



ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

ORDRE DES MÉTIERS DE L'ONTARIO

TRADE EXAMINATIONS IN ONTARIO

Exam Preparation Guide

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Examinations in the Skilled Trades: What Do I need to Know and What Can I do to Prepare?

1. Introduction:

Many of the skilled trades in Ontario have a final certification examination that you must pass to become certified in your trade. Passing the examination gives you the right to join the Journeypersons' class of members at the Ontario College of Trades and receive a Certificate of Qualification in your trade.

There are two types of trade certification examinations in Ontario:

- 1) Provincial (Ontario) examinations - which lead to a Certificate of Qualification (CofQ)
- 2) Red Seal examinations – which lead to a Certificate of Qualification (CofQ) with an Interprovincial Red Seal endorsement

If a trade is designated as Red Seal in Ontario, you will be writing the Red Seal examination. You will write an Ontario-only examination when your trade is not designated as Red Seal trade in Ontario.

The Ontario College of Trades develops the certification examinations. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) offers the examinations on our behalf at their examination centres across the province.

2. Getting Started

Most people need to prepare after they decide to take their trade certification examination. How much you prepare, of course, is up to you.

Your preparation options range from reviewing a few subject areas to studying trade textbooks and code books, taking sample tests or completing examination preparation courses.

No matter what you decide to do, it helps to know where to find the resources and information that can best help you prepare.

3. Basic Examination Details for You to Know

You will have **up to four hours to write your examination**. If you need more time, you must ask for it when you schedule the examination, not on the day of your examination. You can leave the examination centre if you complete the examination in less than four hours.

You need a mark of 70% to pass.

Exam questions are multiple choice with four options from which you must choose the correct answer. Your examination may have between 90 and 150 multiple choice questions.

4. Scheduling Your Examination

The examination scheduling process is currently outlined in detail on the College of Trades website. (<http://www.collegeoftrades.ca/membership/resources/exam-process>).

Remember these 3 basic steps:

1. Confirm your eligibility to write the examination with the College of Trades.
2. Contact Client Services at the College of Trades to pay your examination fee.
3. Contact the local Ministry apprenticeship office to schedule your examination in their examination centre. (<http://services.findhelp.ca/eo/tcu/appoff>).

5. Specialized Supports

As you prepare for the examination, and especially if you have been unsuccessful in previous examination attempts, you may be interested in seeking additional supports relevant to your circumstances. These may include accommodation requests for the day of the examination, essential skills upgrading, language training and/or other specialized support programs.

This section includes the following types of specialized support options:

- A. Special Circumstances (Requests for Accommodation)
- B. Essential Skills Upgrading
- C. Language Training
- D. Higher Level Language Training Programs
- E. Employment Ontario

A. Special Circumstances (Requests for Accommodation)

Depending on your circumstances, you may be eligible for alternate arrangements to write your examination. These are called “accommodation requests”. If you think you may need accommodation, discuss this with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) when you book your examination, well before you write the examination. Medical notes and/or other supporting documentation may be required to support your request. Accommodation measures include options such as:

- Extra time to write the examination
- Writing the examination in a separate room or space to reduce distractions
- Doing a practical examination, instead of a written one, where you demonstrate your knowledge and skills to an examiner. NOTE: The costs for a practical examination are much higher than those for a written examination; a practical examination takes longer to set up; and practical exams are not available for all trades.
- Using the services of a translator, interpreter or reader (TIR), which you find yourself. Note: Your TIR needs to submit an application to the Ministry well in advance of your examination date to provide this service for you. The Ministry will decide if the person you propose is eligible to act as your TIR for one examination attempt.

B. Essential Skills Upgrading: Essential skills upgrading gives you a way to improve your reading, writing and/or math skills. Some programs also include supports for improving employability and workplace skills. Essential skills programs are available across the province.

- They may be provided through adult learning programs under various Boards of Education or through Community Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology.
- The Ontario government funds literacy agencies to provide this training.
- Employment Ontario service providers can refer you to literacy, numeracy and basic skills programs.
- For more information, go to: <http://www.essentialskillsontario.ca/essential-skills/skills-delivery>.

