

Fishing Hand interview questions

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What to expect

Fishing Hand interviews are usually informal and practical, run by a skipper, owner or fleet manager who wants to know whether you can work a deck safely and last the trip. Expect questions about your sea time, your hands on gear skills, and how you handle yourself when conditions turn.

- **Sea time and experience:** Where you have fished, on what kind of vessel, what gear you have worked and how long your trips ran.
- **Practical deck skills:** Walk throughs of setting and hauling gear, winch and hauler operation, rope work and safe practice around warps and lifting gear.
- **Safety and sea sense:** How you look after yourself and others on deck, what you do when the weather changes, and how you use flotation, radio and emergency equipment.
- **Reliability and fitness:** Whether you can handle long shifts, rough conditions and time away from home without putting the crew at risk.
- **Catch handling and food safety:** Sorting, grading, icing and packing fish so product lands in good condition, plus hygiene and biosecurity basics.
- **Teamwork under a skipper:** How you take direction, communicate on deck and get on with a small crew in close quarters.

Typically a conversation with the skipper or owner, either at the wharf or by phone, covering your sea time and gear experience, then a walk through of safety and catch handling. Many operators follow up with a paid trial trip or a day on deck so they can see how you work before offering a berth. Questions about tickets and safety training usually come up partway through, so bring copies of any certificates you hold.

1. Walk me through how you set and haul a net or line from the deck.

Why they ask

The skipper wants to hear the actual sequence and whether safety checks are automatic for you, not something you only mention when asked.

How to structure your answer

A chronological walkthrough of the whole operation, from pre set checks to stowing the gear, naming the safety points where they belong in the sequence rather than tacking them on at the end.

Example answer

"First I check the gear with the skipper or mate, looking at the net for tears, the bridles and shackles for wear, and the drum or hauler for anything that has been slipping. We set according to depth and the marks on the sounder, and I keep clear of the warps while the gear goes over. On the haul I stay on the side the mate calls, working the winch slowly so nothing comes aboard in a rush, and I watch the codend as it comes up so I can guide it over the sorting tray. Once it is aboard I check the net again for damage before it gets stowed."

2. Tell me about a time conditions turned while you were working on deck and you had to keep going safely.

Why they ask

This is the closest thing to a behavioural question in a deck interview, and it tests judgement rather than bravery.

How to structure your answer

STAR, with the situation set in weather terms, the task stated as what the crew needed, the action describing what you changed on deck, and the result covering both the catch and the crew coming through unharmed.

Example answer

"We were hauling on a night set about a day out when the swell picked up and the deck started shipping water over the rail. The mate needed the gear aboard before it dragged, so I clipped on, slowed the winch right down and worked the codend from the sheltered side rather than where I had been standing. I called each movement so the other deckhand knew where I was, and we got the net aboard without anyone going near the rail. After that we shortened the set and waited it out, and the catch landed fine because we had iced it early."

3. You are icing catch in the hold and notice the ice is running low with two days left on the trip. What do you do?

Why they ask

Catch is money, and operators want someone who flags a problem early instead of hoping it works out.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: state the immediate action, who you tell, how you prioritise what is already aboard, and how you keep the skipper informed.

Example answer

"I would tell the mate or skipper as soon as I noticed, because rationing ice is their call, not mine. In the meantime I would check what is in the hold, keep the catch covered and packed tightly, and keep the bins out of any warm spots. If one bin has better ice than another I would reorganise so the higher value fish get what is left first, and I would keep the hold door shut between checks. The aim is to land good product, so it is better to raise it early than hope it comes good."

4. What checks do you do on a winch, rope or shackle before a set?

Why they ask

Gear failure at sea is a safety issue and a lost set, so this question separates people who have actually maintained deck gear from people who have only watched.

How to structure your answer

A practical inspection checklist, run through in order from the winch out to the terminal gear, with a clear line on what makes you stop and report rather than use something.

Example answer

"I start at the winch, checking the drum, the brake and the controls for smooth operation and any fluid or fraying around the spool. Then I run the rope or wire through my hands looking for flat spots, glazing, broken strands or anything that has been chafing on a fairlead. Shackles get checked for wear in the pin and the throat, and I make sure mousing wire or a cable tie is in place. If something looks marginal I take it out of service and tell the skipper rather than risk it under load."

5. How do you keep fish in good condition between the haul and landing?

Why they ask

Catch handling is where a deckhand directly affects what the boat gets paid, so interviewers probe it even on a general hand role.

How to structure your answer

Work through the cold chain in order, from bringing the catch aboard to landing, naming the decisions that protect quality and the hygiene habits that go with them.

Example answer

"The quicker the fish comes out of the net and into ice, the better it lands. I sort by species and size as it comes over the tray, keep the different grades in separate bins, and get it iced down straight away rather than leaving it on deck while the sorting finishes. Gutting and cleaning get done with clean gear and clean water, and I keep blood and slime out of the bins so the ice lasts. Through the trip I check the hold regularly, drain meltwater and top up ice where it is needed, and make sure everything is packed and labelled before we land."

6. What does sea safety mean to you on a normal working day, not just in an emergency?

Why they ask

Operators want someone whose safety habits are automatic, since the regulator and the crew both depend on it, and a new deckhand is often the least experienced person aboard.

How to structure your answer

Move from personal habits to crew habits to emergency readiness, giving a concrete example of each rather than listing rules.

Example answer

"It starts with the small things. I wear a flotation device on deck, keep my footing on wet surfaces, and stay out of the bight of ropes and the path of the winch. I let people know where I am when I move around the boat, especially at night, and I speak up if I see something unsafe rather than working around it. Beyond that I make sure I know where the life raft, flares, EPIRB and first aid kit are on each vessel, because that changes from boat to boat. If the skipper runs a drill I take it seriously, since that is the only chance to practise before it matters."