

Test Tips: Passing the ISP Exam

by William L. Uttenweiler, ISP
NCMS Florida Space Coast (June 2006 - present)
NCMS Channel Islands Chapter (January 1997 - June 2006)

As a former part-time teacher, I thought it would be helpful for future candidates to get tips from those who have already passed the ISP exam. I have contacted all those who took the exam during its initial paper offerings. I asked what tips they would share with future test takers. I hope you find them both insightful and helpful.

This article was originally written for publication in the January/February 2005 issue of NCMS's newsletter, the *CM Bulletin*. It has been revised to incorporate tips from newly certified ISPs, including people who have taken the on-line version of the test. That is why there are now three parts to the article:

- * General Tips
- * Tips for the Paper Test
- * Tips for the On-Line Test

I would like to thank all the professionals who took the time to share their insights and tips with those coming behind them..

GENERAL TIPS

FACT: The test consists of 100 multiple choice questions on the main topics and 10 on the electives. The exam is "open book." Candidates may not reach out to other people during the test, whether in person or by phone, text messages, email, instant messaging, or any other means. You

have two hours (120 minutes) to complete it. The two-hour time limit is purposefully designed into the test. It may allow the applicant time to look up only 10-20 questions. You need to know most of the answers. *ISP Certification Program Requirements & Application*, which is on-line at this URL: <http://www.ncms-isp.org/documents/brochure.pdf>.

FACT: There are nine major areas covered by the test (plus electives). The nine are: security administration and management; document security; information systems security; physical security; personnel security; international security; classification; security education; and audits and self-assessments. *ISP Certification Program Requirements and Application* at [http://www.classmgmt.com/ISP Certification Program/brochure.pdf](http://www.classmgmt.com/ISP_Certification_Program/brochure.pdf).

FACT: Not everyone passes. At the offering in June 2004 in Reno, NV, the pass rate was 75%. That is about what it was during the "beta test" sessions. Dr. James N. Hickok, ISP, former NCMS National President, winner NCMS Society Award, Communications Training Analysis Corp., Albuquerque, NM.

FACT: The scores were higher in June 2005 Seattle NV and the pass rate was 85% there! The study sessions paid off. Dr. James N. Hickok, ISP, former NCMS National President, winner NCMS Society Award, Communications Training Analysis Corp., Albuquerque, NM.

FACT: Breaks are allowed. You can leave the room to use a restroom or stretch



your legs. However, you lose the time, so hardly anyone ever takes one. Dr. James N. Hickok, ISP, former NCMS National President, winner NCMS Society Award, Communications Training Analysis Corp., Albuquerque, NM.

☺ **TIP:** THAT TEST WAS HARD! Ray Hair, ISP, ISMSI, Annandale, VA; and Clifford Baughn, ISP, L-3 Communications, San Carlos, CA.

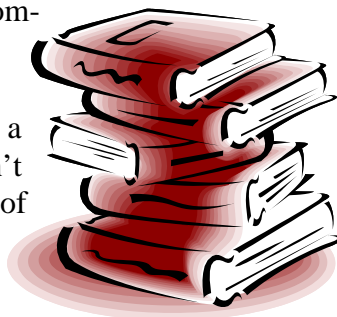
☺ **TIP:** Even if you are a seasoned security professional, don't just take the exam "cold." Many of the questions require knowledge of how things are done "in the trenches," not just overall policies or best practices. You have many choices in preparing -- 100% independent study, doing the ISP Exam Preparation Program (EPP) Workbook on your own, or participating completely in the EPP. Kathy Dolan, ISP, Infinity Systems Engineering, Colorado Springs, CO.

☺ **TIP:** Most of the government tests I have taken are pretty easy. Their "distracter" answers are easily eliminated if you know much about the subject. That was not true for this test. It was much better written and, consequently, much tougher. Joseph Reuter, ISP, LinQuest Corporation, Los Angeles, CA.

☺ **TIP:** I would not have been disappointed had I not passed the exam. I gained a tremendous amount of knowledge for myself and my employer - so, at some point, I would have retested and passed it. Dennis L. McCartney, ISP, Northrop Grumman DTRA Field Office, Belgium.

☺ **TIP:** Passing the ISP exam represents a grueling two-hour display of

knowledge across a wide range of industrial security topics. Even "seasoned" facility security officers [those with at least five years' of full-time experience] will need to hit the books before taking it! Dianne M. Raynor, ISP, former NCMS National President, winner NCMS Society Award, The Boeing Company, Vandenberg AFB, CA.



☺ **TIP:** Get management support early on. Somehow you need to promote the ISP concept to your supervisory chain. For anything to succeed and thrive in an organization, the leaders must be with you. Keep them informed. Explain what NCMS is and does. Sell them on the ISP. This makes all the difference in the world. Dennis L. McCartney, ISP, Northrop Grumman DTRA Field Office, Belgium.

