Frequently Asked Questions – Click to view

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1. Why do I have to learn the Colregs lights and shapes and IALA buoys? Surely, I can just look them up in a book?

There is a whole string of flaws in this argument. Let’s examine some of the important ones:

- Many vessels are ablaze with lights at night. To pick out the Colregs lights you really need to know what you are looking for in the first place.

- When you are on watch at night, you need to be able to "read the situation" quickly and make immediate decisions. You cannot simply abandon the helm and start looking things up in a book.

- Turning on the lights to look up something in a book will ruin your night vision.

- Looking up things in a book may be possible in good weather when all is going well (anyone can sail a boat in good weather!). The real test for a skipper comes when the weather is shocking, visibility is restricted by driving rain, and the crew are down below too seasick to help.

Taking a watch alone in traffic at night requires experience. You need to develop the ability to interpret what you see around you. Knowing your "lights" is just your learner’s licence and only once you have that can you begin to develop the ability to read the situation around you.

There is the legendary story of the powerboat skipper who came too close to a dive boat and hit a diver. When asked why he did not react to their Alpha flag he said, "Oh you mean that blue and white flag you were waving? What does that mean?"

Knowing your Colregs and your IALA buoyage gives you a far better appreciation of what is going on around you at sea. Accept that proposition and you will find that learning Colregs and IALA is not that difficult.

2. Why do I require a Coastal Skipper qualification in order to take a Yachtmaster Offshore exam? If you have the required knowledge and experience, why can’t you go directly for the Offshore exam?
There is a whole string of flaws in this argument. Let's examine some of the important ones:

- The main reason is that the exams are very different. The Coastal Skipper exam focuses on coastal sailing issues. The Yachtmaster Offshore exam assumes that the candidate's coastal sailing skills are adequate and focuses on offshore and ocean crossing issues.
- The second reason relates to knowledge retention. Ensuring that the Yachtmaster has been through two separate examination processes gives greater assurance that the SA Sailing Yachtmaster is worthy of his or her qualification.
- There is also one further consideration. Yachtmaster Offshore candidates must have skippered a yacht on three overnight coastal passages. Taking full responsibility for a coastal passage is an essential part of the learning curve. You can only do this as a Coastal Skipper. You don't learn a skipper's responsibilities if you are simply a "play-play" skipper with an experienced skipper, or instructor, on board ready to take over the moment the going gets tough.

3. **Why do I need to have a Yachtmaster Offshore qualification in order to become a Yachtmaster Ocean?**

The focus of the Yachtmaster Ocean exam is celestial navigation. Passing the Yachtmaster Ocean exam only proves that you understand celestial navigation. It does not demonstrate that you know your coastal navigation or your international tidal systems, etc.

4. **Is the SA Sailing Skipper's Ticket recognised internationally?**

You can cruise around the world or charter a boat anywhere in the world on the appropriate SA Sailing Skipper's Ticket. There are, however, two circumstances where you might consider going to the additional cost of getting an RYA (Royal Yachting Association) or an IYT (International Yachtmaster Training) qualification:

- If you are planning to sail around the UK or Channel ports, the RYA courses do an excellent job of taking you through the rather unique tidal systems that you will experience in this area. Working with tidal atlases and individual tidal curves for each standard port is almost unique to this area.
- If you wish to seek employment outside South Africa as a skipper you will probably find an RYA or IYT qualification useful. Both qualifications are recognised by the MCA. If you want to deliver yachts for Robinson and Cane, or any other South African yacht manufacturer, a SA Sailing Yachtmaster qualification is mandatory.

Remember that you must have an SA Sailing Skipper's Ticket to sail in South Africa.

5. **Why does SAMSA not accept an RYA qualification?**

The authorities think of a Skipper's Ticket as a driving license. Generally if you want to stay permanently in a country you have to get a local driving license.

There are several problems with reciprocity between the RYA and SA Sailing qualifications. One of the biggest being that the RYA syllabus focuses on the rather unique tidal systems around the UK and Channel ports. For the South African Day Skipper, or even the Coastal Skipper, this is not particularly relevant. For the South African Yachtmaster Offshore an understanding of world wide tidal systems is appropriate.
6. **What are the differences between the SA Sailing and the RYA syllabuses?**

The major difference is in the tidal systems studied. Those around the UK and channel ports are unique and complex. The Admiralty have developed tidal stream atlases and a system of individual tidal curves for each standard port to deal with this particular complexity. The RYA syllabus understandably focuses on this system because it is, after all, their home water.

At the South African Day Skipper level, studying this system is totally irrelevant. It is more appropriate to learn about the local tides. At Coastal Skipper level the SA Sailing system introduces an awareness of international tidal systems. At YM offshore international tidal systems - including the Admiralty system applicable to the UK and channel ports - are studied.

7. **Why was the Local Waters Ticket introduced?**

- Many Day Skippers simply want to be able to anchor at Clifton, enjoy the sunset, and show their guests the lights of Cape Town on the way back. They do not want to tackle coastal passages. The Local Waters Ticket allows them to enjoy an evening sail in their local waters without the need for tackling the more difficult Coastal Skipper examination.

- Many Day Skippers want to upgrade to Coastal Skipper but do not have the night hours. Previously they were in a "catch 22" position. They needed to go out at night to get enough night hours to go for Coastal Skipper. But they needed the Coastal Skipper qualification to legally take their boat out at night.

- SA Sailing believes that the Local Waters Ticket will solve these problems and make it easier for sailors to stay inside the law.

8. **What happened to the Day Skipper with night exemption?**

- Many years ago SAMSA felt that the night exemption was being abused and cancelled it. So if you have one of the old "Day Skipper with Night Exemption" certificates the "night exemption" is unfortunately no longer recognised. Essentially you just have a Day Skipper certificate.

However, what we have been able to do is to persuade SAMSA to allow us to introduce a Local Waters certificate. For the experienced Day Skipper this is a reasonably simple exam. There is no Chartwork exam. You have to write a short a Colregs exam to demonstrate that you know your lights. And you have to take the examiner out for a night sail to demonstrate that you know your local lights at night, that you can do Man over Board in total darkness and that you can do a night entry into your home port with confidence.