



Scottish Beekeepers' Association

The SBA Exams – Tips for Sitting Them.

Exam-a-phobia is a very common ailment, not helped by past experiences at school and college. However as with any activity there are ways of reducing the pain right down to the point of enjoyment.

First of all there is the tremendous sense of satisfaction experienced as you unearth new facts when preparing for the exams. Adding to your knowledge, will improve your beekeeping and that, after all, is the main purpose of the education system. The SBA exams are very focused on beekeeping and as such are fairly practical & common-sense based.

Always obtain and read the syllabus, these are available on the SBA web site, the exam paper writer will not ask for anything that is not contained therein.

A recommended Reading List can be obtained on the SBA website at Learn, Exams & Fees, Basic Beekeeping, Recommended Reading and Information Sources

The SBA Basic Beekeeping Certificate & The Junior Beekeeper Certificate

The first exam that all Scottish Beekeepers should sit is **The Basic Beekeeping Certificate (BB)**, unless under 16, in which case they can elect to take the **Junior Beekeeper (JB)**. These are very practical “over the open hive” oral question and answer exams followed up by 1/2hr or so of oral questions about bees and beekeeping. We would hope that all Scottish Beekeepers would obtain one of these qualifications. The Education Committee has made these exams as “candidate friendly” as possible. A good explanation of taking the BB was given in Ian Craig’s article in **The Scottish Beekeeper of April 2012** along with the experiences of recent candidates. These certificates are awarded at Pass (60 to 69%), Credit (70 to 79%) and Distinction (80% & above). Passing the BB or JB at Pass or above level enables you to apply for the Module exams and the Intermediate Practical.

General reading of good quality bee books is very worthwhile and the examiners lean quite heavily on the following books amongst others – Ted Hooper’s *Bees & Honey* – a comprehensive knowledge base, originally written by a man who had years of practical beekeeping experience, Eva Crane’s *A Book of Honey*, Ron Brown’s *Beekeeping – A Seasonal Guide*, & especially his *Beeswax*, for all things waxy, , Dade’s *Bee Anatomy* – wonderful fold out diagrams of the bee’s body parts, Dorothy Hodge’s *Pollen of the Honey Bee* also Rex Sawyers *Pollen Identification for Beekeepers* – these latter three are invaluable for the Microscopy module. Since beekeepers are sometimes accused of being a little weak on botany, two other valuable reference books are *The Wild Flower Key* by Francis Rose (updated by Clare O’Reilly) and *Plants & Honey Bees (their relationship)* by David Aston & Sally Bucknall. The Yates’ husband and wife team made it a mission in life to write study-note books for the Modules and these are invaluable as well indexed technical manuals for exam takers. There are 4 Yates books covering Modules 1 to 3, 5 to 8, Microscopy & one for the Basic Beekeeping Certificate. So get your list written for Santa & the Birthday Fairy.

The Moir Library in Edinburgh is of course a valuable source of information – all of the above books plus many others are available on loan (see the front page inside the front cover of this magazine for Convener & Library contact details).

Turning to the SBA Modular exams. Having fixed on the modules you want to take, it is useful to form a study group with one or more colleagues and get a spread of ideas on how to tackle the subjects under study. You can also give support to one another and make study a more social and enjoyable pastime. Especially try and **nail down the likely number of individual facts that you'll have to master to answer a specific question** e.g. seeding coarse crystallizing honey with fine crystallizing honey to give a smooth creamed honey – there are about 22 separate steps in this operation including the statements about critical temperatures, filtering, pre-preparation of equipment and other details. The examiner will therefore usually offer about 20 marks for such a question.

During revision, it will help if you make hand written notes, as well as helping to learn, it will give you confidence in putting your thoughts down on paper. This is particularly important if it is some time since you have sat a written exam. Use clear headings for your revision notes and highlight key points and phrases.

Arrange to sit some mock exams in your study group – get a past paper, sit a couple of questions one evening and then mark each other's papers and discuss how you could improve.

Obtaining some past papers is useful, towards the latter part of your studies, but do not start with them too soon as you may have a tendency to learn the content necessary to be able to answer the specific questions on that paper, which of course may not appear in the exam paper you sit. Past papers are available on the Members Pages of the SBA web-site.