For more information on the 9 essential skills, go to Appendix A.

C. Language Training: If you are interested in improving your English or French language skills before you take the examination, training is available in Ontario through federally and provincially funded organizations who deliver the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. For more information or to obtain assessment and referral information, go to:

- <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/backgrounders/2013/2013-10-18.asp>
- <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/welcome/index.asp>
- <http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/goc/linc.shtml>
- <http://www.settlement.org/index.asp>
- <http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/english/keyinitiatives/language.shtml>
- <http://www.ontarioimmigration.ca/OI/index.htm>

D. Higher Level Language Training Programs

There are several occupation-specific training programs available that you might be interested in taking to prepare for your trade examination. These include Enhanced Language Training (ELT), Occupational Specific Language Training (OSLT) and Bridge Training Programs. For more information, go to:

- http://www.ontarioimmigration.ca/en/working/OI_BRIDGE.html
- http://www.ontarioimmigration.ca/OI/en/working/OI_HOW_WORK_TRADES.html
- http://www.settlement.org/sys/faqs_detail.asp?faq_id=4001181
- <http://co-oslt.org/en/>

E. Employment Ontario

You may feel you need to work in Ontario for a while before you try writing the certification examination. Even if you are an experienced international worker, working with a local company or business will help you understand how your trade is practised in Ontario and get you more comfortable with any required codes, tools and terminology. If your trade is compulsory¹ in Ontario, you can discuss a short apprenticeship with an employer and representative of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, based on your prior experience and trade education.

The Employment Ontario Employment Service (ES) is delivered by service providers across Ontario. Their services can help you look for employment and other resources for success. They also offer skills and experience assessments and job placement supports. For more information or to find services in your area go to:

- <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/employmentontario/eoes.html>
- <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/search.asp?chosen=22>

¹ A compulsory trade is one where you must be registered as an apprentice, be a member in the journeyman candidate class or certified as a journeyman in order to work in the trade in Ontario.

6. Examination Preparation Resources – What's out there?

There are many resources available in Ontario to help you prepare. These resources include preparation courses, sample examinations, study guides, materials and texts. You can also use your own network of support by speaking to your employers, previous instructors and your colleagues at work.

This section describes the following types of resource options:

- A. The Apprenticeship Training Standard
- B. Resources for Red Seal trades:
 - a) The National Occupational Analysis
 - b) Interprovincial Red Seal Examination Preparation Information Guide
 - c) Examination counselling sheets
 - d) Sample question library
- C. Examination plans for provincial certification examinations
- D. Preparation courses
- E. Sample questions/tests
- F. Textbooks/code books/health and safety information and other related resources

A. The Apprenticeship Training Standard

The Apprenticeship Training Standard (ATS) is the “logbook” that apprentices in Ontario use to identify and track the skills they learn as part of their on-the-job training. It is developed by industry experts to make sure that apprentices across Ontario are trained to the same standards, and learn skills that industry has identified as necessary to work at the journey person level in their trade.

It is also a resource that trade applicants who have not completed an Ontario apprenticeship can review as part of the Trade Equivalency Assessment (TEA) process.

Most examination candidates, both completed apprentices and experienced international workers, find it very helpful to review the ATS for their trade to prepare for the examination.

Provincial examinations are based on the skills described in the Ontario training standards. Red Seal examinations are based on the National Occupation Analysis (NOA) document used across the country, which is also used to develop Ontario’s training standard for Red Seal trades.

Reviewing the ATS for your trade will give you a clear understanding of the skills included in your trade and will remind you of specialized language and tools used when working in the trade.

To find a copy of the ATS for your trade, go to:

<http://www.collegeoftrades.ca/membership/resources/training-standards>.

