



the dtic

Department:
Trade, Industry and Competition
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Introduction to Exporting

Unit 3: Export Documentation

Understanding the essential documents and their importance in international trade



Invoices



Certificates



Contracts



Payments



Transport

© 2025 Introduction to Exporting Course

1

The Importance of Export Documentation



Export documentation is the foundation of international trade, serving as a legal framework that enables the smooth flow of goods across borders.



Enables Goods Movement

Without proper documentation, goods cannot be transported across international borders. Documents like bills of lading and air waybills serve as legal instruments for the movement of goods.



Facilitates Payment Collection

Documentation like commercial invoices and certificates of origin are essential for banks to process payments. They provide evidence of the transaction and terms of payment.



Streamlines Customs Clearance

Proper documentation accelerates customs clearance processes. Documents like certificates of origin and commercial invoices provide necessary information for customs officials.



Defines Rights & Responsibilities

Documentation clearly outlines the obligations of all parties involved in the transaction. It transforms verbal agreements into legally binding contracts.

"Export documents are essential to ensure that international trade transactions are legal, compliant with standards or regulations, and traceable. The information on these documents is used for statistics, risk management, and revenue generation. Whether the documents are properly completed can determine if customs clearance in the importing country takes hours or several days."

Introduction to Exporting

2

Key Export Documents Overview



International trade relies on a system of documents that facilitate the movement of goods across borders. These documents serve as legal instruments, enabling payment, customs clearance, and smooth trade operations.

1



Proforma Invoice

A contract document that indicates the terms of payment and delivery for export goods.

2



Commercial Invoice

A core document that details the goods, their value, and is required for customs clearance and payment.

3



Certificate of Origin

Proves the country of manufacture and is essential for determining tariff rates and preferences.

4



Transport Documents

Legal instruments representing the contract of carriage and transfer of goods, such as bills of lading.

Tip: Additional documents may include packing lists, insurance certificates, and export permits, depending on the specific trade requirements.

3

Proforma Invoice



What is a Proforma Invoice?

A proforma invoice is a preliminary statement of the terms on which the seller is willing to sell goods. It's not a formal request for payment but a pre-statement of commercial invoice terms.

Tip: It's also considered a sales contract.

Key Importance

- ✓ Essential for importers to obtain import licenses
- ✓ Crucial for foreign exchange allocation
- ✓ Particularly important when letters of credit are the preferred payment method
- ✓ Serves as a guide for the issuing bank when drafting letters of credit

Typical Details Included

Payment Method

Prepayment, letter of credit, bank collection, or credit terms

Terms of Payment

Confirmed irrevocable sight L/C, sight payment upon documents, or 30 days after B/L date

Incoterms

Export terms like EXW Johannesburg or FOB Mombasa

Addresses

Seller's and buyer's addresses, and "attention party" information

Shipping Details

Loading port, discharge port, full names of locations

Goods Description

Complete description, quantity, packaging details

Practical Tip

When filling out a proforma invoice, ensure all information is accurate and complete. Any errors can delay customs clearance and payment processing.

Commercial Invoice



Key Functions

- ✓ **Core Document:** Forms the basis for other international trade documents
- ✓ **Customs Clearance:** Required by customs authorities in the importing country
- ✓ **Payment Collection:** Used by banks to verify terms of payment
- ✓ **Statistical Purposes:** Used to collect trade statistics

Important Requirements

- ⚠ Must be accurate and consistent with other documents
- ⚠ Complete with all required fields
- ⚠ Properly signed and issued

Introduction to Exporting

Commercial Invoice Example

COMMERCIAL INVOICE

COP Exporter:	Buyer's Reference:
Company Name	Reference Number
Exporter's Customs Code No.:	Exporter's Reference:
Code Number	Page 1 of 1
Invoice No. and Date:	Consignee:
2821/07/2005	Recipient Name and Address
Notify Party:	Notification Party Name and Address
Country of Origin:	Terms of Delivery and Payment:
Origin Country	Delivery and Payment Terms
Country of Final Destination:	
Destination Country	
Vessel:	Voyage No.:
Ship Name	Voyage Number

5

Certificate of Origin



What is a Certificate of Origin?

A certificate of origin is an official document that proves where goods were manufactured or produced. It's a crucial component of international trade, especially for preferential trade agreements.



Primary Purpose

The main purpose of a certificate of origin is to establish the country of origin of goods for customs purposes and for determining applicable tariffs.



