

Deck Officer interview questions

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What to expect

Deck Officer interviews are technical and safety focused, and they assume you will be given authority over a watch and a deck crew. Expect your certificates, sea service and medical fitness to be verified before or around the interview, and expect questions that test your judgement rather than your recall of the rule book.

- **Technical and navigational:** Passage planning, chartwork, ECDIS and radar plotting, collision regulations, stability and cargo calculations.
- **Safety and regulatory:** How you apply SOLAS, MARPOL, the ISM Code and AMSA requirements day to day, and how you handle a non conformance or a defect.
- **Scenario and emergency response:** Man overboard, fire, abandon ship, restricted visibility, close quarters situations and machinery failure, testing how you prioritise and when you call the master.
- **Behavioural and crew leadership:** How you have handled underperformance, conflict, fatigue and mixed crews, and how you keep a watch team working together on a long trip.
- **Process and handover:** Walk throughs of watch handover, pre departure checks, mooring and cargo operations, and how you document what you have done.

Applications usually go through a crewing manager or marine superintendent. A first interview is often a phone or video screen covering your certificate, sea service and availability, then a panel or one to one with a senior deck officer or marine superintendent covers technical and safety questions. Some employers add a simulator assessment, a chartwork exercise or a written stability problem. Medical, eyesight and security checks, referee checks on your sea service, and verification of your AMSA Certificate of Competency happen before an offer. Offshore and Defence work often includes a client specific induction as well.

1. Walk me through how you plan a passage from berth to berth along the coast.

Why they ask

This is the core technical task of the role, and the interviewer is checking whether your planning is methodical and whether you actually review and sign off a plan rather than leaving it at first draft.

How to structure your answer

A walk-through structure: state what triggers the plan, list the steps in the order you do them, and finish on review, sign off and briefing the watchkeepers.

Example answer

"On a previous near coastal vessel the master handed me a run of about four days through the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait. I start with the large scale overview, checking the intended route against the vessel's draught, the chart folio and the latest notices to mariners, then I work down to the detail. I mark no-go areas, traffic separation schemes, tidal gates and any spot where I want a second pair of eyes. I build the route into the ECDIS, set safety contours that match our under keel clearance policy, and cross check the electronic plan against the paper chart. Then I write the plan up with waypoints, abort points, contingency anchorages and the points where I will call the master. Once the master reviews and signs it, I brief the other watchkeepers and the ratings so everyone knows what the next few days look like. If the weather or traffic changes I update the plan rather than sticking to something that is no longer safe."

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a deck crew member whose performance or conduct was falling short.

Why they ask

Deck Officers manage people as well as ships, and the interviewer wants evidence you address problems early and document what you do rather than letting them fester on a long trip.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: the situation and the behaviour, the task of fixing it, the specific actions you took including the conversation, and the result for the person and the watch team.

Example answer

"As second officer on a vessel I worked with an integrated rating who had a pattern of arriving late for watch and being short with the deck crew. Rather than escalate straight away, I spoke with him privately first and asked what was going on. He was dealing with something at home and had let it spill into the watch. I set out clearly what I expected, what the consequences were if the lateness continued, and offered a simpler way forward so he could tell me before a watch if something was wrong rather than just not turning up. I kept the chief officer informed and documented the conversation, so it was not something done in secret. Over the next few weeks the lateness stopped, he took on the mooring training I suggested and ended up mentoring one of the newer ratings."

3. You are on watch at night in restricted visibility and radar shows a close quarters situation developing. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure, whether you act early or wait, and whether you know when to call the master rather than trying to manage everything alone.

How to structure your answer

A judgement under pressure structure: immediate action to keep the vessel safe, assess the situation with the tools you have, escalate to the master, then record and review once the risk has passed.

Example answer

"First priority is keeping the vessel safe and the master informed. I would come to a safe speed for the conditions and make sure the fog signals and navigation lights are on. Then I would plot the other vessel on ARPA and take a series of bearings to work out whether the bearing is steady and the range is closing, which tells me whether risk of collision exists. If it does, I would alter course to starboard in good time and make the alteration large enough to be obvious on the other vessel's radar, avoiding any alteration to port for a vessel ahead. I would call the master immediately if I was in any doubt or the situation was not resolving, rather than waiting to see how it played out. Everything goes in the bridge log. If visibility closed in further, I would consider whether we should be proceeding at all or finding a safe anchorage."

4. How do you keep the vessel compliant with SOLAS, MARPOL and the ISM Code in day to day operations?

Why they ask

Compliance is a standing responsibility for a Deck Officer, and the interviewer wants to hear that it lives in your daily routine rather than in a folder opened before an inspection.

How to structure your answer

A policy to practice structure: name the instrument, describe the routine that puts it into practice on board, then explain how you would handle a gap or non conformance.

Example answer

"Compliance is really about daily habits. Each watch I check the bridge equipment, the garbage record book, any oil record book entries that relate to our operations, and the running hours on fire pumps and lifeboat batteries. Drills happen on schedule and I write them up properly, because the

record is the evidence. I keep the vessel's safety management system procedures open on the bridge so the crew follow the ship's own instructions rather than what they half remember, and I raise non conformance instead of letting them sit. Before an AMSA or port state control inspection I walk the vessel myself so I know what they will see, and I make sure the certificates, crew endorsements and stability documents are current."

5. Describe your handover procedure at a change of watch, and how you use ECDIS and AIS to maintain situational awareness.

Why they ask

Watch handover is where incidents get missed, and the interviewer is checking that your process produces shared understanding rather than a quick nod across the bridge.

How to structure your answer

A sequence structure: what you check before handover, what you hand across, and how you confirm the incoming officer actually has the picture.

Example answer

"I do not hand over until both of us are comfortable. I go through the vessel's position and course, the passage plan and any alterations, traffic within radar range and any vessel I am watching, the weather, and the state of deck and cargo operations. I flag anything unusual so the incoming officer does not have to discover it at the wrong moment. ECDIS is my main situational picture and I set it up so the safety contour, the route and any no-go areas are obvious, then cross check AIS targets against what I am seeing visually and on radar, because AIS does not tell you what a vessel is actually doing. I log the handover time and note anything carried over to the next watch."

6. Tell me about a time you identified a safety hazard on board before it caused an incident.

Why they ask

The interviewer wants evidence you notice small things early and turn a single catch into a lasting change, which is what safety culture on a vessel actually looks like.

How to structure your answer

An incident to system structure: what you saw, what you did in the moment, then what changed on board as a result.

Example answer

"On an offshore supply vessel we were working cargo in a swell when I noticed the lashings on the after deck were slack and one twistlock was not fully seated. The load had not shifted yet but it would have in those conditions. I stopped the lift, told the chief officer and we secured the unit properly before we continued. I raised a near miss report, talked the loading sequence through with the deck crew at the next toolbox talk, and the lashing inspection was added to the pre departure checklist. The change stuck because the crew could see why it mattered, not just because I told them to do it."