Here are steps you can follow to get the most out of the Training Standard:

1. Read and understand each skill described (there are usually 100 to 150 skills in a training standard). The skill will contain the following three elements in this order, beginning with the task in bold:
 - The task you have to perform
 - Under what conditions, using which materials and equipment
 - To what measurement or level of satisfaction (how well you have to do it)
2. Identify all the details of the task.
3. Identify the sequence of actions to complete the task.
4. Identify any equipment to be used.
5. Visualize yourself doing each action in the task, in the proper sequence.
6. Talk yourself through the task (you may want to ask someone else to check you while doing this).
7. Discuss the task in detail with others who are experienced.
8. Review the standard of performance required (i.e., how well you have to do it) and make sure you understand how it applies.
9. If you have not done a certain task, ask your supervisor or someone in the trade to show you why, how and when it is done.
10. Remember that the examination may test any skill in the Training Standard whether it is indicated as optional or mandatory.

B. Resources for Red Seal Trades

If you are taking an Interprovincial (Red Seal) examination, the Red Seal website offers a number of excellent resources to help you prepare. These resources include:

- a. **National Occupation Analysis (NOA):** This document describes the skills and knowledge required to perform the duties of the trade. Each NOA consists of blocks; each block is divided into tasks and each task is divided into sub-tasks. Red Seal examination questions are specifically based on the NOA sub-tasks. (<http://www.red-seal.ca/d.4c.5m.2ntse.1rch@-eng.jsp>)
- b. **Interprovincial Red Seal Examination Preparation Information Guide:** This document describes how to use the NOA to prepare for your examination. From the NOA structure to study plans, it gives you a detailed approach to examination preparation. (<http://www.red-seal.ca/images/ATC-index-eng.html>)
- c. **Examination Counselling Sheet:** The examination counselling sheet provides you with a breakdown or weighting of the percentage of questions for each topic area on the examination. Most Red Seal examinations have between 100 and 150 questions.
- d. **Sample Question Library:** Sample questions on the Red Seal website show you the structure and phrasing of the types of questions you will be asked on the examination.

To find the Red Seal support material for your trade:

1. Go to: www.red-seal.ca
2. Click: *Red Seal Examinations*
3. Select: your trade name

C. Examination Plans for Provincial Certification Examinations

There are examination plans available for some of the trades that are not designated as Red Seal in Ontario.

Note: Even if you are writing a provincial examination, a visit to the Red Seal website to review their general examination tips and techniques is still useful. For example, the provincial examination questions use the same structure and phrasing as the Red Seal examinations. Go to www.red-seal.ca to visit the Red Seal website.

D. Preparation Courses

- Pre-certification Courses: Contact your local community colleges, union training centres or private career colleges for information on fee-based pre-certification courses in your area.
- Examination Preparation Courses: Many Training Delivery Agencies² now provide Ministry sponsored trade-specific examination preparation courses for both completed apprentices and trade applicants who want to take the examination. Contact the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) at one of their local apprenticeship office to ask about registering for these courses. Examination preparation courses generally target individuals who know their trade but may have difficulty preparing for or writing the examination. The courses do not provide a comprehensive review of the trade's skills sets. The link to the local apprenticeship offices is: <http://services.findhelp.ca/eo/tcu/appoff>

NOTE: Course costs may vary. The Ontario College of Trades does not endorse any particular course or Training Delivery Agent (TDA).

E. Sample Questions and Tests

The Red Seal website is an excellent resource for sample questions for Red Seal exams. In addition to this, other provinces may have practice examinations available for reference for some trades. There are also some fee-based services that provide sample examination options for some trades. Services not based in Ontario can provide great

² A Training Delivery Agent (TDA) is approved by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to deliver in school requirements for a specific trade. A TDA can be a community college, union training centre or private career college.

supports, though it is important to remember that terminology, regulatory codes, skills and other requirements may vary between provinces.

NOTE: These resources vary in terms of costs. The Ontario College of Trades does not endorse any particular website or resource related to question or examination banks.

- www.red-seal.ca
- “ExamBank” – Trade and Apprenticeship Exam Bank (fee-based service)
<http://trades.exambank.com/>
- Alberta Ministry of Enterprise and Advanced Education
<http://www.mybookezzz.org/lookup.php?q=red+seal+exam>
- British Columbia’s Industry Training Authority
<http://www.itabc.ca/exams/prepare-your-exams>

F. Apprenticeship Curriculum Standards, Textbooks, Code Books, Health and Safety Information and other Related Resources

Reviewing theoretical or academic information may also help you prepare for your examination. This is especially true when dealing with trades with regulatory code requirements.

