

# Preparing for examinations success

**P**assing an amateur radio exam, at any level does, like any other exam, owes much to technique.

Getting learning and examination technique right are ways to assure even the most nervous candidate of examination success.

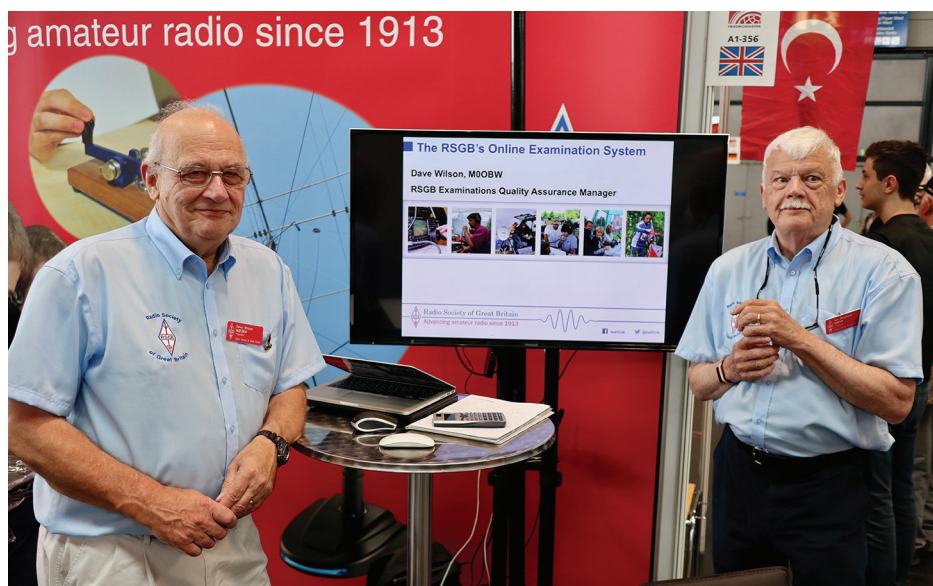
Like anything else in life worth having however, success is not achieved by luck, it is achieved by a certain amount of work and that means spending time. The privileges granted by Ofcom to operate amateur radio transmitters are not handed out on a mere request, since misuse of the radio spectrum through either operator error or equipment failure can cause hazards to other users, especially if those users are civil aviation or the emergency services. For you to attain the standard, particularly at the Foundation level, it just requires one important attribute on your part; namely the determination to pass.

It would be a mistake, however, for you to view the learning process as just about meeting safe and legal operating standards. Of far greater interest is to actually understand the basics of how radio works. It is in this understanding that the key to really maximising the enjoyment of our hobby lies. Whether that is in making the extra distance on contacts, making your own antenna systems and saving yourself a packet of money or designing and building your own equipment. Knowledge is the key to exploring all of these and more.

The time spent in learning should commence from the moment you decide to enrol on a training course to the hour or so before the exam commences. By that time, you should be confident and relaxed, prepared to calmly answer the questions in the exam and reap the rewards of their preparation.

## Getting into the mood for learning

Unlike school, university or professional exams where the learning process can often be regarded as a complete chore, learning about amateur radio is something that we embark on for pleasure. This is a hobby after all, we do it for fun. One of the most important factors in examination success is to enjoy the learning.



RSGB President, Dave Wilson, M00BW and RSGB Chairman Ian Shepherd, G4EVK demonstrated the UK online exam system at the Ham Radio exhibition in Germany.

## The wrong approach

I am always nervous when starting to teach a new group of candidates when I see brand new, untouched text books on their desks. My nervousness increases when I see those who have not printed out the club's tutorial notes. In short – arriving at a training session without having read a word of training material is the worst possible start.

## The right approach

You have decided that you want to become a radio amateur. You have found a training club and enrolled on one of their courses and you have downloaded any training materials. If you are really determined to pass you will download the syllabus from the RSGB website as it is the syllabus that is the absolute definition of what is and is not examinable. Another invaluable document to download is the *Reference Data for use in the Foundation/Intermediate/Full Level Examination*. The good news is that you do not need to learn the contents of the *Reference Data* booklet as you are provided with a copy in the actual exam. It's a good idea to know your way around the document however, so that you can easily look up the answers for some of the questions. For good

measure, buy the relevant text book from the RSGB website and ideally print off the downloaded materials.

The next step is to familiarise yourself with the contents of these documents – ie read them, or for those who find reading text difficult, then have someone read them to you. It does not, and should not, be at one sitting. Set aside half an hour to peruse a section. Then do something else until you feel like doing another half an hour. The objective here is not to take in every learning point. Instead, it is to allow your brain to become familiarised with the course content so that, once you are on the course and receiving tuition, the information presented will be easily remembered.

