



ICS Study and Examination

Guidelines

This document is not designed as a prescriptive set of rules for how to approach your exam. Instead, it is a guide, giving you some ideas on what you may want to think about when approaching your examination. Naturally, the context of the question, the topic and the subject have a huge bearing on how the question should be interpreted. This document is an endeavour to support your study and encourage you to think about the types of things examiners are looking for when they write and indeed mark a question.

Tips and Study Techniques

A lot of people find study really difficult to master, especially those that are less familiar with examinations. While there are no hard and fast rules about studying, there are a few things that you can be aware of to help you make the most of your exam preparation. Remember that everyone is different, and someone who studies well actively thinks about what is best practice for them.

- Make sure you manage your time. You will need to make study a priority and commit time to ensure you have learnt everything you need to when working towards the exams.
- Establish your learning priorities. This is a difficult task because the amount you could learn is seemingly endless, but there are several pointers. Looking through your materials and working with your tutors is one of the best ways but don't dismiss reviewing the syllabus and checking through old exam papers. Don't discount other ICS students and members as a resource. Talking to them can help you establish a plan of action for how you intend to tackle your exams.
- Be familiar with past examiners reports. These always hint at common pitfalls and mistakes that you can actively seek to avoid in your exam.
http://www.ics.org.uk/html/examiners_reports.htm
- Practice makes perfect – try answering past exam questions and getting used to the discipline of writing an exam. http://www.ics.org.uk/html/exam_papers.htm
- Be mindful of your own learning patterns. Again, there is no set of rules for how to study, it really is 'best fit', but there are tips you can think about:
 - Research indicates that study lasting more than 40 minutes is more often than counterproductive. Plan to study for 30-40 minutes at a time before you have a break.
 - Whatever you do with your break time, get up and move away from your desk (a walk and some fresh air is a really good idea). You should look at having a short break before getting back to it.

- Make sure your study area is comfortable and has lots of fresh air and good light.
- In the weeks coming up to your exam you will really want to make sure you are well rested. Some studies indicate that sleep is the single biggest factor influencing examination performance. It's generally accepted that having a routine sleeping pattern (going to bed at the same time and getting up at the same time) is the best way to achieve quality sleep.

Accessing Support

Studying for professional exams is a unique process. It's quite unlike school and university and can be a very lonely pursuit if you don't take the opportunities to access support. Help is available, but you do need to take the initiative and actively access it yourself. A great place to start finding out about the people who can support you is your local branch or distance learning centre. Here you gain access to a wealth of knowledge and expertise. Our network of members and fellows are always willing to offer support and their expertise. If your location or situation makes it difficult to access this support network, the next best thing is our online forum www.argo0.com. Here you can post questions and create discussion on any number of topics. You will be able to access other students, tutors, members, fellows, head office and other industry professionals worldwide through this network. The other resource to be familiar with is our student help desk on the ICS website. It can help point you in the right direction - http://www.ics.org.uk/html/students_helpdesk.htm

For a strong result, it's imperative that you are well versed in current industry developments, which often means using other resources beyond your tutorship text book. Again, speaking with those around you (work colleagues, members, your tutors) is a great way to get this moving in the right direction, but accessing some further resources is also something we can help you with. The Institutes own magazine Shipping Network is full of professional development articles and industry news. You can access this easily by registering on www.argo0.com. You should also definitely have a look at www.shippingpodcasts.com. This is full of up to date market reports on a huge variety of topics that you can download directly to your ipod (or listen to online if you don't have an ipod). It's also worth having a look around your office. If you haven't been to the Lloyd's List website then it's definitely worth a look. Here you can subscribe to an email bulletin free of charge! Most shipping companies will subscribe to regular publications of some sort and there is no time like before an exam to start taking an interest.

Answering the Question

Often you hear the time old mantra 'answer the question', yet just as often candidates genuinely believe they have answered the question and don't fully understand where they have gone wrong. There are a few things that you can think about to help you avoid the most common examination trap.