Relevant textbooks, code books, health and safety manuals and other trade-based information are available in a number of locations. Check with your community college, union training centre, private career college, local library, bookstore or even online. Sector-based associations and industry bodies may also have materials available to help you prepare.

The Apprenticeship Curriculum Standards used by Ministry-approved training delivery agencies who deliver apprenticeship in-school training can also help you prepare by outlining the topics that apprentices learn through formal instruction at a college or union- or employer-sponsored training centres.

To find the Apprenticeship Curriculum Standard for each level of in-school training for your trade, go to: <http://www.collegeoftrades.ca/membership/resources/training-standards>.

Using the Trade Theory/Textbooks/Curriculum Standard

- Find a good trade glossary of terms.
- Identify the key concepts, theories and principles using the textbook.
- Identify important or typical problems in the trade performances.
- Identify exceptions to theories and the conditions where they occur.
- For each concept, find and learn the related definitions or formulas.
- Relate each concept or formula to your work experience.
- Relate the concepts to one another to give yourself a general overview.

- Sequence or organize information by job application so it makes sense.
- Rehearse sequences and relationships by repeating them out loud.
- Draw diagrams to show structures and relationships.

7. Studying for the Examination

- Decide on a study strategy that works for you and what you are trying to study.
- Try to set specific times to study and stick with them.
- Find a comfortable place to study, away from distractions.
- Use short study periods with regular breaks as they are the most effective for peak concentration and retention. Reward yourself for study success.
- Assign yourself study time for a topic based on its importance on the examination (use the Red Seal and Ontario examination plans to find out the number of questions to be asked).
- Effective study begins well before the examination and depends on spreading out your study times. Your ability to remember will be greatly improved if you look at your study materials often and re-read them every three or four weeks.

8. Additional Tips – Study Plans and Study Schedules

There are many resources and supports available for those preparing for written examinations. You may want to consider researching the following areas/topics to support your preparation for your trade examination:

- Study tips
- General test-taking tips
- Tips for multiple choice examinations
- Reducing anxiety
- Creating a Study Plan and a Study Schedule

Tips for Creating a Study Plan and a Study Schedule

A study plan is an organized schedule you can create that outlines study times and learning goals.

Creating a study plan and schedule can help you concentrate, retain material and effectively manage your time. Remember, circumstances, schedules and time available for preparation can vary for each individual.

Here are some helpful hints for creating your plan and schedule:

- **General Tips:**
 - Find a quiet, comfortable place to study
 - Create a study environment that supports your needs
 - Be honest with yourself
 - Avoid technology while you are studying

- Don't put things off
 - Take notes and highlight important information
 - Spend time studying with others (if possible)
 - Teach the lesson to another tradesperson, friend or colleague – When you teach someone else, you will find that you need a good understanding of the subject
 - Use your NOA (i.e. Glossary and other Appendices) and other resources to ensure you are referring accurately to terminology and definitions
 - Prepare flashcards, flowcharts and diagrams of key information including;
 - Formulas
 - Definitions
 - Key concepts
- **Tips for Creating your Study Schedule:**
 - Assess your current schedule – try to create a healthy balance between your work life, study life, social life and sleep time. Organize your schedule to fit your needs and your personal learning style
 - Establish a regular studying routine
 - Look at your calendar / planner and flag study and non-study days
 - Schedule study sessions in blocks – short blocks can be easier to schedule and can be more productive
 - Write down the subject you studied in each session
 - List all the subjects you need to study and rank them
 - Do your most difficult studying when you feel best
 - Stick to your schedule
 - Don't wait until the last minute. Study regularly
 - Reschedule missed study sessions

9. Examination Day – What Else Should I know about the Examination?

A. What to bring on the day of the examination

The Ministry will ask you to provide proof of your identity when you arrive at the examination centre on the day of your examination, so bring photo identification with you, such as your driver's license or passport. **NOTE:** The Ministry cannot accept health cards as proof of identification.

