



IALA Buoyage II: Cardinal & Other Marks

The marks that are identical worldwide — cardinals pointing to safe water, plus isolated danger, safe water, special and the newer emergency wreck mark.

CARD Cardinal system

- Yellow & black marks placed N/E/S/W of a danger
- Pass on the **named side** (north mark = pass to its north)
- Topmark = **two black cones**; read their points

N North cardinal

- Cones **both point up**; black above yellow
- Light: **VQ or Q**, continuous
- Safe water lies to the north of the mark

E East cardinal

- Cones **base to base**; black–yellow–black
- Light: **VQ(3) / Q(3)** — groups of **three**
- "East = egg" (cones make an egg; 3 o'clock)

S South cardinal

- Cones **both point down**; yellow above black
- Light: **VQ(6) + long flash** (or Q(6)+LFI)
- Six flashes = "six o'clock" = south

W West cardinal

- Cones **point to point**; yellow–black–yellow
- Light: **VQ(9) / Q(9)**
- "West = wine glass; 9 o'clock"

IDM Isolated danger

- On/over a small danger with **safe water all round**
- **Black with red horizontal band(s)**; two black balls topmark
- Light: **white group flashing (2)**

SWM Safe water

- Mid-channel / landfall; safe water all round
- **Red & white vertical stripes**; single red ball topmark
- Light: isophase, occulting, 1 long flash / 10 s, or Morse "A"

SPL Special & wreck

- Special: **yellow**, yellow X topmark, yellow light — marks a zone
- Emergency wreck: **blue & yellow stripes**, yellow cross
- Wreck light: **alternating blue & yellow**, ~1 s each

TRAP Easy marks to lose

- Cardinal points = **where to pass**, not where the danger is
- Isolated danger = **2 balls**; safe water = **1 ball**
- Special marks carry **no** navigational meaning alone

ORAL What the examiner wants

- Read the cones like a clock: N up, S down, E egg, W wine
- "Two black balls, flashing 2 — isolated danger, safe water round"
- Yellow cross = special; blue–yellow = new wreck

SYSTEM SPECIAL / WRECK CARDINAL DANGER / TRAP ORAL TIP

Pass first time. The full syllabus, in your pocket.

1,200+ Part A questions, MCA-style mock orals with an AI examiner, audio sound signals, and offline study for those at sea. Scan to download.

