



MARITIME TEST OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

MarTEL offers a new and innovative approach to the Maritime English Language of mariners and port workers across the European Union. Through an interactive online learning platform, MarTEL will create and test a set of accepted standards of Maritime English Language for merchant seafarers whose first language is not English. The MarTEL Project is currently being developed by a consortium of highly experienced European partners; each comes from a different but related background that complements the project perfectly. The consortium includes maritime universities and training institutions as well as private companies which have hold specific experience or expertise in the project's area.

The Project is supported by the European Union, which has funded the development and research of MarTEL since 2007. The project has received recognition from the EU because it meets several criteria for future development within the union by both encouraging and promoting lifelong learning among adult European learners and promotes the development of linguistic diversity and closer cohesion in Europe. MarTEL's main aim is to improve safety at sea, which justifies the Project's inclusion within the EU's Leonardo da Vinci Programme.

At first maritime English may not seem to be of great importance; however the issue takes on greater significance when one considers the fact that the 75% of seafarers presently employed aboard merchant ships or at work in most European Ports do not come from European Union countries and have been educated at institutions outside of the Union and are not fluent or even able to speak English at all. Because merchant shipping is an international industry and accurate communication is vital. It is widely accepted that English is the language of the sea. Therefore a seafarer's ability to communicate to a high standard of English is essential. For this reason the MarTEL Project was first initiated. Furthermore the staggeringly high number of accidents being caused or in some way related to poor levels of maritime English language being used aboard merchant vessels or port workers was of increasing concern to both seafarers, ship owners/operators and maritime education and training (MET) institutions alike. The problem acquired greater significance upon the publication of official International Maritime Organisation (IMO) statistics, stating clearly that 80% of accidents at sea are caused by human error, nearly half of which are attributed to communications failures.

There was also a distinct lack of standards for the certification of Maritime English at international, European and even national levels, other than the existing English language standards and maritime English course model including the IMO's SMCP (Standard Maritime Communication Phrases, 2001). Consequently the MarTEL consortium has endeavoured to produce, a set of Maritime English standards (based upon the existing guidelines and requirements) and to develop a system of online testing for it. This is expected to be incorporated and accepted by a number of MET institutions and accreditation bodies (inc. Edexcel) across the European Union. The core aim of the project intends to produce a series of maritime English language standards at three different levels, which will then be tested via MarTEL online platform, these levels include:

- The **Preparation standards** will include tests at three levels of proficiency: Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced. All levels will include active skills, such as Speaking, Comprehension and Writing. The content would be based on active learning and on maritime terminology and usage, with little emphasis on grammar.
- The **Officer standards** will be based on TOEFL 550-550 standards but with content based primarily on either Navigation English or Marine Engineering English. These tests will focus on skill levels considered appropriate for a given type and rank of officer, with less prominence to grammar.
- The **Senior Officer standards** will be equivalent to TOEFL 550-600 and aimed at the senior officers in charge of vessels over 3000 GRT. The standard will include a section on language requirements for these vessels. All standards for Officer and Senior Officer Levels will give differing levels of importance to different skills and proficiency requirements at various ranks and duties. For example, a Chief Engineer should be competent on comprehension (especially reading) and writing but a more moderate level of speaking may be tolerated.

The impact of the MarTEL project is expected to be significant and wide ranging. MarTEL will save lives at sea. All too often an accident at sea leads to the deaths of seafarers. These are considered industrial accidents and are rarely reported in the international or even national press, and owing to the global nature of merchant shipping these deaths often go unnoticed by the wider world. MarTEL is expected to have another important impact, which involves the reduction of waste in merchant shipping equipment and cargo. Although deaths do occur, the accidents often occur nearer land or in ports which, although less life threatening still results in the loss of expensive cargos. Take for example the recent cases of cargo being lost from carrier ships around the UK alone, which although not caused by failures in maritime English, easily could have been. This type of accident causes a host of problems including the loss of the ship, or cargo, all of which leads inescapably towards the increase of shipping insurance. Finally MarTEL is expected to have indirect environmental impact. If safety standards are improved as a consequence of better communication skills it follows that greater safety at sea will lead to fewer environmental disasters like that of the oil tanker Prestige. In November 2002 the Liberian tanker, Prestige, broke up and sank with 77,000 tons of oil on board, just 120 miles off the Spanish coast. Several hours before the first distress call, in an exchange between the Prestige and the Cape Finisterre station, communication was calm and clear and used SMCP. However after the first mayday call communication procedures broke down and the SMCP were abandoned, consequently the emergency situation was badly handled by the ship's crew. The resultant oil spill left thousands of fishermen out of work, and contaminated more than 100 beaches and caused untold damage to the environment which may have been reduced had proper communications been followed throughout.

The MarTEL project aims to address poor communication at sea through in-depth training of mariners to a high standard. To enhance MarTEL's potential each stage of the Project has followed a process of evaluation and phase testing of the standards and their accompanying online testing facility. Phase one's sample test aimed to assess the language proficiency level of a candidate, wishing to enter a MET institute/centre as a cadet officer.

The evaluation process was headed by a MarTEL Task Force assessing the appropriateness (validity), currency and scope of the MarTEL Phase One test under controlled conditions with real cadets at a MET institution in Turkey, Poland and Finland. The findings were encouraging and showed the true extent of the MarTEL Project's potential in developing appropriate maritime English language standards at this level. The testing process actually highlighted the strengths of the methods for developing content in that the testing was valid and the results favourable, with only a few minor areas for improvement (largely centring upon the phrasing of questions).

MarTEL phases 1 & 2 sample tests are presently undergoing the final stages of development in preparation for its final testing and evaluation stage before being piloted in a number of European MET institutions. The final development stages include the development and evaluation of Phase 3 of the standard tests, which focuses on the development and testing standards for senior officers (Captains and Chief Engineers) levels of maritime English language.

It is expected that MarTEL will be ready for delivery by the end of the third quarter of 2009 and will be ready for presentation to international accrediting and awarding bodies, first in Europe, and in the longer-term, on a global basis. The TUDEV Institute of Maritime Studies in Turkey has been chosen as the first port of call for actual testing of MarTEL for three reasons. First they are a key partner in the consortium developing MarTEL and therefore enjoy a unique and detailed understanding of the project. The second reason is their vast experience in implementing other such new maritime standards and courses, within their existing framework of MET curricula. Finally TUDEV is a good environment to house MarTEL and has contacts in the Maritime sector, including awarding bodies and merchant shipping providers, thus ensuring that MarTEL can advance quickly beyond TUDEV to other MET institutions. After successful pilot testing in Turkey, tentative plans are already being made to implement MarTEL in other MET institutions within the consortium, like, Finland, or Norway or Poland.

The continual development and implementation of the MarTEL Project is therefore well on track for its scheduled completion and piloting in Turkey. The MarTEL Partnership is convinced by early testing and the interest already shown by European MET providers in the long-term the MarTEL project is expected to have a major impact in teaching of Maritime English and its assessment. This will therefore be an eventful year in introducing MarTEL and the expected improvements in safety at sea for European seafarers in the near future. For more information and regular up-dates on the MarTEL Project, please visit <http://www.maritime-tests.org/>