An Open-Book Test Isn't Always a 'Gimme'

Effective preparation prior to the test date will give examinees an advantage, even if the code book can be used during the exam

BY LYNDSEY DECKARD

This column is intended to be a forum for discussing the workings of the Examination Bank Subcommittee of the American Welding Society Certification Committee. We solicit your questions and comments about certification, examination questions, challenges, protocol, or other related certification subjects. They can be mailed to AWS, 550 NW LeJeune Rd., Miami, FL 33126, or e-mailed to yamamoto@aws.org.

A majority of applicants for the AWS Certified Welding Inspector (CWI) certification are experienced welders or visual welding inspectors. When these applicants take the fundamentals portion of the exam and/or the practical (hands-on) portion, they bring a degree of experience that supplements their study in preparation for the examination.

A portion of the AWS examination also covers the D1.1, D1.5, D15.1, and API 1104 codes. Irrespective of the code selected, a significant percentage of postexam comments received by the Certification Committee concerns difficulty in finding answers in the code book in a timely manner.

The code book portion of the CWI exam is open book. By definition, all the answers are in the book the applicant uses during the exam; in other words, every answer is taken directly from the book.

This is a timed exam. The examinee has two hours to answer 46 questions. That is, test takers have about 2 minutes and 20 seconds to locate the answer to each question. It is surprising and frustrating for examinees to see how quickly that time goes while frantically leafing through pages in a code search that is not well organized.

> **When preparing for the CWI exam, it is advisable to read — but not memorize — the code before the test date.**

Preparing for the Code Portion of the Exam

One of the most effective ways in which a potential CWI can prepare for the code portion of the exam is to read the code he or she has elected for certification before the test date. It is not necessary to read every word nor is it advisable to attempt to memorize parts of the code. A CWI is not expected to answer code questions from memory either on the job or during the exam.

In fact, memorization is strongly discouraged because it increases the likelihood an inspector will be wrong in future determinations or not be current with the latest issue of the code. A Certified Welding Inspector is expected to know how to accurately find answers in any AWS code, not have the codes committed to memory.

The fastest way to become familiar with what's in the code is to read through the table of contents a couple of times. It is important for potential CWIs to know the differences between a Welding Procedure Qualification, a Welder/Welding Operator Qualification, and Welding Procedure Specification. Applicants must know which chapters in the code address each in order to go quickly to the correct portion of the code.

Examinees are required to bring their own code book for use during the examination. This book may be highlighted and tabbed. It may not have loose sheets of notes or questions and answers handwritten in it.

It is helpful to add index tabs to your copy of the code. For quick reference, tab each chapter and any tables or charts you think may be important. Table 4.1, for example, contains a wealth of information. Become familiar with the sections that identify prequalified joint configurations, both partial and complete joint penetration. A word of caution: If you tab and/or highlight too many things, nothing will stand out and it will be difficult to find information quickly.

Tips for the Practical Portion of the Exam

It is important to note the practical portion of the examination utilizes a small code book that is supplied with the practical examination answer booklet. This code is organized in a manner similar to the real codes and must be used for the hands-on exam. Your practice in using the code books will also serve you well during this portion of the exam.

If you encounter a question and the general location of the answer is not at first apparent to you, turn to the alphabetical index in the back of the book; that will quickly place you in the proper section to find the answer.

Lyndsey Deckard (deckard@pbworld.com) is a member of the AWS Certification Committee and its Examination Bank Subcommittee.