☺ **TIP:** I went into taking the test with the understanding that you should look things up before giving the answer. This was wrong. If you do that, you'll never complete it! Answer the questions that you can from your own knowledge and experience, then go back and tackle the rest. Linda Johnson, ISP, Northrop Grumman Corporation, Pleasant Hill, CA

☺ **TIP:** Don't forget that each question is only worth 0.9 points on a 100-point scale. Just reminding myself of that kept me from getting bogged down on a single question. Cynthia Sabelhaus, ISP, Raytheon Missile Systems, Tuscon, AZ.

☺ **TIP:** During my first time through the exam, I only marked for review the ones I didn't know. I wish now I had also marked the ones I wasn't sure of but was willing to guess on. Because I didn't waste time, I had addition review time at the end.

Kimberly Perry, ISP, Applied Research Associates, Albuquerque, NM.

☺ **TIP:** Once you have set your goal to obtain the prestigious ISP Certification, the next step is almost certainly to sign up for the Exam Preparation Program. Okay that is the easy part. Then you must complete your assignments in your workbook each week and call in to a session prepared to answer the questions and contribute to discussions relating to the particular subject. This helps you, as well as, the other participants calling in. Hazel Martinez, ISP, winner, NCMS Information Security Award, SARA, Inc., Albuquerque, NM.

☺ **TIP:** The workbook from the ISP Exam Prep Program was a lifesaver! I had a large number of questions on Chapter 8 when I took the test. That's an area I don't work with. Thanks to careful study of the workbook, I scored 10 for 10 on one of those sections. I cannot recommend the workbook strongly enough! Patricia D. Robbins, ISP, winner NCMS Information Security Award, Cubic Applications Inc, Lacey, WA.

☺ **TIP:** Are your test-taking skills rusty? Considering taking a few computer-based training (CBT) classes like JPAS, USAF Information Security, etc. They are free, give quick feedback, and will help you practice reading the questions carefully. The DSS Academy offers a large number of them that fit in with the ISP exam content. The DSSA catalog is available at: http://dssa.dss.mil/seta/documents/combined_catalog.pdf. William L. Uttenweiler, ISP, winner NCMS Information Security Award, NCMS Society Award & NCMS

Presidential Award, The Aerospace Corporation, Cape Canaveral AFS, FL.

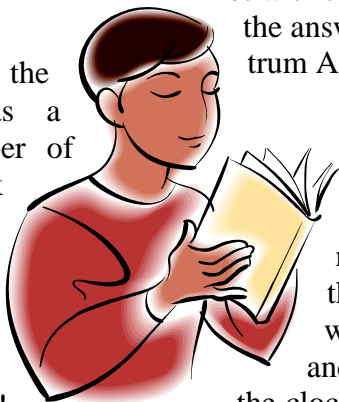
☺ **TIP:** Answer the questions you know. If you don't know an answer, move on, and come back to that question later on. Something else in the test may jog your memory. Barbara Taylor, ISP, winner NCMS Society Award, NCMS Information Security Award, NCMS Presidential Award, Raytheon Company, El Segundo, CA.

☺ **TIP:** When you come to a question that you do not know the answer to, write down the question number, the page number, and the topic. This list will help a lot with time management, and where to find the answers. Debbie L. Young, ISP, Spectrum Astro, Gilbert, AZ.

☺ **TIP:** Time management is essential. I was doing fine answering questions but didn't realize how slow I was moving. At the end I took quick guesses, but it wasn't enough. I plan to try again and will pay much closer attention to the clock. [Editor's note: she did and she passed.] Virginia P. Reggiani-Waling, ISP, Qwest, Chandler, AZ.

☺ **TIP:** I found that a lot of the questions I had trouble with were related to a few topics. When I grouped those together I could find several answers by reading just one of two sections of my reference materials – another time saver. Patrick W. Dale, ISP, winner NCMS Information Security Award, Systems Planning Corp, Lexington Park, MD.

☺ **TIP:** Do not use common guessing techniques on answering multiple choice questions, like “pick the most inclusive answer.” They don't work. Jody J.



Woenker, ISP, ITT Industries, Fort Wayne, IN.

FACT: The NCMS web site provides a complete list of the references for the test at http://www.ncms-isp.org/Study_Resources/ISP_Study_Resources.asp. The page has been reorganized and revised in late summer 2005 to update links and make it more user-friendly.

☺ **TIP:** Study the source material, especially the NISPOM. Another big help was reading the program textbooks from the Defense Security Service Academy's industrial security courses. Jo-Ann C. Webber, ISP, Dynamic Analytics & Test Inc., Arlington, VA.

☺ **TIP:** Even if you think you already know the business, it would help if you went through the NISPOM at least once as a refresher. It's amazing what you think you know as opposed to what you really do. Cynthia Cornelious, ISP, Raytheon Company, Falls Church, VA.

☺ **TIP:** If you know **where** stuff is located in the NISPOM you'll do fine. We all know the chapters – but the section and verse are even more important. Lawrence Mustonen, ISP, General Dynamics Information Systems, Bloomington, MN.

☺ **TIP:** READ the NISPOM!!!! and when you think you just couldn't bear to open its pages again – just do it!!!! You will be so thankful that you KNOW that book!!!! And PRACTICE working with [The Annotated NISPOM](#) until finding what you want feels comfortable – knowing your NISPOM and being comfortable with it is a lifesaver!!!! It's the KEY!!!! I am glad I studied my study manual and my notes – for

sure - but for the actual test it was knowing where to go (fast) in the NISPOM that got me through! Deborah Lelis, ISP, Wyle Aerospace Group, Ridgecrest, CA.

