



RED SEAL: *making the grade*

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You've completed trade school, your apprenticeship is behind you and you're ready to write for your Red Seal Certification (also commonly referred to as Certificate of Qualification, C of Q or your 'ticket'). You pick up your electrical code book and try to match up your practical experience with the legal words of the code. But all of the things you have learned while apprenticing are now lost in a sea of rules, exceptions and provisions. Either you don't know where to look, or the wording of the questions seems confusing.

Electrical students run into many difficulties with the Red Seal exams. Three of the most common problems they face are navigating through the electrical code, visualizing what's described, and managing their time during the exam.

Navigating the code is very complex, and it takes practice to find your way around. Electrical students are familiar with hands-on problems, but seeing them described in words can be confusing. Finally, time management is of the essence; even stellar students can fail in this department.

Navigating the code: where do I go?

Master electrician Marvin Rosenberg has met many struggling students while teaching courses for electricians at George Brown College. He understands why they regularly fail the Red Seal exam. Electricians need to find two things: the definitions of the words and the rules in the code that explain how these devices or systems may be used.

Sue Turner, director of publications for building materials publisher Orderline, says they receive regular phone calls from electrical students wondering where to turn next. Exam practice helps, she says. "Students need to sit down to the type of practice exam they will face for their certificate".

Rosenberg worked with Orderline to develop the Paperless line of C of Q Pre-Exam Workbooks for Domestic and Rural Electricians—as well as Construction and Maintenance Electricians—to help students practice these skills and strategies. The Paperless workbooks cover all applicable electrical code references with related study questions. Once a student has gained experience finding code references with the

practice questions, they approach the exam with confidence.

Here's an example of a typical exam question:

A mast installed on a deep well submersible pumping station requires additional support when the mast sticks out into the air above the roofline ____, and this additional support bracket shall be attached to a guy wire attached to an eyebolt which, in turn, is attached to the ____.

When you know where term 'mast' is discussed in the electrical code, you can go there and, having read through the definitions, the accepted applications and the exceptions, you will more clearly understand what the exam question means.

Visualizing the problem

Electrical students often struggle to visualize the situation they read about in an exam question. Many learn more easily by taking something apart or putting it together with their hands, or seeing it rather than reading about it.

As a result, Rosenberg's study materials (practice exams, instructional books and self-study materials) include diagrams with his instructional material. He notes: "These students are hands-on learners. They need diagrams to help them understand the questions".

Time management and exam-writing strategies

What about exam-writing strategies? How, for example, do you allot your time on the Red Seal certification exam? Time management can challenge even the best electrical students. Rosenberg has developed exam writing strategies and tells students that it is not only what they know that matters, but whether they answer all the questions. Missed questions cost marks, so Rosenberg offers students tips on how to maximize their scores, even when they aren't sure on every single question.

Study material formats

Electricians are busy professionals needing training products that fit their schedules so, when seeking additional tutoring, look for a provider that offers courses and training products online, via CD or downloadable PDFs. This allows for the flexibility of learning at home. For students that find in-class courses do not offer enough time to review or absorb the material, online courses allow for extended access to the content while PDFs and CDs can be reviewed as often as needed.

Orderline, for example, carries a line of self-assessment tools in CD format for both Construction and Maintenance and Domestic and Rural exams. These tools are filled with sample questions and practice exams, enabling students to test themselves against the clock to better prepare for exam conditions. 