The use of English language is increasingly becoming a mandatory requirement for many categories of seafarer. In addition to the revised STCW Convention's emphasis on English language training, there are various other International Maritime Organization (IMO) requirements which stipulate the need for seafarers to communicate in a common language. In practice therefore most seafarers now require an ability to communicate in English.

ISF, and the maritime English training experts Marlins, have taken an active part in discussions at IMO concerning use of English at sea. In addition to providing information about the well established ISF Marlins English Language Test (only US $5 per test) and the complementary ISF Marlins Test of Spoken English (see right) this leaflet explains recent developments concerning the use of English by seafarers internationally.

*The 1995 amendments to the IMO Convention on Standards of Training and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW)

ISF Marlins Test of Spoken English (TOSE)

The ISF Marlins TOSE CD provides a standardised interview framework for assessing seafarers' speaking and listening skills, in order to provide a general indication of a seafarer's verbal ability.

Key Objectives
- Help trainers/interviewers evaluate speaking and listening skills
- Assist employers as part of a broad selection process
- Identify specific training needs
- Monitor progress during or after training

Key Features
- Extensive guidelines and reference materials in printable format
- Test materials for different language abilities
- Colour-coded test material for ease of use
- Stimulating on-screen visuals to promote discussion on general and work-related topics
- Thorough guidelines for grading speaking skills
- Easy to use report form

Moreover, the TOSE complements the existing ISF Marlins Test (see inside) to provide a comprehensive analysis of English language skills.

The TOSE CD, which can be used indefinitely, is available from ISF for the price of UK £172 (US $300) or less for multiple orders, using the order form on the back.

Please pass to your personnel department
IMO English Language Requirements

The SOLAS Convention
Recent amendments to the IMO SOLAS Convention underline the need for a common working language in the interests of safety at sea. Unless the personnel involved speak another common language, English must now be used as the working language for bridge-to-bridge and bridge-to-shore safety communications, and communications on board between the pilot and bridge watchkeeping personnel (SOLAS Chapter V).

STCW
Regulation V/1.4 in STCW concerning explicit company responsibilities requires that the ship's entire crew can effectively co-ordinate their activities in an emergency, which implies the ability to communicate in a common language. It is possible that this aspect will have to be demonstrated to port state control officers, for example, through lifeboat drills. STCW, which came into full effect in 2002, also includes several requirements on the use of English language by specific categories of personnel:

- **Officers of the navigational watch** now require adequate knowledge of written and spoken English to understand charts, nautical publications, meteorological information and messages concerning the ship's safety and operation. They also need to be able to communicate with other ships, coast stations and multilingual crew, and to use the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) — see below — (Table A-II/1 of STCW Code).

- **GMDSS radio operators**, which in practice now include most deck officers, require a knowledge of English, both written and spoken, for the communication of information relevant to the safety of life at sea (STCW table A IV/2).

- **Engine watchkeepers** are required to demonstrate an ability in English adequate to interpret engineering publications written in English and to speak clearly and comprehensively when making communications needed to perform engineering duties (STCW table A-III/1).

- **Ratings of the navigational watch** in the deck department, certificated watchkeeping ratings must be able to comply with helm orders in English and make clear and concise communications (STCW table A-II/4).

Any seafarer with a designated **safety or pollution prevention duty** is recommended by guidance in Part B of the STCW Code, concerning basic training, to have an ability to use English with an emphasis on nautical terms and conditions (STCW section B-VII/1).

- **Personnel on passenger ships** are required to have an ability to communicate with passengers during an emergency, taking into account the likelihood that an ability to use an elementary English vocabulary for basic instructions can provide a means of communication in the absence of a common language (STCW section A-V/2 and A-V/3).

The ISM Code
The International Safety Management (ISM) Code emphasises the importance of communication in the development and maintenance of effective management systems.

Under ISM, the company is required to ensure that the ship's personnel receive relevant information on the Safety Management System in a working language or languages, and are able to communicate effectively in the execution of their duties related to the Safety Management System (ISM 6.6 and 6.7). In practice, the language used is often likely to be English.

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Standard Marine Communication Phrases

In 2000, IMO adopted the Standard Marine (English language) Communication Phrases (SMCP) to replace the Standard Marine Navigational Vocabulary (SMNV) developed in the 1970s.

Ability to use the SMCP, in particular Part A concerning external communication phrases and bridge operations, is now a mandatory requirement for deck officers through a cross reference in the STCW Convention.

However, it is important to understand that it is not intended that seafarers should learn every individual phrase by rote. The principal purpose of the SMCP is to provide reference material for teaching English in a maritime context, according to the user's specific needs.

The ISF Marlins English Language Test incorporates many of the new IMO phrases.

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IMO Model Course on "Maritime English"

IMO has approved a model training course on English language for seafarers which makes extensive reference to the SMCP. With the assistance of Marlins, the course was developed for IMO by ISF.

In spite of the title, however, it should be emphasised that there is no such thing as "maritime" English. The course simply enables training institutes to develop a syllabus involving the practice of genuine English communication in a maritime setting.
ISF Marlins™ Test
(Version 3.0)
ONLY US $5 PER TEST!

The ISF Marlins English Language Test uses CD ROM technology to assess seafarers' understanding of both written and spoken English, and includes questions using the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases and an audio section using international speakers of English. Designed specifically for the shipping industry by English Language Training (ELT) experts, the ISF Marlins English Language Test provides an objective analysis of English language ability.

The Test can be administered by non-English speakers without any knowledge of foreign language training. Simple instructions and computer "help" advice allow the test to be completed by seafarers who have little experience with computers.

The Test is applicable to all grades of officers and ratings (including catering and hotel personnel). Although maritime related, it deliberately avoids testing knowledge of "seamanship" skills, concentrating instead on the understanding of English.

Recently upgraded to be Windows 2000 compliant.

Each Test comprises three principal sections:

Listening
The CD is programmed to select 40 questions randomly, which involve recordings of English being spoken in a variety of accents that are likely to be heard at sea (i.e. not "BBC" English). Using the computer, seafarers select the "correct" answer from a list of choices, which are also ordered randomly for security.

The recordings have a maritime theme dealing with words, phrases and situations which seafarers might reasonably be expected to be familiar.

General Comprehension
The CD is programmed to select 50 written questions, (i.e. they are read by the seafarer), dealing with maritime situations and phrases. Seafarers must select the correct answer from a list of choices which test understanding of vocabulary, phonology, idiomatic expressions and important grammar skills.

The vocabulary questions require the seafarer to select the "odd one out" in a choice of 4 simple words (for example: high/wide/heavy/long).

The phonology questions test ability to recognise different letter sounds through identification of the "odd one out" from several words (for example: double/round/allow/south) which seafarers are invited to say out loud.

The grammar questions test skills such as the correct use of prepositions (to, of etc.) or tense (has, had etc.).

Practical Comprehension
The third section features paragraphs extracted from actual written instructions used on board ship. Words or phrases are deliberately left out and seafarers must choose the word that has been omitted in order to demonstrate their understanding of the text.

Results
The tests are scored out of a hundred, but the seafarer taking the test will not have access to the results. However, the person administering the test can print out either the seafarer's total score or the results broken down into their different components for record keeping purposes.

There is no pass or fail mark. Individual companies should use these results as a guide to evaluate additional language training needs and whether the seafarer has sufficient ability for work at sea in English.

The test is accompanied by ISF guidance concerning trial scores for the test by different grades of seafarers.
ISF Marlins™ English Language Test – (Version 3.0)  
& ISF Marlins™ Test of Spoken English (TOSE)  
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