☺ **TIP:** I grew up on the DOE side of the security world where the NISPOM is/was mostly “irrelevant” because the DOE told us how to act – in very gory detail (no NISPOM required!). So, when I set out to achieve this professional certification, I realized that while I've been at this business about as long as anyone in NCMS, I probably had zero direct knowledge of the rather expansive content in the NISPOM and the associated reference library. . . . The answer for a person in my situation (x-DOE contractor) is to open the NISPOM and study; i.e., study intently. Harold “Rob” Robinson, ISP, BTAS Inc, Beaver Creek, OH.

☺ **TIP:** During the ISP Exam Preparation Program sessions I stress using the NISPOM as the "Font of Wisdom". The workbook simply highlights certain things in each NISPOM chapter. You still need to read the NISPOM to come up with a workbook answer. I also stress your search methodology. The workbook is sort of like a practice exam. It forces you to look up the answer in the NISPOM. Doing this better prepares you for the real exam. Bohdan Stryk, ISP, winner NCMS Information Security Award, Boandi Corporation, Phoenix, AZ.



☺ **TIP:** When I tested, I had a “cheat sheet” listing all of the numbers I'd spotted. An example would be the 30-day stipulation of NISPOM paragraph 2-205. It's easy to confuse numbers – 30 days? 45 days? 60 days? That way, any time I came across a number in a test question, I could refer to my sheet. It was a great help.

James Massaro, ISP, University of Texas – San Antonio, San Antonio, TX

☺ **TIP:** Start to study early! Some of the references need to be read and re-read again and again. I can remember starting to study in mid-February for the June ISP exam. Dennis L. McCartney, ISP, Northrop Grumman DTRA Field Office, Belgium.

☺ **TIP:** Seek assistance. If you don't understand a security area, there is a wealth of expertise out there. Whether this expertise comes in the form of your co-workers, boss, DSS agents or fellow NCMSers – ask any and all of them if you have questions. They were with me when I took the test. Dennis L. McCartney, ISP, Northrop Grumman DTRA Field Office, Belgium.

☺ **TIP:** The Mentors from the ISP Exam Preparation Program are **INVALUABLE** – call in!!!!!!!!!! The Mentors are **AWESOME!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!** In every way – they are the best cheerleaders you could ever hope to have!!!!!! Deborah Lelis, ISP, Wyle Aerospace Group, Ridgecrest, CA.

☺ **TIP:** Check into whether or not your local NCMS chapter has implemented resources to assist you in your goal of attaining the ISP Certification. Some chapters have created "study groups" or compiled references on media to assist you with your certification. Some chapters will also provide financial assistance to cover the cost of the exam if your company/organization does not do so. David Perry, ISP, BBNT Solutions, Cambridge, MA.

☺ **TIP:** Be sure to study the international/foreign security requirements in the

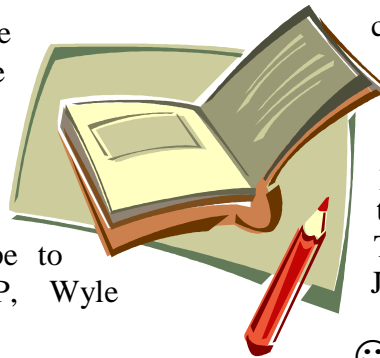
NISPOM! My facility does not participate in overseas classified work; therefore, I found that particular section to be difficult and time consuming as I had to take more time than I would have wanted to research the answer. Another area to study is OPSEC. Lisa I. Vaillancourt, ISP, Northrop Grumman Space & Mission Systems, Burlington, MA.

☺ **TIP:** On the exam, even if you mark a question for review I suggest marking your best guess right then (you can always change it later). If you run short on time you'll be hard pressed to re-read very many unanswered questions before time runs out. Leonard G. Burger, ISP, Boeing Company, Huntsville, AL.

☺ **TIP:** I had the misperception that all chapters of the NISPOM were covered by an equal number of questions. As a result, I did not pay enough attention to Chapter 8 – a long chapter and probably my weakest. That is the primary reason I didn't pass. Two unsuccessful candidates, June 2009 from Anaheim, CA.

☺ **TIP:** When going through the workbook, answer the question with the correct words or sentence. No answers in the test are longer than a few words or a single sentence. When taking the Exam Prep Program, most people answered workbook questions with paragraph after paragraph of NISPOM. If you do that nothing will sink in when its test time. Answer the question specifically as asked. Roger Mackenzie, ISP, iRobot Corporation, Haverhill, MA.

☺ **TIP:** Don't take any area of the content for granted. I did the poorest on areas I thought I was most comfortable and did very well on the area I am the least



comfortable with. Alycia Harris, ISP, ITT Corporation, Trinity, AL.

