Test Taking Tips

One person's approach to taking the AWS certification examinations may help you the next time you're tested

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 Mary Ruth Johnson at AWS, 550 NW LeJeune Rd., Miami, FL 33126, or e-mailed to mjohnsen@aws.org.

Most of you reading this column already hold an AWS certification as a welding inspector, either as a Senior Certified Welding Inspector, Certified Welding Inspector, or a Certified Associate Welding Inspector. Additional AWS certification programs are available such as Certified Welding Educator (CWE) and Certified Welding Engineer (CWEng). Currently proceeding through the necessary development and approval processes are even more specialties such as the Radiographic Interpreter (RI). You may decide that attaining additional AWS certifications will be useful to you and your company. These added credentials can only increase your value to your employer and, in the long run, increase the value of your company to its clients/customers.

All American Welding Society certifications are attained through experience and knowledge and by passing an examination to verify, and to some degree quantify, the extent of that knowledge and experience. The examinations are not easy and a certain percentage of examinees take a test more than once before passing it.

If you can memorize the entire welding code on which you will be tested (for instance, D1.1: 2002 is 502 pages long), know absolutely everything there is to know about all welding and NDE processes, and are heavily experienced in their application, the exam will be a slam dunk and you need read no further. If, on the other hand, you are a fairly normal, average or above, experienced welder, inspector, engineer, or technician who is willing to put in some extra preparation time, this column could be helpful. If you have any colleagues taking the exam for the first time, do them a favor and pass this column along to them.

With these thoughts in mind, I thought I would share with you my views on how to approach taking an AWS certification examination in a way that will maximize your chances for success. While these tips are geared toward the CWI exam, they hold true for any AWS certification examination.

Come prepared. Bring more than one pencil and a good eraser. The test answer sheets are scored by computer. If you change your answer and do not erase completely, the reader may pick up two answers and disqualify that question for you. It is also a good idea to bring a light snack for during the break (granola bar, candy bar, or other similar energy food). A Big Mac and fries are a bit much. Use good judgment.

Be sure you understand the question. Proctors will explain everything before each test period. If you don't understand the instructions, ask right then. It is better to get the explanation before the official time starts than to use your precious exam time trying to figure it out for yourself or asking the proctor.

Remember that this is a timed test. The Fundamentals portion has 150 closed book questions to be completed in two hours. That means you have 48 seconds to answer each question. If you don't recognize the correct answer immediately, move on. The code book portion has 46 open book questions to be answered in two hours. That is about 2½ minutes to answer each question. Again, if you don't find the answer quickly, move on.

Go through all the questions first. As recommended above, go through all the questions in order and try to answer them if you can. If you get hung up on a question, pick an answer, then make a light mark in the margin and go on to the next question. Be very careful; do not skip a question because it can throw you out of synchronization between questions and answers. If you lose the relationship between the questions and the lines on the answer sheet, you will have every answer after that point attached to the wrong question. This is a really upsetting way to fail an exam, so pay close attention. It is a good idea to verify the question number with the answer line number every couple of questions. When you have gone through them all, go back to the questions where you placed a mark in the margin.

Use all of your time. As stated earlier, this is a timed test. Make that work in your favor. Do not be intimidated or influenced by the person who turns in his/her answer sheet in 45 minutes and goes outside to have a cup of coffee for the remaining time. That person may be really brilliant, or he or she may have just given up. When you get through the questions the first time, go back to the ones that you marked in the margin. Sometimes a subsequent question will remind you of an answer to one you postponed; sometimes it will eliminate a possible answer as untenable. Remember, you are not competing with others in the room. You are competing with the examination itself and every additional correct answer increases your chances of a passing score. You need 70% on each test portion to pass at the CWI level. If the guy who

LYNDSEY DECKARD (Deckard@pbworld.com) is Quality Manager of the Vehicle Division of Parsons Brinckerhoff Transit & Rail Systems Inc. He is an AWS Senior Certified Welding Inspector, an ASQ Certified Quality Auditor, and a member of the AWS Certification Committee, the Examination Question Bank Subcommittee, and Chairman of the Ethics Subcommittee.

finishes in 45 minutes on each part of the test gets 65% on one portion and you get one more correct answer than he does by spending the extra time going over your answers on that portion, guess which one of you will be a CWI.

If necessary, issue a challenge. If, as you take the exam, you encounter a question that you believe is worded incorrectly, offers no correct answer, or offers more than one correct answer, the Certification Committee's Exam Bank Subcommittee encourages you to challenge that question. Challenge forms are available from the proctor at exam sites and are on the back cover of every exam booklet. All challenges are reviewed by the entire Exam Bank Subcommittee and they are dispositioned as shown in Table 1.

Keep in mind that there will almost certainly be some areas in which you are not very strong. For those situations, I'd like to share with you some advice my dad, a very wise man, gave me. Two of the valuable lessons he taught me bear directly on the subject of taking multiple choice examinations such as those used for AWS certification.

Table 1 — Exam Bank Question Subcommittee Challenged Questions Actions

Subcommittee Findings	AWS Action	Change Score
Question valid	No action	No
Question valid but wording could be improved	Review and revise wording by Subcommitte	No
No correct answer offered	Review and revise question	Yes, for all who challenge the question
More than one correct answer offered	Review and revise question	Yes, for persons selecting any correct answer

◆ "If you don't know, guess." A guess has, in this case, a one-in-five chance of being correct. If you can eliminate some obviously incorrect answers, the odds improve significantly to one in four or even better.

◆ "Do something, even if it's wrong." An answer left blank has no chance of being correct. If you are running out of time, check off one answer in every answer line. Never leave an answer blank. In life, doing nothing is not a legitimate option. Not making a choice is a choice.❖

Welding Question Contest

The AWS Certification Committee is seeking sample questions for possible use in various tests. We are hoping that you, the internationally recognized, best welding inspectors in the world, will submit a few questions.

Prizes (really small ones) will be awarded to a total of ten entrants in the following categories:

• Most good questions submitted.
• Best question submitted.
• Most obscure question.
• Most interesting question.

Contest Rules

• Questions must be neatly written.
• Questions must be based on D1.1:2002.
• Each question must be multiple choice.
• Choices must be plausible.
• Each question must have five (5) possible answers.
• Page and section number of the Code must be provided as a reference for the question.

If you don't care about the contest (remember, the prizes are really small), please consider sending in your questions anyway.

All decisions of the judges are final. Winners will be notified, then recognized in Inspection Trends.
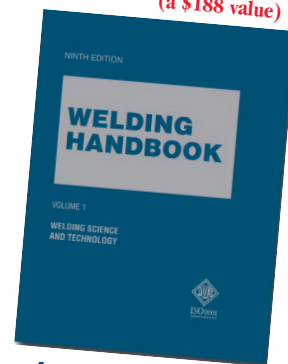
Please send your questions to

Jim Greer
Certification Department
American Welding Society
550 NW LeJeune Rd.
Miami, FL 33126