The Ontario College of Trades will give you a receipt when you pay your examination fee. Bring that receipt with you as well.

B. What will be provided for you in the examination centre

The Ministry will supply everything that you will need. You will be given:

- the examination book, which you **MUST NOT WRITE IN**
- the answer sheet
- scratch paper
- a pencil and an eraser
- a code book and/or a non-scientific calculator (if you need one for your examination): you will *not be allowed* to bring your own code book or calculator into the examination centre.

Every examination centre has English and French dictionaries and a number of dictionaries in other languages. If you need a dictionary in a language other than English or French, check with your examination centre to see if they already have one. If they don't, you may be allowed to bring your own, but it will be checked for notes, marks or any other writing before you will be allowed to use it.

C. What is the examination testing?

The examination questions are testing:

1. Your understanding of trade terminology and concepts.
2. Your knowledge of the timing and order of tasks: Questions will ask when a specific task should be done, with correct answers indicating, "every three months" or "after this other task" or "before that task".
3. Your knowledge of the reason for performing tasks: Questions will ask why a task is done, with correct answers indicating, "because this condition exists" or "to get this sort of result".
4. Your knowledge of the performance of the task: Questions will ask how tasks are done, with correct answers indicating skills and techniques or certain job sequences.

5. Your knowledge of standards and permissions: Questions will ask what permission is needed or what standard must be followed in doing a job, for example, which code or blueprint information is used.
6. Your understanding of consequences: Questions will ask about consequences such as “when a certain event happens or a certain task is done, what effect does it have?”

Once an examination has started, you cannot leave the examination room until you are completed, except in an emergency or to go to the washroom.

D. Examination Writing Strategies

- Apply three principles: Use time wisely, read directions and questions carefully and use good reasoning.
- Consider all the alternatives: Do not jump at the first possible answer; it may be misleading. Read through all answers in the order they appear and choose the best one.
- Relate each possible answer to the question. Consider how well each option answers the question: is it a logical, correct response? Use the process of elimination to rule out wrong answers.
- Anticipate the answer before you look at the options: Read the question carefully and then answer it on your own; find the answer, which is the same as yours.
- Use information from other questions to help you: Look for similar questions, or questions on the same topic; do the responses overlap? Is there any extra information you could use, like a definition?

Look for words such as always, never, etc.: They are absolute words, indicating there are no exceptions to the statements. Be careful not to accept answers using such extremes unless you are certain there are no exceptions. If you are not sure of the correct response: Eliminate the "definitely not" option(s); balance the remaining options against each other (how are they the same/different); then choose the best alternative answer remaining.

10. How to behave during the examination

Any inappropriate behaviour during the examination, including any form of cheating or examination misconduct, will not be tolerated and may affect your eligibility to become a member of the Ontario College of Trades, or to continue to be a member of the College if you are already one in another trade. It may also affect your ability to work in your trade if you are in a compulsory trade. If found guilty of cheating you could be subject to a maximum fine of \$10,000.

11. What to do if you have an examination complaint

- If you have a complaint about the content of the examination, ask for an examination complaint form as soon as you finish your examination and before you leave the examination room.
- On the form, make a note of the question number(s) you have concerns about and explain your complaint in detail.
- The Ministry will forward your complaint form to the Ontario College of Trades for review.
- The College of Trades will contact you if your mark changes as a result of your complaint.

12. Getting your results

The Ontario College of Trades will **mail your results** within three weeks of writing the examination.

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities cannot give you your results, nor can you get your results from the Ontario College of Trades over the phone or in person.

13. If you don't pass the examination

You can write the examination again. It is not uncommon for examination candidates to try their examination more than once. You will be allowed to schedule another examination 15 days after your previous examination date unless your examination has been blocked pending an investigation of examination misconduct.

You must pay an examination fee to the Ontario College of Trades for each examination attempt.

If you do not pass, the following information from the Ontario College of Trades will help you prepare for your next attempt:

- The examination results letter that you receive from the College of Trades will breakdown your marks according to the topics on which you were examined.
- Review these results to identify areas of strength and weakness that will help you focus your study efforts for your next attempt.
- Use the resources and supports listed in this guide to help you prepare.
- Don't re-schedule the examination until you have prepared and feel confident in your knowledge and skills.