☺ **TIP:** When I skimmed the first page of two of the exam, I my confidence lag because the questions seem to come from areas I was relatively weak in. Then I decided to stick to my test plan – I answered the questions I knew and gave tentative answers to the ones I was less sure of, marking those for review at the end. It worked. As I went along I regained my confidence . . . and I passed. Roger Mackenzie, ISP, iRobot Corporation, Haverhill, MA.

☺ **TIP:** After allowing work to prevent my involvement in the weekly call-ins for three years, I decided to go ahead and take the test at the 2009 NCMS Seminar. However, I had read the NISPOM and answered all of the workbook questions on my own. I listened to the two weekly call-in recorded sessions where I felt my knowledge was the weakest. I spent Sunday evening reviewing my source material and tabbing both the NISPOM and the workbook. I also brought my laptop with The Annotated NISPOM into the test room. If you've prepared well, believe in yourself and take the challenge. Michael V. Warren, ISP, Bechtel Corporation, Frederick, MD.

☺ **TIP:** Study the same way to plan to take the test. If you are using the electronic copy of the NISPOM as your reference material, study that way. Look up workbook questions using that. If you plan to use a hard copy during the exam, then look up your study questions the same way. I learned how to search the softcopy NISPOM very quickly which saved me a lot of time during the test. I would not have passed without following this

recommendation. William Duvall, ISP, Science Applications International Corp (SAIC), Germantown, MD.

☺ **TIP:** Just as you “crammed” before a test in high school or college, cram just before you take the ISP exam. Clear your calendar for the 24 hours before the test so you can reread the NISPOM and other critical references. (Don't focus on the workbook. You need to refresh yourself on the language used in the source documents.) Put those ideas and terms into your short-term memory. Allow time to eat and sleep well. William L. Uttenweiler, ISP, winner NCMS Information Security Award, NCMS Society Award & NCMS Presidential Award, The Aerospace Corporation, Cape Canaveral AFS, FL.

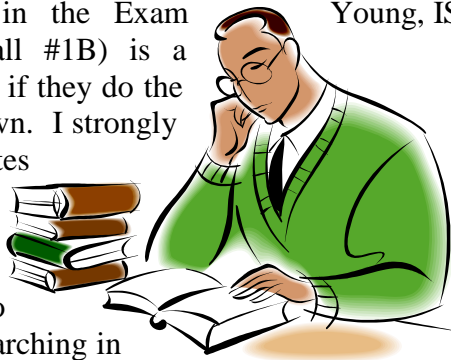
☺ **TIP:** Before I take most high stakes exam, like the CPP which I passed, it put aside plenty of time for review. However, my schedule was too hectic right before I took the ISP and I didn't have time. I think the absence of my review/cram time was the reason I failed. Anonymous unsuccessful candidate, June 2009 from Anaheim, CA.

☺ **TIP:** We have all spoken to the issue of poor time management resulting in the failure to pass the ISP exam. After proctoring several exams I have noticed that the ability to use open sources during the exam may be a curse rather than a blessing in many cases. Because the individuals taking the exam has the references available, they are more likely to look up and verify more questions than is necessary. If the proper preparation and study has been completed prior to sitting down to test, the answers are there....you must trust your first instinct and save the open references to look up only those questions that are truly in doubt.



Dianne Walton, ISP, CISSP, Exam Proctor, winner NCMS Information Security Award, Northrop-Grumman, Orlando FL.

☺ **TIP:** Using *The Annotated NISPOM* greatly reduces most Candidate's searching time when they are hunting for answers. That lesson in the Exam Preparation Program (Call #1B) is a must for Candidates, even if they do the EPP workbook on their own. I strongly recommend that Candidates use [TAN](#) to look up the workbook definitions/ key terms. It gives them much needed practice so they have more skill in searching in Adobe Reader and more confidence when they take the test. Dianne Walton, ISP, CISSP, Exam Proctor, winner NCMS Information Security Award, Northrop-Grumman, Orlando FL.



☺ **TIP:** [A different viewpoint] It wasn't any more beneficial to use the online NISPOM or other resources. It took just as long to complete. Lawrence Mustonen, ISP, General Dynamics Information Systems, Bloomington, MN.

☺ **TIP:** [Yet a third] Bring both! Lisa I. Vaillancourt, ISP, Northrop Grumman Space & Mission Systems, Burlington, MA.

☺ **TIP:** At the 2005 testing in Seattle, WA, NCMS had the hotel provide power strips so we didn't have to rely on our batteries. Sounds good, right? I plugged my laptop in and was computing/testing happily until about 1.5 hours in the test. Then I realized my battery was down to 21% power! Why wasn't the power strip working? Answer: It was installed turned off and I hadn't noticed. Lesson: Check and recheck. William L. Uttenweiler, ISP, winner NCMS Information Security Award,

NCMS Society Award & NCMS Presidential Award, The Aerospace Corporation, Cape Canaveral AFS, FL.

☺ **TIP:** Organize your reference materials in a fashion that you are familiar with and that you have reviewed. Debbie L. Young, ISP, Spectrum Astro, Gilbert, AZ.

