

Marine Pilot interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for marine pilot roles typically involve a panel from the port authority or pilotage provider, and may include a simulator assessment. They probe your ship handling, local knowledge, safety mindset, and ability to work with masters and tug crews.

- **Technical navigation and ship handling:** Questions on pilotage planning, under keel clearance, use of PPU, ECDIS, and radar.
- **Scenario-based emergencies:** Hypothetical situations such as engine failure, adverse weather, or close-quarters encounters.
- **Behavioural teamwork and communication:** How you work with tug crews, mooring teams, VTS, and ship masters.
- **Safety and regulatory compliance:** Knowledge of AMSA marine orders, port regulations, and incident reporting.
- **Client-facing:** Interacting with ship masters, including advising and resolving disagreements.
- **Process:** Walk-through of your pilotage process from boarding to berthing.

The process often starts with an initial screening, followed by a technical interview, a simulator exercise, and a panel interview. Some ports include a medical and a police check. You may be asked to demonstrate knowledge of local waters and port regulations.

1. Walk us through your process for planning a pilotage, from boarding to berthing.

Why they ask

This tests your systematic approach and knowledge of local procedures.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through: start with pre-boarding preparation, then boarding, briefing, execution, and post-pilotage documentation.

Example answer

"First, I review the vessel's particulars, draft, and stability. I check the latest weather, tide, and under keel clearance. Then I board, introduce myself to the master, and confirm the pilot card. I discuss the passage plan, tug use, and mooring arrangements. During the transit, I maintain a listening watch on VHF, monitor PPU and ECDIS, and keep in constant communication with the tugs and VTS. On approach, I adjust for wind and current, and guide the ship to the berth. After berthing, I complete the required documentation."

2. Tell me about a time you had to handle a difficult manoeuvre or emergency.

Why they ask

Assesses your judgement under pressure and ability to coordinate a response.

How to structure your answer

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

Example answer

"During a pilotage in strong crosswinds, a vessel's engine failed. I immediately informed VTS, ordered tugs to take strain, and used the remaining momentum to guide the ship to a safe anchorage. I kept the master informed and coordinated with the tug crews to prevent drift into shallow water. After the

incident, I debriefed with the port authority and recommended additional tug readiness for similar conditions."

3. How do you coordinate with tugboats and mooring crews during a complex berthing?

Why they ask

Tests your communication and teamwork in a high-stakes operation.

How to structure your answer

Step-by-step: pre-briefing, positioning, commands, monitoring, and post-berthing checks.

Example answer

"I start with a pre-briefing with tug masters, specifying power, lines, and communication channels. I use VHF to give precise commands. I position tugs to counteract wind and current. I work with mooring crews to ensure lines are ready. During the berth, I monitor the ship's approach rate and adjust tug thrust as needed. After mooring, I confirm all lines are fast and thank the crew."

4. What would you do if you disagreed with the ship's master about a navigational decision?

Why they ask

Evaluates your ability to assert safety while respecting the master's authority.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: state your concern, propose alternatives, escalate if needed, document.

Example answer

"I would respectfully raise my concerns, providing specific reasons based on local knowledge, tide, or traffic. If the master still disagreed, I would escalate to VTS or the port authority as per protocol. My priority is safety, but I would document the exchange and follow the master's final decision if it does not endanger the vessel, while noting my advice."

5. Describe your experience with Portable Pilot Units and electronic chart systems.

Why they ask

Checks your technical proficiency with key tools for the role.

How to structure your answer

Technical demonstration: describe setup, integration, cross-checking, and troubleshooting.

Example answer

"I use PPUs daily, integrating AIS, ECDIS, and radar data to maintain a precise position. I set up the PPU before boarding, check the chart and route, and use it alongside visual references. I also cross-check with the ship's ECDIS and paper charts where available. I keep my PPU updated with the latest port data."

6. How do you stay current with changes to port regulations and navigational hazards?

Why they ask

Shows your commitment to ongoing professional development and local knowledge.

How to structure your answer

Reflective: list sources, actions, and how you apply updates.

Example answer

"I attend regular port briefings, review AMSA marine notices, and participate in simulator training. I also maintain a log of local hazards and share updates with colleagues. I hold a current pilotage licence and complete continuing professional development through the Australian Maritime College and industry seminars."