If you fail the examination two times, you must provide the Ontario College of Trades with proof that you have done something to improve your chances of passing every other attempt from now on.

14. Self-Assessment Checklists

As you move through your preparation process in anticipation of writing your examination, the following checklist may be a good reminder of things you need to do:

Self-Assessment Checklist During Your Preparation

- Did you download/save/print a copy of your NOA?
- Did you download/save/print a copy of your Apprenticeship Training Standard?
- Did you download/save/print a copy of your Examination Counselling Sheet?
- Are you using your NOA as a study tool?
- Are you using your Apprenticeship Training Standard as a study tool?
- Have you accessed other study resources (i.e. code books, texts, provincial/territorial standards)?
- Are you using your own network for support (i.e. colleagues, instructors, employers)?
- Have you created a study plan?
- Have you created a study schedule?
- Have you made use of the sample question library? (# times? ___ Did you time yourself ___)
- Are you interested in Essential Skills Upgrading? Yes No
- Have you accessed information on Essential Skills Upgrading in your area? Yes No
- Are you interested in Language Training? Yes No
- Have you accessed information on Language Training in your area? Yes No

Self-Assessment Checklist – Day Before Writing:

- Do you have the appropriate Photo Identification ready?
- Do you know the location of the examination centre?
- Do you know the time of the examination?
- Do you have transportation to the examination centre?
- Do you have the necessary resources to get to your location (i.e. bus ticket)? Yes No
- Are you giving yourself enough time to get to the location? Yes No How Much? _____
- Have you considered factors (i.e. traffic, construction) in your transportation plan?
- Have you printed a map/directions to get to location (or do you have GPS)? Yes No
- Did you set your alarm? Yes No
- Did you get enough sleep prior to the examination?
- Did you provide notice to your employer (time off)? Yes No
- Did you take enough time off from work/school to attend the examination? Yes No

APPENDIX A

What are Essential Skills?

Essential Skills are the foundational skills needed to carry out all work tasks as well as the building blocks required to learn new skills.

There are 9 essential skills for the workplace:

Reading - *is the ability to read and understand written information in many different types of workplace documents.*

Document Use - *is the ability find & use the information you need, put in information where it is needed, and construct information displays: these are all document use tasks. Icons, labels, lists, tables, forms, graphs, signs, maps, gauges, images, schedules, schematics, touch screens & technical drawings are examples of documents or information displays used in a workplace. We use this skill when we read signs, labels, lists, as well as when we interpret graphs and charts.*

Numeracy - *is the ability to use numbers and think mathematically to measure and make calculations, to estimate, to work with money, to analyze numerical trends and to create schedules and budgets.*

Writing - *is the ability to use the written word to create a clear message. It includes non paper-based writing such as typing on a computer. We use this skill when we organize, record, document, provide information to persuade, request information from others and justify a request.*

Oral Communication - *is the ability to talk with others to give and exchange information & ideas, such as: ask questions, give directions, coordinate work tasks, explain & persuade.*

Working With Others - *is the ability to lead, coordinate or collaborate with others on work activities. We use this skill when we work as a member of a team or jointly with a partner (whether in person or at a distance), and when we engage in supervisory or leadership activities.*

Thinking - *is the ability to engage in the process of problem solving, job task planning and organizing, finding information, critical thinking, significant use of memory and decision-making. We use a thinking process to solve problems, organize and plan, find needed information, be logical, remember things and make decisions.*

Digital Technology - *is the ability to use information and communication technology. We use this skill when we use a smartphone, operate cash registers, use word processing software, send emails and create and modify spreadsheets.*

Continuous Learning - *is the ability to apply strategies which support learning and the ability to adapt to change. We use this skill when we learn as part of regular work or from co-workers and when we access training in the workplace or off-site.*

Having strong Essential Skills, such as reading, writing and thinking, can increase your chance of succeeding in these examinations.

We wish you all of the best as you prepare for your examination.