☺ **TIP:** Download all the soft copy references and put them on a separate computer on the "desktop view" so you can quickly see each document in its icon view. I found it easier and faster to retrieve and open them when I saw the icon and document title on the desktop. The ability to do work and/or phrase searches in the soft copies (whether the documents were in MS Word or Adobe PDF format) was very handy for me. Conrad C. Hertzog Jr., ISP, Northrop Grumman, Colorado Springs, CO.

☺ **TIP:** Get or make a "cheat sheet" of major topics and subtopics and where to find that them in the NISPOM or other reference material. That way you will be able to look up a particular topic much more quickly. Barbara Taylor, ISP, winner NCMS Society Award, NCMS Information Security Award, NCMS Presidential Award, Raytheon Company, El Segundo, CA.

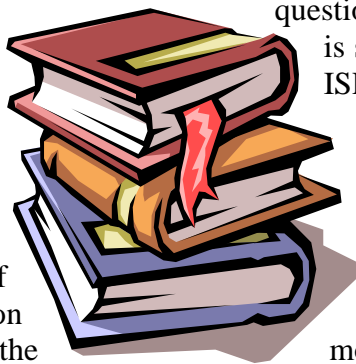
☺ **TIP:** Make your space comfortable and plan out where your reference material will be (if it isn't electronic). I had more reference material than I could possibly have used – even taped to the walls – but even unused, it was a great comfort knowing it was within reach, just in case. Anything that can relieve the stress of a timed test helps. Shona L Nietzsche, ISP, Raytheon Company, Aurora, CO.

☺ **TIP:** Two tips for improving your searches if you use the “soft” copy materials. First, be sure you have the most recent version of Adobe Acrobat Reader. Second, check the block so that your search criteria for “whole words.” That improves results. Candidate Janice Kolts, The Boeing Company, Kent, WA.

☺ **TIP:** I was able to look up quite a few questions using the search feature with my laptop and the softcopy “Annotated NISPOM.” However, the test writers for the new test (based on the 2006 NISPOM) didn’t exactly copy the language of the reference into the questions so I had to be flexible. Kim McLean, ISP, L-3 Communications, Santa Maria, CA.

FACT: The material includes four elective sections. You must answer from two of them. The elective categories are: intellectual property; COMSEC/ TEMPSET; counterintelligence; and operations security (OPSEC). Dr. James N. Hickok, ISP, former NCMS National President, winner NCMS Society Award, Communications Training Analysis Corp., Albuquerque, NM.

☺ **TIP:** Thinking about choosing the OPSEC questions? Consider taking (or retaking) the Interagency Support Staff’s (IOSS) computer-based course OPSE 301, Fundamentals of OPSEC. It’s an excellent review of the material. It includes specifics on definitions and applying the principles – and excellent introduction or review. William L. Uttenweiler, ISP, winner NCMS Information Security Award, NCMS Society Award & NCMS Presidential Award, The Aerospace Corporation, Cape Canaveral AFS, FL.



FACT: The question bank is 500 and it

will be updated every year. Different tests will have a significant percentage of different questions, so memorizing the answers will not get you a pass. We also will mix the order of the questions. Dr. James N. Hickok, ISP, former NCMS National President, winner NCMS Society Award, Communications Training Analysis Corp., Albuquerque, NM.

☺ **TIP:** Don’t forget to study the electives too. I missed six out of the 10 elective questions. Fortunately, I had done well enough on the core questions to get a passing grade overall. James W. Curran, ISP, Applied Signal & Image Technology Inc., Linthicum, MD.

FACT: While there is no guessing penalty, you can only afford to miss 25% of the questions; therefore, guessing should be a last resort. Dr. James N. Hickok, ISP, former NCMS National President, winner NCMS Society Award, Communications Training Analysis Corp., Albuquerque, NM.

☺ **TIP:** If you are down to the last five minutes and you haven’t answered all the questions, mark some answer. A blank is sure to be wrong. Dotti S. Bitner, ISP, winner NCMS Society Award, Rockwell Scientific LLC, Thousand Oaks, CA.

☺ **TIP:** I completed the ISP Exam Preparation Program in June 2006 and waited over a month and a half before I took the exam on-line. I passed but with a lower score than I’d hoped for. I hadn’t cracked a book since the telecons completed, and that was a huge mistake! Test while the material is still fresh in your memory. Elizabeth A. Bostick, ISP, Batelle Memorial Institute, Columbus, OH.

☺ **TIP:** Thanks to the workbook I passed the test after waiting 11 months from the completion of the ISP prep course. As you can imagine, the material was not fresh in my mind. . . I want to thank you for the workbook and the test taking tips. They really saved me! Lisa J. Riley, ISP, AT&T Government Solutions, San Diego, CA.

☺ **TIP:** After taking the exam online (and “almost” passing) vs. taking the hardcopy exam, I, of course, recommend the hard copy route. I marked the questions I wanted to research and had plenty of time at the end to look each one up. Also, the second exam had a different “twist” with new questions so I was glad I didn’t limit or focus my studying to those questions I remembered having on the first exam. Elizabeth M. Tingwall, ISP, The Boeing Company, Albuquerque, NM.

