

Deckhand interview questions

careertips.com.au: common questions and what they're really testing

What to expect

Deckhand interviews are usually run by the Master, a crewing manager or both, and focus on practical competence, safety awareness and how you handle physical work in changing conditions. Expect a mix of straightforward process questions, a few behavioural questions about working in a crew, and at least one scenario question testing judgement at sea.

- **Process:** Questions asking you to walk through a routine deck task step by step, such as securing cargo or preparing for mooring.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experience working under supervision, in a crew, or under physical and time pressure.
- **Scenario / judgement:** Hypothetical situations, usually involving weather, equipment faults or safety hazards, testing how you'd respond in the moment.
- **Safety:** Direct questions on PPE use, safe operation of winches and cranes, and compliance with vessel safety procedures.
- **Technical:** Questions on specific equipment experience, such as winches, davits or deck maintenance gear, and what checks you perform.

Interviews typically open with questions about your tickets, sea time and general fitness for sea work, move into process and technical questions about deck duties, then into one or two scenario or behavioural questions. Panels for larger operators may also check references directly with previous Masters or crewing agents.

1. Walk me through how you'd secure a mixed cargo load before departure.

Why they ask

This checks whether you understand cargo securing methods and stability basics, a core deckhand task listed for this role.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a step-by-step walkthrough: what you check first, the order of tasks, and what you'd flag to the officer in charge if something looked wrong.

Example answer

"I'd start by checking the stowage plan against what's actually on deck, then inspect the cargo nets, chains and turnbuckles for wear before use. I'd lash heavier items low and central, checking safe working loads on each securing point, and test tension once everything's in place. If I found a damaged lashing or a load sitting outside the plan, I'd stop and report it to the officer in charge rather than proceed."

2. Tell me about a time you had to work closely with a small crew under pressure.

Why they ask

Deckhands work under close supervision in tight crew environments, often in difficult conditions, so teamwork under pressure is a key trait interviewers probe for.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation, your task, the action you took, and the result.

Example answer

"On one trip we had a tight weather window to complete mooring before conditions turned. The bosun assigned me to line handling while another deckhand managed the winch. I focused on clear hand signals and staying in constant radio contact so we weren't second-guessing each other. We got the vessel secured before the wind picked up, and the Master mentioned afterward that the coordination made the difference."

3. You're on deck watch and notice the weather deteriorating faster than forecast. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure and whether you understand your reporting responsibilities, given deck watch includes monitoring conditions and reporting hazards to the bridge.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a judgement-under-pressure response: what you'd notice, what you'd check, who you'd notify and why, and what you'd do while waiting for instruction.

Example answer

"I'd note the specific changes, wind shift, swell building, visibility dropping, and report it to the bridge straight away rather than waiting to see if it settles. While waiting for instruction I'd make sure loose gear on deck was secured and that anyone else on deck was aware conditions were changing. I'd rather over-report early than have the bridge find out late."

4. What steps do you take to make sure you're working safely around winches, cranes and other deck machinery?

Why they ask

Worksite safety management is listed as a core specialist skill, and safe equipment operation is central to preventing injury on deck.

How to structure your answer

Structure this around your personal safety routine: pre-checks, PPE, communication, and what you do if something's not right.

Example answer

"Before operating any winch or crane I check it's been signed off as safe to use and that guards and stops are working. I always wear the required PPE, harness included if I'm working near the edge or aloft, and I keep clear communication with anyone else near the equipment, using hand signals or radio if it's noisy. If a machine feels off, even slightly, I stop and get it checked rather than pushing through."

5. What experience do you have operating and maintaining deck equipment like winches, davits or pressure washing systems?

Why they ask

This is a direct technical check against the tools listed for this role and whether your hands-on experience matches what the vessel actually uses.

How to structure your answer

Give a technical walkthrough: what equipment you've used, what routine maintenance or checks you performed, and any limits to your experience.

Example answer

"I've operated winches for cargo handling and mooring lines, and davits for launching rescue boats during drills. On the maintenance side, I've done routine greasing, checked wire rope for fraying, and used pressure washers and paint systems as part of deck upkeep. I haven't worked on larger crane systems yet, but I pick up new equipment quickly with proper instruction."

6. Deck work involves long hours, rough conditions and physical strain. How do you manage that over a long roster?

Why they ask

Physical stamina and dexterity are explicitly listed as required for this role, and rosters in maritime work are demanding, so employers want to know you can sustain the pace.

How to structure your answer

Answer with a short personal account of how you pace and look after yourself physically, backed by a concrete example if you have one.

Example answer

"I keep myself fit outside of work so the physical side of the job doesn't wear me down partway through a swing. On board, I pace heavier tasks like cargo securing rather than rushing, and I make sure I'm resting properly during off-watch hours. I've done multi-day rotations before without issue, and I know how to read my own fatigue and flag it rather than push through when it's not safe."