Types of Certificates

- Form A Certificate of Origin (general format)
- Eur 1 Certificate (specific format for certain agreements)
- Regional certificates for SADC and AfCFTA agreements

Introduction to Exporting



6

Certificate of Origin



Important Note

South Africa participates in these regional trade agreements and must register as an exporter with SARS to utilize these preferential tariffs effectively.



Regional Trade Agreements

SADC

Southern African Development Community enables reduced tariffs for goods moving between member states.

AfCFTA

African Continental Free Trade Area aims to create a single market for goods across Africa.



Benefits in Preferential Trade

- Enables goods to enter a country with reduced or zero tariffs
- Facilitates trade within regional economic blocs
- Improves market access for exports from developing countries
- Reduces administrative barriers at customs

Introduction to Exporting

7

Transport Documents



Transport documents are **legal instruments** that accompany goods during international shipping and establish the terms of transport between parties.



Bill of Lading

- Document of title to goods
- Legal contract between shipper and carrier
- Enables transfer of goods ownership
- Proves goods have been shipped

Key types: Straight, through, multimodal



Air Waybill

- Contract of carriage by air
- Shows flight route and airports
- Contains cargo description and weight
- Required for customs clearance

Must accompany goods for customs clearance



Road/Rail Consignment

- Carrier's receipt for goods
- Transport contract
- Contains loading/unloading points
- Not negotiable instruments

Specific for road or rail transport only

Document Highlights

Transport documents must be completed accurately to ensure smooth delivery and payment. They serve as legal proof of the transaction terms.



Introduction to Exporting

8

Bill of Lading in Detail



The bill of lading is a crucial document in sea transportation that serves as a foundation for international trade. It connects the sales contract, payment contract, and transport contract.



Document of Title

It serves as a certificate of ownership for the goods described. Possession of the original bill of lading gives the holder the right to receive the goods at the port of discharge.



Negotiable Instrument

It's a negotiable document that can be transferred to another party, allowing them to control the goods. This enables the buyer to arrange for goods to be delivered directly to them.



Freight Invoice

It functions as an invoice for the payment of freight charges. The terms of payment are based on the specific Incoterms® applicable to the transaction.



Contract of Carriage

It represents a contract between the shipper and the carrier. The carrier is obligated to transport the goods according to the terms and conditions printed on the reverse side.



Receipt of Goods

It serves as a receipt issued by the carrier acknowledging the receipt of the goods for shipment. It describes the goods, their weight, and other relevant details.



Key Insight

The bill of lading is issued by the carrier after the goods are actually loaded onto the vessel. This is different from a "received for shipment" bill of lading, which is issued when goods are received at the port but not yet loaded.

Shipper
B/L Number
Port of Discharge

Key Information Fields on a Bill of Lading

Consignee
Vessel
Marks/No/Container

Notify Party
Port of Loading
Gross Weight

Introduction to Exporting

9

Additional Export Documents



In addition to the core documents, several supplementary documents are essential for specific export scenarios and product types.



Packing Lists

Details the weight, volume, contents, and packaging of each export package. Required by customs for inspection and by banks for credit verification.

Customs Inspection

Bank Verification



Insurance Certificates

Proves insurance coverage for specific orders. Required by credit letters when selling under CIP or CIF terms.

Credit Letters

Insurance Claims



Pre-shipment Inspection

Verifies the quality, quantity, and value of goods. Required for high-value or sensitive products entering certain markets.

Quality Control

High-value Goods



Fumigation Certificates

Confirms goods have been fumigated. Required for products like fresh flowers, wood products, and food items entering certain countries.

Agricultural Products

Food Items



Additional documents may be required based on product type, destination country, and trade agreements.

Introduction to Exporting

10

Export Documentation Best Practices



Following these best practices will help ensure your export documentation is accurate, consistent, and legally binding.



100% Accuracy

Ensure all documentation is 100% accurate with no false or misleading information. Even minor errors can lead to payment disputes or customs delays.



Consistency Across Documents

Maintain consistency in details, terms, and conditions across all documents. Related information must match across all copies.



Permanent Record Keeping

Keep all export documentation as permanent records. Store both original and copied versions in a secure location.



Legally Binding

Ensure documents are legally binding when necessary. Understand the legal implications of the documents you sign.



Key Takeaway

Documentation is the foundation of international trade. Quality documentation enables smooth trade operations and protects all parties involved.

Introduction to Exporting