Chiefs Needed to Update Advancement Exams

Volunteer now and truly make a difference

By Terrina Weatherspoon, Defense Media Activity

Although it has been a long time since I’ve taken an advancement exam, there are two things I will always remember about the experience: the relief I felt when I knew the answer to a question, and the frustration I felt when a question was totally irrelevant. Seeing several questions about dark room photo processing when the dark room on the ship had been gutted and converted to storage space two years earlier, didn’t sit well with me. Who was writing these test questions and why did they hate us?

Fast forward a decade through rating mergers, advancements in technology and several manpower overhauls and one thing remains consistent, the need for relevant, real-world rating exams. And this is where chief petty officers are being asked to step up.

Navy chiefs (E7-E9) on active duty, Full Time Support (FTS), and Reservists on Active Duty for Special Work (ADSW) who are interested and desire to make a difference in the future of their rating are encouraged to apply as a fleet subject matter expert (FSME) for their rating’s Advancement Exam Readiness Review (AERR) at the Navy Advancement Center (NAC) in Pensacola, Fla.

Each enlisted rating has unique FSME requirements, so the right mix of skills and knowledge are important.

“You want the right people to go – folks who are truly the experts in their rate,” said Chief Legalman Ronnie Ratliff. “Information changes, things are updated and having that awareness of the important facets of your job, where the Navy is headed is all crucial. It’s all vital to the success of your rate. It should not be taken lightly. The future of the rate rests with you, as most questions are held in the bank for several years; we have to ensure only the most relevant information makes it to the test.”

The application to volunteer as an FSME for advancement exam development must be endorsed by the commanding officer or officer in charge, as well as the command master chief, senior chief or chief of the boat prior to submission to the Naval Education and Training Professional Development and Technology Center (NETP-DTC).

“I helped re-write the Aviation Structural Mechanic test,” said Chief Aviation Structural Mechanic Sean Bassett. “Ten-plus hours a day verifying information, references, publications and the usefulness of the questions. It was a two-week long review. A lot of work, but I absolutely 100 percent feel like I made a difference.”

Bassett remembers taking advancement exams throughout his career and getting stuck on questions that had long since been outdated. He wished back then that he could change things and those wishes are coming true now.

“Me and the rest of the subject matter experts took great pride in our work,” said Bassett. “I would most certainly recommend this to a fellow chief. It pro-
vides you with insight and feedback to take back to the fleet. And the need never ends. With regards to my rate, we are constantly using new technology and processes.”

The reviews run one or two weeks in length with each rating being reviewed about every two years. Chiefs who are selected are responsible for determining the content of E4 through E7 rating advancement exams and making sure that the latest publications are used.

“The best thing that I took away - beyond that of ensuring the questions accurately test what Sailors in my rating should know - was that I learned the process of how the questions are analyzed after the exams,” said Master Chief Musician Jim Ramsey.

“Each question has statistics tied to them. For example: If a question is too hard/easy at the PO3 level, the exam writers can either tailor this question to make it applicable for the PO3 exam or bump it up to the PO2 exam. Additionally, the test writers decide as a group what subject each paygrade should be tested on. The exam writers are providing Fleet-wide input into the rating exam with input from several subject matter experts.”

Chiefs with experience in multiple platforms or recent experience on a major rating skill-set are highly desirable.

“I believe, and even today still brief to other Chiefs, test writing was one of the most rewarding Navy experiences in my career of 20 years,” said Senior Chief Cryptologic Technician (maintenance) Christopher Brown. “To be there on exam day to see your finished product, then to see hours a day of looking at test questions, verifying the accuracy of those questions and making sure the references are correct for each question in that rating’s test bank. Overall, I loved it! It’s one of the most rewarding experiences I have had in 21 years in the Navy. You leave feeling that you are making a difference for the future of your rating.”

A lot has changed since I’ve taken an advancement exam – and that’s a good thing. Today, under the new AERR process, exams are more representative of the work being done in the Fleet. And that is due to the hard work of the dedicated chief petty officers willing to invest in the future of their rates. We now know who writes these things, but for anyone who just finished taking an advancement exam, it may still feel a bit like they hate us.

For application forms and additional requirements, visit https://www.nko.navy.mil/group/navy-advancement-center.