



# The (not-so-) daunting essay question

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**S**ome time back I wrote an article about certification essay questions. Several years of

essay grading

seeking to obtain a specialist certification. Similar to other SBE certification exams, 50 multiple choice questions are randomly selected from a pool of questions by computer. Each question is worth two points. During this portion of the exam, standard reference texts can be used. While it is important for an individual to know the material by heart, it is just as important to demonstrate that he or she is able to find the correct answer when needed. We often use reference materials in our jobs and, therefore, the same opportunity is given in answering the multiple choice questions. After completing the multiple choice questions, the examinee then provides a written response to an essay question.

You may be asking how the essay question is selected, administered during the exam and graded. When an applicant completes the application to take an examination for a senior level they will be asked to provide a record of experience of their last 10 years. Many applicants also attach a biography or resume that provides further experience details. The certification director at the SBE National Office will assign a member of the SBE National Certification Committee the task of reviewing the application. Upon approving the application, the committee member selects three essay questions from a question pool. The question pool covers various topics related to radio and television. The committee member selects three questions based on the experience information submitted by the applicant. This is why it is important for applicants to provide detail about their experience.

For the specialist examination, however, a single essay question will be selected by the national office that is targeted specifically for the specialist certification being sought.

For the senior level, after the examinee answers the 50 multiple-choice questions, he/she then chooses one of the three essay questions selected by the certification committee member. The three essay questions are provided to the examinee in a sealed envelope. The examinee will choose one essay and write a response. Unlike the multiple choice question portion of the exam, reference texts are not allowed to be used while answering the essay. For the specialist exam only one question will be provided as mentioned earlier.

A minimum passing score of 84 is required

for an examinee to obtain certification for senior or specialist certification. The essay question may contribute up to 20 points towards this 84-point total. This means a person must score a minimum of 64 points on the multiple-choice questions to pass the exam assuming they achieved a perfect score of 20 points on the essay question. As you can see, there is considerable worth placed on the essay question.

Here is how the grading of the essay question works. Once the multiple-choice questions have been graded and it has been determined that an individual has scored at least 64 points, the essay question response is then sent to three members of the National Certification Committee to be graded. The three members independently grade the essay and return their scores to the SBE National Office. The national office averages the three scores to obtain a single score for the essay response. The single score for the essay must be at least a 10 for the individual to pass. If the averaged essay score is a 10 or greater, the essay score is added to what was achieved on the multiple choice questions. This becomes the total score of the examination.

So how does someone prepare for the essay question? Because I have graded several essay responses, I will offer my own thoughts and observations that I feel could help you to prepare to take the essay portion of the senior or specialist examination.

1. Submit an accurate application. Be specific on your application and other documents you attach as to your work experience and responsibilities. This greatly assists the committee member assigning your essay questions to assign those questions that are in line with your experience.

2. Neatness counts. On the essay response, be neat in any drawings you provide and ensure your writing is legible. The committee person assigned to grade your question is a grader and not a mind reader. Messy drawings and handwriting may work against you if the grader cannot follow or understand what you have written. Hint: A small straightedge ruler with no formulas or notes on it may be useful for any supporting drawings you may need to provide.

3. Be detailed. Provide appropriate supporting detail on any drawings or

later I would again like to talk about the essay question, which is an important part of obtaining a senior level or specialist certification.

The SBE Program of Certification has several different levels that are tailored to varying degrees of experience. In most cases, to obtain SBE certification an individual must pass an examination to demonstrate his or her knowledge of broadcast engineering. These exams all use a multiple-choice question format.

In addition to the multiple-choice test, the exam for Certified Senior Radio or Television Engineer or a Specialist certification (e.g. AMD, DRB, 8-VSB) also includes essay questions. What follows is why the essay question is important in the senior-level and specialist certification examination process.

First, let us review the requirements for senior level certification. An applicant must first have 10 years or more of responsible broadcast engineering or related experience. Then the individual must achieve a passing grade on an examination comprised of multiple-choice questions and one essay question. For a specialist the examinee must hold a Broadcast Engineer or higher level of certification, take an exam comprised of multiple choice questions and then provide a written response to one essay question.

You may wonder why these exams include the essay question. The answer is actually rather simple.

When the Senior Broadcast Engineer certification was created, it was felt that an additional element should be added in the exam process to demonstrate the applicant's proficiency in the field of broadcast engineering. An applicant with 10 years or more of experience should be very capable of answering an essay-type question related to a job responsibility that he or she has held. This type of question affords the examinee an opportunity to demonstrate from practical experience his or her knowledge of a subject. The same principle holds true of an individual

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the **SIGNAL**

**ESSAY** from page 6

explanations. Think of this in terms of preparing something that would be reviewed by your peers, boss or other industry professionals.

4. Be thorough. Ensure that all the items mentioned in the essay question are answered fully. Read the question carefully. It may be worth making a checklist to ensure

you address all the areas required. Once your essay answer is complete, reread the question to verify that all the elements are included.

5. For block diagrams, unless explicitly stated otherwise, an “electrical one-line” flow drawing is being requested and not a free hand artist rendering of what equipment visually looks like.

I hope this helps you understand the

importance of the essay question and the process used to assign and grade it. Do not let the essay question intimidate you from obtaining the senior or specialist level of certification that you deserve. As you answer the essay question, let your experience “do the talking” and let those creative juices flow. I state this from experience as I took the senior level exam and passed.



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