☺ **TIP:** If you make the investment in *ISP Certification – The Industrial Security Professional Exam Manual or How to Prepare for and Pass the Industrial Security Professional Certification Exam* by Jeffrey W. Bennett, ISP and you think the test questions are the same, you are out of luck. But test taking is a lot like sports; his book was a great practice tool for the “game conditions” (especially the fact that two hours goes by extremely fast). Pete Short, ISP, Ball Aerospace & Technologies, Broomfield, CO.

FACT: The test fee is \$200 for NCMS members; \$300 for non-members. *ISP Certification Program Requirements and Application* at http://www.classmgt.com/ISP_Certification_Program/brochure.pdf.



Vintage ISP Pin Design

☺ **TIP:** That represents a \$100 savings – a great benefit for NCMS members. Also, NCMS members get a \$50 discount when registering for the annual National Training Seminar. Since the combined entrance fee and first year’s member only cost \$105, it’s like joining NCMS for free! Any non-member who is thinking of becoming a certified ISP should take advantage of this GREAT opportunity! William L. Uttenweiler, ISP, winner NCMS Information Security Award, NCMS Society Award & NCMS Presidential Award, The Aerospace Corporation, Cape Canaveral AFS, FL.

☺ **TIP:** Round pegs for round holes. Square pegs for square holes. Pick and choose which of these tips/techniques work best for you. William L. Uttenweiler, ISP, winner NCMS Information Security Award, NCMS Society Award & NCMS Presidential Award, The Aerospace Corporation, Cape Canaveral AFS, FL.

☺ **TIP:** From taking my own test and proctoring others – RELAX! You’ve presumably studied the NISPOM, ISLs, and electives, gathered and mentally organized your source materials, so now you need to take a deep breath when you walk into your test site and have faith in your preparation. I proctored a gentleman who panicked at the beginning and wasted a lot of time searching for answers. When he realized the time was ticking away, he picked up the pace. He finally relaxed and let his preparation guide him through the test...and he passed just fine. Conversely, I had a nightmare trip out to the NCMS conference, only arriving two hours prior to the test. I was tired, jetlagged, and frazzled, but not about the test. I knew I had prepared well and knew I could find any answer I needed. It worked – I passed. So

just RELAX!! Erica Simmons, ISP, Paradigm Technologies,

TIPS FOR THE PAPER TEST

☺ **TIP:** I flew to Reno NV on the morning of the exam in 2004. My plane arrived late, I felt rushed and hassled, etc. If you can, I'd recommend arriving at the conference the day before. That way you can be settled and well rested before the test. Cheryl K. Pelton, ISP, three-time winner NCMS Society Award, Sonatech Inc., Santa Barbara, CA.

☺ **TIP:** I really appreciated the get together for lunch before the exam as well. It helped me focus my energy on some last minute areas. Kim McLean, ISP, L-3 Communications, Santa Maria, CA.

☺ **TIP:** If you plan on taking the ISP Exam at one of the National Training Seminars, you should make sure that you get a lot of rest and remain "clear headed" before the exam. We are all tempted to use our "free time" in the hotel to socialize and catch up with friends. A lack of sleep or a lack of focus will surely impact your final score. David Perry, ISP, BBNT Solutions, Cambridge, MA.

FACT: Once the test starts and the door is closed, participants are "locked out." Don't show up late! Dr. James N. Hickok, ISP, former NCMS National President, winner NCMS Society Award, Communications Training Analysis Corp., Albuquerque, NM.

☺ **TIP:** Be prepared for possible noise

distractions if you test at the National Training Seminar. When I tested, there was another group in the next meeting room that was quite "into" their class – laughing, clapping, etc. both during sessions and break time. I had to re-read many of the questions because the noise broke my concentration. Nancy E. Amaral, ISP, Lockheed Martin Corporation, Marion, MA.

☺ **TIP:** Bring a few small "stickles" to mark the pages where you skipped an answer. This makes it easy to go back and find them. Cheryl K. Pelton, ISP, three-time winner NCMS Society Award, Sonatech Inc., Santa Barbara, CA.



☺ **TIP:** Don't plan to have wifi access during the test at the National Training Seminar. For the 2010 session in Reno, it wasn't available. That threw me a loop since several questions came from source material I didn't have readily available in soft or hard copy. Be sure to have all the reference materials you think you'll need in either hard copy or soft copy already on your computer. Cynthia Sabelhaus, ISP, Raytheon Missile Systems, Tucson, AZ.

☺ **TIP:** I marked a plus sign "+" by each questions whose answer I looked up. That way, when I reviewed my work, I knew I didn't need to worry about double-checking those. William L. Uttenweiler, ISP, winner NCMS Information Security Award, NCMS Society Award & NCMS Presidential Award, The Aerospace Corporation, Cape Canaveral AFS, FL.

☺ **TIP:** Pay close attention when you fill in your answers. The answer sheet was separate and I caught myself filling in the

wrong bubble even though I knew the correct answer. Jody J. Woenker, ISP, ITT Industries, Fort Wayne, IN.

☺ **TIP:** At the 2004 test session in Reno NV, we were seated two people per table. That made it easy to spread the reference materials out. Cheryl K. Pelton, ISP, three-time winner NCMS Society Award, Sonatech Inc., Santa Barbara, CA.