During the familiarisation phase, some topics will be understood immediately, and others may seem obscure. It is really important to make a note of the topics that you find obscure and then go back to them to try and figure it out, or to raise it with your tutor.

All of this should have been done before you attend the first session of your training course. For Foundation level candidates there is a high probability that you will have taken on enough knowledge to even pass the exam at this point – but we are not leaving anything to chance.



These candidates successfully gained their licences after completing the online exam.

The next step is to actually attend the course. By now you will know what to expect and your brain will readily take on the information presented to you in the course. Small gaps in understanding will be filled and those areas of uncertainty should be answered.

I would emphasise however that attending a course is optional. The only mandatory step that is not self-study is the practical assessments for the Foundation and Intermediate exams. For these you will need to find a Registered Assessor. This will almost always be at the club or organisation providing the training course. Most club's training courses are however inexpensive and in some instances are free. Unless you are totally confident of passing the exam without attending a course, my advice to you is to do so.

## Examination technique

**Mock Exams.** Mock exams are downloadable from the RSGB website. It is a very good idea to attempt at least two mock exams under exam conditions to test your knowledge. Then you can brush up on any areas where your knowledge needs a boost.

**Question Format.** The examinations are not difficult. The format is a multiple-choice exam where each question contains a statement and then four possible answers. Only one of the answers is correct, the other three are called *distractors*.

**Read the Question.** It may be obvious, but the most important thing to do is *read the question*. And then read it again for good measure. Look out for really important words like 'must', 'shall', 'should', 'not'. Identify

what the question is actually asking. If, for example, the question calls for a calculation of the current flowing in a circuit and you calculate, correctly that the answer is, say, '2', then it is a certainty that one of the offered answers will be 2 amps but that another offered answer will be 2 of something else – eg watts. Don't do the correct calculation only to choose the right figure with the wrong unit of measure. *Read the question!*

**The Reference Data Booklet.** As already mentioned, you be provided with a *Reference Data* booklet applicable for the exam level you are sitting. This document actually gives you the answer to several questions. All you need to do is know where to look it up so a quick read through this document on several occasions before and during your training will really help. This is not to learn by heart the content of the document – it's just so you know where to look things up. A favourite question involves identifying which band where you must not be too close to Charing Cross. You don't have to remember the band, just look up 'Charing Cross' in the *Reference Data Booklet* and note the only band that mentions it. That's another mark on your way to a pass.

**Time Allowed.** At each level there is enough time to answer a paper three or four times as long as the one you will be set. The exam is not a test of how fast you can answer the questions. So be calm, give yourself time to read each question and know what it is asking you.

**Answering the Questions.** The recommended way is to approach each question in turn. If you know the answer to the question, then select it if doing the online exam or mark the

chosen option on the question paper if doing the paper exam. If you don't immediately know the answer, then 'flag it' if doing the online exam or put a big question mark by the question on the paper exam. Do not, at this stage stare at a question for several minutes trying to work out the answer. The tactic at this stage is 'get the marks for the questions that you know in the bag'.

Having gone through the paper, then go back and spend a bit more time on any questions that you flagged because you were uncertain. Read those questions carefully – again. Spend a bit longer on these questions but don't get bogged down on one question and run yourself out of time. If you still don't know the answer, then make a best guess. At worst it has a 25% chance of being right!

When you have decided on an answer to all of the questions, then review them all from the start. Just to check that you are content with the answers given.

If you are doing the paper exam, then mark up your Optical Marking Sheet (OMS) *with small pencil marks* from the answers that you have worked out. Then check the OMS to ensure that you have marked the right boxes before then shading in the marked boxes in ink. If you need to correct the OMS, *you can only do this before you have inked in the boxes*. The online exam spares you this stress, and you can keep changing your mind right up until you click the 'Submit Paper' button.

**After the exam.** If you are sitting the online exam, then your result is shown to you immediately. You then have access to a schedule that shows the question numbers that you got right and wrong. In the unlikely event that you have not passed, this schedule can provide a useful focus for your revision. If you are sitting the paper exam, then the invigilators will be able to mark the exam from an answer guide for the Foundation and Intermediate levels and then give you an 'indicative result'. This is subject to electronic marking at RSGB HQ.

If you have passed, and if you have followed the advice described here, you are going to be very well placed, then await your pass certificate to be sent to you, which then gives you the information to obtain your licence. Congratulations on your success in the exam and gaining the knowledge to expand and explore the full potential of amateur radio.

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