So, you're all prepared, you turn up at the invigilators house, maybe a quick coffee, sit down, get settled and the paper appears. You are normally allowed 10 minutes over and above the exam time to read the paper and plan which questions you are going to tackle. How should you spend the 10 minutes? You should have a quick scan through the entire paper. All exam papers tend to be broken down into 3 sections –A, B and C.

A is an obligatory "settler" section of 10 questions, 1 point per question –doesn't need much planning, hopefully you'll be able to score at least 7 or 8.

B is a section of usually 5 questions worth 15 points each and you have to choose 4 of the five. Quite often these questions will be split into 2 or 3 parts with a number of points allocated to each part. Now here is the trick – if the examiner has allocated, say 5 points, to a particular part of the question, he will have in his devious exam setter's mind that there are at least 5 separate facts that you could write in answer to his question. So bear in mind – **the clue's in the question**. In your 10 minute pre-read ask yourself as you skim over the questions – "now he's allocated 10 points there, do I know 10 different things about that subject without too much of what Nicholas Parsons of BBC's "Just a Minute" fame would describe as "hesitation, repetition or deviation"? For sure if it's a 10 pointer and you only write down 2 things, you'll unlikely gain more than 2 out of 10. If you write 12 things – & remember your answer "facts" can be short – then there's a good chance the markers (who are very kind people on the whole) can squeeze 8 or 9 out of 10 for you, even if you have veered a little into the "repetition/deviation" zone. In order to mould and clarify your thought process it sometimes helps to take a new line for each fact.

The third section, C, is usually a choice of answering one question from a choice of two, usually worth 30 marks but again frequently broken down into two parts maybe worth 20 marks and 10 marks. Again, take the clue from the number of marks on offer – be prepared to outline more details for the 20 mark section than for the 10 mark section. Sometimes the two sections will be linked as in other questions, opening up the subject in the first part and exploring further in the second part.

Now it's time to start writing.

It sometimes helps to first write down the crucial two or three words of the question and the question value, just as a wee reminder. For example; the question asks about non-viral diseases of adult honey bees and awards 6 points – write down “non-viral” and “adult” -6. Alternatively underline the crucial words on the question paper.

The trickiest module in terms of the number of things to remember is perhaps Module 5 – Biology, unless you have previously had some exposure to things biological, so get started with the more straightforward modules - 1, 2 & 3. Before tackling Module 5, learn some of the Latin terms e.g. anterior = front, posterior = rear, dorsal = back, ventral = underside – this will enable you to learn the biological facts more quickly and make them easier to remember. **Make sketches during your revision, it helps to gel facts into your memory.**

In general, keep writing. The markers cannot award marks for blank pages. They will however, often be sympathetic to facts written down which are a little off-beam, but display that you have a reasonably wide knowledge of beekeeping.

The Microscopy module is much **more practical based** and the SBA at present alternate a microscopy one or two day course followed the next Spring with an exam. These short courses covers all the areas you will be tested on during the exam – understanding the two types of microscope, preparing microscope slides of pollen and disease pathogens, dissecting a bee and identifying the internal organs. After the instruction course **you thus have a year to practice** and make up the slides required in the exam. Microscopy is all about practice – the tutor can demonstrate till the cows come home, but **you must practice**. Many Local Associations have microscopes which can be borrowed and some members purchase their own. Dissecting microscopes (bee dissection) cost upwards of £150, Compounds (pollen grain and disease pathogen identification) from about £250. Many beekeepers find the study of pollen slides quite fascinating and go on to build up slide libraries of different pollens. Two books particularly valuable for this are Dorothy Hodge's book and Rex Sawyer's Pollen Identification for Beekeepers (key) book (keying-out is the method of gradually zoning in on a plant species by identifying a series of flower/leaf shape characteristics or in this case pollen grain characteristics).

From March 2014, two diets of written Module exams (Modules 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 & 8) will be run in March and November. Modules 1 to 7 must be passed before Module 8 is tried. Applications are invited in the Scottish Beekeeper magazine typically 2 months ahead of the exam dates.

The microscopy course is usually held in late March/early April and is advertised in the January Magazine.

So, have a go - once you develop a thirst for knowledge, there will be no holding you back.

For information on the SBA Education System, go to the SBA website, hover over Learn & click Exams & Fees. This will take you to the links for all syllabuses and support documents..

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