☺ **TIP:** Mark your answers directly onto the answer sheet. Don't circle them on the test paper and plan to return at the end to fill in the answer sheet. I did that in Seattle in 2005. I thought I had made my first pass through the exam at a very good pace. Then it took me 5-10 minutes to go back and fill in the answer sheet. Yikes! What if I'd run out of time? William L. Uttenweiler, ISP, winner NCMS Information Security Award, NCMS Society Award & NCMS Presidential Award, The Aerospace Corporation, Cape Canaveral AFS, FL.

☺ **TIP:** We Americans tend to be introspective and self-critical. I felt like I'd nailed the test when I walked out of the room. The longer it took for results to be posted, the more I worried. Do your best; then don't stress. William L. Uttenweiler, ISP, winner NCMS Information Security Award, NCMS Society Award & NCMS Presidential Award, The Aerospace Corporation, Cape Canaveral AFS, FL.



TIPS FOR THE ON-LINE TEST

FACT: On-line test takers get questions from the same test bank as those who take it on paper. They have 100 core questions and

five questions chosen from two of the four elective areas. The questions are presented on the computer screen one at a time. Candidates can “bookmark” questions they want to come back to review at the end. Sharon Tannahill, Executive Director, NCMS Inc., Wayne, PA.

☺ **TIP:** I used a wireless connection during the exam and it took a few seconds for each new test question to load...and just 3 seconds times 110 questions adds up to 5.5 minutes lost. I recommend using a high speed, hard wired connection to avoid this lag time. Leonard G. Burger, ISP, The Boeing Company, Huntsville, AL.

☺ **TIP:** I actually decided not to take the test the date I originally picked because other distractions and stressful situations came up just two days before my test date. I notified NCMS and my proctor and set up a new test date. If you have scheduled a date to take the exam on-line and don't feel 100% ready or clear of mind so you can do your absolute best, reschedule the test. It is better to reschedule and pass the first time, rather than take the test “on time” and fail. Conrad C. Hertzog Jr., ISP, Northrop Grumman, Colorado Springs, CO.

☺ **TIP:** Logging into the secure ISP exam web site was quick and easy. The Candidate logs in; then the Proctor logs in with a verification number provided by NCMS. Ensure the Candidate and the Proctor both have all the required log-in information prior to attempting to start the on-line exam. Conrad C. Hertzog Jr., ISP, Northrop Grumman, Colorado Springs, CO.

☺ **TIP:** I brought a laptop to the proctor's office the first time I took the ISP exam, thinking that it would be for reference materials only. In fact, I had to use that for the internet connectivity to the exam too. During the course of the test, I would minimize the screens back and fourth between the test and his reference material. I accidentally closed the test! It took a couple of minutes to log back in and resume it! That ran up my anxiety level and cost me time. Candidates who take the exam on line should either have two computers, one computer with two regular sized screens, or a single computer with an extra-wide screen. You want to be able to see both the questions and your reference materials on screen at the same time. James R. Bailey Jr., ISP, Northrop Grumman Corporation, Panama City FL.

☺ **TIP:** I came into work on a Saturday to take the exam. No one interrupted me and the office provided a reliable, high-speed connection. I'm glad I didn't try to take it at home. Michael J. Davis, ISP, The Boeing Company, Huntsville, AL.

☺ **TIP:** I came into the office early, closed my door, and took the test. Jeffrey Qualkenbush, ISP, E G & G Technical Services, Holloman AFB, NM.

☺ **TIP:** I stayed after work to take the test. I was fine while taking it, but once I was finished I discovered how tired I was! Jeanette Y. Alderete, ISP, Aegis Research Corporation, Albuquerque, NM.

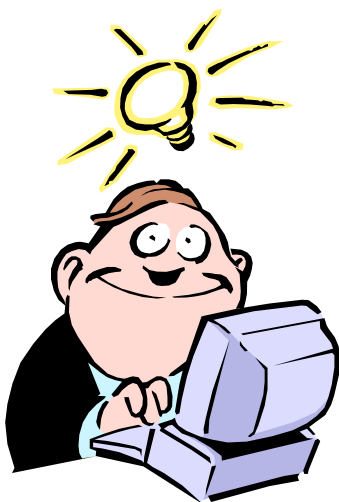
☺ **TIP:** Ensuring complete isolation and quiet during the exam will clear the test-taker's mind to focus totally on the

questions and answers for the entire 120 minutes. Any disruptions will definitely throw off the momentum and concentration of the Candidate. Unplug your phone; turn off your BlackBerry; close your e-mail client; etc. My proctor was also my guardian to make sure I wasn't distracted or disturbed until I'd completed the test. Conrad C. Hertzog Jr., ISP, Northrop Grumman, Colorado Springs, CO.

☺ **TIP:** I made a huge mistake when reviewing the questions I had marked during my first pass through the test. I thought the questions annotated with a red check mark were wrong, so I started changing those answers as fast as I could. I later realized that the ones I marked for review had a triangle on them, not a check mark! As a result, I changed the wrong ones. . .and failed. Next time I will know the logistics of the exam better. An unsuccessful candidate.

