teu Containership**

B) Using the world map provided, describe two trade routes where the chosen vessel would operate and the main types of cargo it would carry.

Drawing of vessel detailing LOA, Beam, draft, Deadweight cargo capacity, Gross and Net tonnage, Light displacement tonnage, TEU capacity, ships gear [where applicable]. A cross-section of the hold showing more detail is desirable. Drawing should be clear and well laid out. Often this was not the case, and as a result, many marks were lost. We can only reiterate that the textbook covers this well, and essential reading/practice can secure better marks if these basics are covered.

A map of two trade routes and a narrative were required, and this part was mostly answered quite well. When selecting a vessel to draw, always think first to ensure you match the two trades to the product.

All three vessel types have significant involvement across a wide range of trading areas, and candidates should demonstrate a good understanding of this in their answers, as shown on the map.

Q8. Describe the main characteristics of FOUR of the following container types, identifying ONE main commodity for which each type may be used and the characteristics of those cargoes.

- i) Flat Rack**
- ii) Tank Container**
- iii) Bulk Container**
- iv) Open Top**
- v) Reefer**
- vi) High Cube**

Container types often appear as examination questions in this subject in various formats, and the November 2025 session was no exception.

In general, in the attempts, the equipment types were described very briefly, and often no specific cargoes were highlighted for the different container types, even though only one commodity was requested in the question. A few students described the cargo's characteristics and the reason(s) it was best suited to the selected container. Often, a lot of students failed to provide the length and height characteristics of the containers, apart from “high cubes”, where most were aware of the 9ft6in height dimension.

This question allows students a reverse approach to addressing a commodity-and-container-type question. In other subjects, a question can ask for details about a commodity and then ask which container can be used to carry it. In this question, the candidates are asked about details of a type of container and then to suggest what commodity that container can carry. The suggestion must be critically appropriate for that container type.