The most frequent mistake candidates make is that despite having read the question, the response is not well tailored and precise. Instead answers often address the topic generally, rather than the question specifically. This is sometimes because the candidate is nervous, but often it is because

they want to show off their knowledge. The marker however, doesn't want you to talk generally about an issue demonstrating that you understand every piece of information. They have asked you a question, and they want you to answer it. You need to therefore work towards understanding what a question is asking.

As an example the question below is from the Liner Trades exam in 2008:

Letters of credit are the 'lifeblood' of international trade and the different types of letters of credit are of benefit to both the buyer and seller.

Explain why you would agree or disagree with the above statement and why the documentary credit system is more popular outside the EU Single Market.

In the examiner's report for this paper, it was identified as a very popular question that was often poorly answered.

This question wants the candidate to focus on two things:

1. A discussion on whether or not letters of credit can be described as the 'lifeblood' of international trade and the benefit they have to both buyer and seller
2. An explanation on why the documentary credit system is more popular outside the EU Single Market

A lot of people would have entered into a general discussion on letters of credit and the process of a bill of lading in an effort to show-off their knowledge to the examiner. These people would have extracted from the question an outline of the topic, but not gone further to establish exactly what the examiner was looking for.

To avoid this, you really need to not only read the question but also establish what the question requires you to do. One tip to think about is instead of just reading the question, take your pen and highlight the main parts. Often questions have one or two main components that you really need to address in your answer. Sometimes (as is the case above) they start with a leader, which is something for you to think about, not something for you to write exclusively about.

You would also be well placed to think about the key words within a question. Below is a table which may help you. Again, the context of a question and your common sense need to be exercised here. This is merely a guide to help you think about what is required of you when looking at the question itself.

Key Word	Skills you need to demonstrate
Define	Identify the central qualities of something and determine its meaning
Describe	Using detail and examples to outline the key characteristics.
Illustrate	Make an issue or concept clear using examples (often this does not require you to draw something)

Explain	To provide detail that makes an issue or concept clear. To interpret information and determine its meaning.
Compare and contrast	Identify the similarities and differences between two objects/issues/concepts
Apply	To make a theory relevant and suitable within a chosen example. To put a concept into action.
Advantages and Disadvantages	To look at the beneficial and negative outcomes of something
Analyse	To separate an abstract concept and critically determine its elements, features and possible outcomes.
Examine	To scrutinize and investigate an issue or concept carefully.
Identify	To recognise the main features of an issue, object or concept
Discuss	To consider and examine via argument
Predict	Use a variety of factors to determine a possible future outcome
Comment	Observations, expansions, criticisms and thoughts, premised on knowledge about a particular issue or concept
Assess	To determine the effect, results or reasons for something
Consider	To reflect on an event or piece of information leading towards the proposal of a solution
Differentiate	To recognise the unique features and characteristics of an issue, concept or object and to establish how it is different from something else.

Using Examples

The difference between demonstrating knowledge and showing understanding comes through using examples. This is exactly what your examination marker wants you to do. The tutorship books in this sense give you the basis of the theory you need. Showing that you can put this into practice is more involved. Regurgitating parts of the tutorship book will not draw any favours from the markers and will likely result in a failure. You need to demonstrate not that you can rote learn information, but that you have a professional understanding of how the industry works. The best way to show that you understand is therefore to **apply** theory by using examples. You will need to undertake wider reading and investigations to do this effectively. Speak to your colleagues in other areas. Find out what the markets are up to. Read up to date publications and journals. Try www.shippingpodcasts.com for market reports. While you can't anticipate what the examination questions are likely to be, if you know what the various markets are doing and have some figures and facts to back you up (a google search should not be underestimated here) you will be in a good position. It's also wise to know about the major events, big accidents (both historical and recent) and any headline news stories that have happened within the industry you are focusing on. Once you have this knowledge you are well equipped to talk about the effect these events have had.

The message here is quite simple. Talk, read, gather as much information from as many places as you can. Know what is happening in the market, have some figures to support you and be mindful of the major factors that have shaped the specific industry you're being examined on.

Good Luck!