☺ **TIP:** One of my ISP Exam Prep Program Mentors mentioned that it could be confusing and to be careful not to accidentally close the on-line test. This made me think about my buddy's computer at work that has two screens. I kept the references on one monitor and the test on the other. That worked well for me. Jeffrey W. Bennett, ISP, Dynetics Inc., Madison, AL.

☺ **TIP:** I have a large CRT on my computer. Instead of taking in two computers (a laptop of the NISPOM and my desktop for the test), I put the exam on one side of the screen and the test on the other. That worked well for me. Joseph Reuter, ISP, LinQuest Corporation, Los Angeles, CA.



☺ **TIP:** The keyboards for my laptop (for the electronic copy of the references) and my desktop (for the test) were so close together than once and a while I realized I was typing on the wrong one! Also, the keyboard for the desktop is an ergonomic style and the one from the laptop is a straight one so moving between them was a little awkward. Kimberly Perry, ISP, Applied Research Associates, Albuquerque, NM.

☺ **TIP:** The clock counting down from two hours to the end was very helpful. It helped me avoid spending too much time on any single question. Gary Doss, ISP, E G & G Technical Services, Holloman AFB, NM.

☺ **TIP:** For some reason, when I took the test I couldn't see the countdown clock and couldn't spot the list of questions I had marked for further review. Fortunately I knew when I started. Also, I had answered all the questions first time through. I had 13 minutes left, so what I should have done was to review the questions from start to finish. (Instead I clicked on "finish." But I passed; that's the important thing.) Patricia Robbins, ISP, winner NCMS Information Security Award, Cubic Applications, Lacey, WA.

FACT: The on-line exam questions are broken into nine "core" areas plus the electives (which you must choose before starting the exam). As soon as you finish you can see your results. Not only can you see your overall score, but you can see how many you answered correctly in each section. You will also get an e-mail confirming your results quickly and written confirmation within 7-10 business days. Sharon Tannahill, Executive Director, NCMS Inc., Wayne, PA.

☺ **TIP:** I took the exam on-line. The instant feedback – knowing I'd passed – was fantastic! Jeffrey Qualkenbush, ISP, E G & G Technical Services, Holloman AFB, NM.

All ISPs are encouraged to offer tips for this article. Please e-mail them to the author at isp_mentor@hotmail.com

To obtain the most up-to-date version of this article, point your browser to:

<http://www.ncms-isp.org/testtips.pdf>



The Society of Industrial Security Professionals

The 6 Reasons People Don't Earn ISP Certification

by William L. Uttenweiler, ISP
NCMS Florida Space Coast (June 2006 - present)
NCMS Channel Islands Chapter (January 1997 - June 2006)

Reason #1. Fear. Fear of failing the test. Fear of embarrassment. Fear of losing money. All these are normal. Candidates overcome them by (a) preparing well and (b) networking with others – your peers and those who've already passed the ISP Exam. The Prep Program offers all this – and more. **You Cannot Pass a Test You Don't Take.**

Reason #2. Putting the test off. Workload increases. Candidates go on vacation or get sick. For whatever reason, most of the Candidates don't take the exam. "Often the difference between a successful person and a failure is not one has better abilities or ideas, but the courage that one has to bet on one's ideas, to take a calculated risk - and to act." Andre Malraux. **You Cannot Pass a Test You Don't Take.**

Reason #3. Not managing the clock. Many Candidates take too much time on the early questions. Or they lack faith in their preparation and begin looking up answers before they have provided their best answer (guess) for all questions. Remember – 1 minute, 1 question. 30 minutes into the test you should be on question #30 (or higher); 60 minutes, 60 questions.

Reason #4. Inadequate preparation. In 2006 I chatted with the Candidates in the testing room in Atlanta GA before the exam. One of them told me she didn't expect to pass. I was stunned. "Why?" I asked her. She told me that she had dropped out of the Prep Program about half way through. She had not done the workbook or read the NISPOM chapters for material she had

missed. She had opened Chapter 8 for the first time as she was flying to Atlanta. No surprises -- she didn't do well. Another colleague, a former Chapter Chair and NCMS Board Member, took the exam without studying. He came close but didn't pass. Read the NISPOM. Complete the workbook. Read the NISPOM again shortly before you take the test. That will prepare you well, whether or not you participate in the Exam Preparation Program's calls.

Reason #5. Taking Shortcuts during Exam Prep Program. Mentors have noted a trend for Candidates who participate in weekly calls without first completing the workbook. They act as stenographers – writing down answers provided by other Candidates or the Mentors – hoping to learn “enough to pass.” Often, they don't. There is no substitute for real preparation. Read the NISPOM. Complete the workbook. Read the NISPOM again shortly before you take the test. That will prepare you well, whether or not you participate in the Exam Preparation Program's calls.

Reason #6. “. . . when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” George Santayana, *The Life of Reason: Volume 1 (Reason in Common Sense)*. The Test Tips article provides you with the best insights and tips the current ISPs can give you. Even candidates who have never met a certified ISP had a huge head start over those who tested in 2004 and 2005. Pay attention to the ideas in the [Test Tips](#) article.