Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
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Essential Skills and Apprenticeship

Using Essential Skills: Preparing for Your Interprovincial Red Seal Exam

As part of your apprenticeship program, you will get in-class training and you will also write several tests and exams. At the end of your training, you may apply to write the Interprovincial Red Seal exam. Getting a Red Seal allows you to practise your trade in any province or territory in Canada where the trade is designated.

Having strong Essential Skills, such as reading, writing and thinking, can increase your chances of succeeding in these exams. The following tips and strategies will maximize these skills by helping you:

- make a study plan;
- study and prepare for your exam; and
- apply what you know on the exam.

Making your study plan

Study plans help you make the most of the time you have to prepare for an exam. A good study plan will help you focus on the topics that will most likely be on the exam and those that you have the most trouble with. Remember that a good plan is only good if you stick to it!

Step 1: Find out which topics will be on the exam and how much of the exam will focus on each topic.

Interprovincial Red Seal exam questions are based on a set of blocks (subject areas or topics), as identified in the National Occupational Analysis for that trade.

Find out the percentage of questions for each block (topic) on your exam by:

- checking with your instructor; or
- going to the Red Seal Web site at www.red-seal.ca, clicking on the link to Interprovincial (IP) Red Seal Examinations and selecting your trade.

Note that Red Seal exams:

- *include 100 to 150 multiple choice questions;*
- *are subject to time restrictions; and*
- *have a passing grade of 70%.*

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Step 1 (continued):

Here is an example of the percentages you might find for a carpenter:

Title of blocks	Percentage of questions on exam
A – OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS	19%
B – CONCRETE	21%
C – FRAMING	26%
D – EXTERIOR FINISH	16%
E – INTERIOR FINISH	18%
Total	100%

Step 2: Decide which topics you are good at and which ones give you difficulty.

- Make yourself a chart to rate how good you are at each topic.
- List the blocks (topics) and then rate your skill level.

Here is an example of a person who is good at Occupational Skills, but weak in Concrete (if 10 is high and 1 is low):

Blocks (Carpenter)	My skill level
Block A: Occupational Skills	10 9 8 (7) 6 5 4 3 2 1
Block B: Concrete	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 (3) 2 1
Block C: Framing	10 9 8 7 6 (5) 4 3 2 1

Step 3: Decide where to focus your studying.

- Make a list of priority topics: topics that have the most questions on the exam (from Step 1) AND topics that you have the most difficulty with (from Step 2).
- Study all topics that will be on the exam, but focus on your priority topics especially; put them at the top of your list.

For the carpenter example, Framing and Concrete have the most questions in Step 1 and Concrete is the most difficult topic in Step 2, so Framing and Concrete are the most important to study; they are at the top of the list.

Step 4: Make a study schedule that you will stick to.

- Mark a calendar with frequent two-hour study sessions and write in the topics to cover for each session (see Step 3).
- Study one to three topics in each session. Avoid cramming all topics into one session.
- Break up each session into four 30-minute periods, with 10-minute breaks between periods.
- Invite other people to study with you or ask them to help keep you on track.

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Studying and preparing for your exam

Taking exams can be stressful. The following tips will help you study and prepare for your exam so you can remain calm and think clearly on the day of the exam.

Studying

- Follow your study plan.
- Study the most difficult material first.
- Make notes on important information in your own words.
- Highlight the points that your instructor emphasizes in class.
- Review the questions (and answers) at the end of each chapter in your text books.
- Use flashcards to review vocabulary and definitions.
- Read definitions out loud to help you remember the information.
- Re-draw and re-label your diagrams for practice and review.
- Make tables to compare information.
- Make a reference sheet of formulas and practise writing the formulas often.
- Have someone ask you questions.
- Explain or teach the material to someone else.

Preparing for exam day

- Confirm the location of the exam and how to get there.
- Plan to be at the exam location 15 minutes early.
- Prepare the materials or equipment you need to write the exam and bring them with you. Ask if calculators and code books are permitted.
- Stay well rested; this will help you think more clearly.
- Stick to your usual eating and sleeping habits to reduce stress.

Applying what you know on the exam

Taking the exam

- Sit in a place where you feel comfortable.
- Read and listen to the instructions carefully.
- Ask questions if you do not understand the instructions.
- Take deep breaths to help you relax before you begin the exam.
- Write down the formulas you remember on scrap paper.
- Scan through the entire exam.
- Estimate the amount of time you have to complete each question.
- Start with the questions you are most comfortable with and skip the others for now.
- Read each question carefully.
- Answer questions in the right place and format.
- Go back to questions you skipped or had difficulty with.
- Answer all the questions, even if you have to guess.
- Review your answers once you have finished the exam.

Multiple choice questions

Interprovincial Red Seal exams are multiple choice exams. Multiple choice questions might ask you to:

- answer a question
- finish a sentence by choosing the correct missing information
- match a term with a definition or vice versa
- make a calculation
- look at a diagram and identify something on it

Strategies on answering multiple choice questions

- Read each question carefully and choose the best answer. Often your first choice is the best one. Be careful about changing answers over and over.
- Make sure you understand what the question is asking.
- Separate long questions into smaller parts to make them easier to understand.
- Watch for questions written in the negative form and choose your answer based on the way the question is worded.
- Watch for words such as all, none, always and never in questions and answers.
- Mark the questions you are unsure of and go on to the next question. Remember to come back to answer them later.
- Read all possible answers before choosing your answer.
- Cross off answers that you know are wrong.
- Check that you are marking your answers in the right place, especially when you are asked to use computer answer sheets. Be especially careful to answer in the right place when you skip questions.
- Go back to the questions you are unsure of; make your best guess if you really do not know the answer; and move on.
- Answer every question by the end of the exam period.

For more information on Essential Skills and related resources, visit

hrsdc.gc.ca/essentialskills

For more information on the Interprovincial Standards Red Seal Program, visit

www.red-seal.ca

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