# Shipbroker interview questions

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## What to expect

Shipbroking interviews test your market knowledge, negotiation instincts and ability to stay calm under pressure. You will likely face a mix of process, behavioural and scenario questions, often with a technical twist.

- **Process:** Walk through questions that check you understand how a fixture comes together from enquiry to charter party.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past negotiations, disputes or client relationships, using STAR to show how you handled them.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations that test your judgement when a vessel, cargo or charterer throws up a problem.
- **Market and technical:** Questions on freight rates, vessel types, chartering terms and the tools you use to track the market.
- **Client facing:** How you build trust with shipowners and charterers over time.

Interviews usually start with a brief introduction and a run through your resume. Then you move into technical and market questions, followed by scenario or behavioural prompts. Some employers ask you to work through a simple voyage estimate or review a charter party clause. You will often get a chance to ask questions at the end.

## 1. Walk me through how you would fix a vessel from initial enquiry to final contract.

**Why they ask**

This shows whether you understand the full broking process and can spot potential delays or risks.

**How to structure your answer**

Process walk through: start with the enquiry, then vessel selection, voyage estimate, negotiation of main terms, recap, charter party and post fixture operations.

**Example answer**

*“First I would take the enquiry and check the cargo size, load and discharge ports, and laycan. I would search for suitable tonnage using Veson IMOS and Clarksons, then build a voyage estimate covering bunkers, port costs, canal dues and expected hire or freight. After matching a vessel, I would introduce owner and charterer, negotiate the main terms such as rate, laytime and demurrage, and send a recap for confirmation. Then I would work with the operations team to draft the charter party and follow the voyage through to completion.”*

## 2. Describe a time you had to negotiate a difficult charter rate with a shipowner or charterer.

**Why they ask**

Negotiation is the core of the job, and this reveals your approach when the other side pushes hard.

**How to structure your answer**

STAR: situation, task, action, result. Focus on the specific tactics you used and the outcome.

**Example answer**

*“I was fixing a Supramax for a coal cargo from Newcastle to Japan. The owner wanted a higher rate because of firm conditions, but the charterer had a fixed budget. I gathered recent fixtures on similar routes to show the market was softer than the owner thought. I then proposed a compromise on*

*laytime and demurrage to bridge the gap. We agreed on a rate that worked for both, and the charterer returned with two more cargoes that month.”*

## 3. You have a vessel open in Singapore and a cargo enquiry from a charterer who needs to load in three days. How do you handle it?

**Why they ask**

This tests your judgement under time pressure, a daily reality in broking.

**How to structure your answer**

Scenario judgement: assess options, prioritise the most urgent, explain your reasoning and how you would communicate.

**Example answer**

*“I would first confirm the vessel's exact position and readiness, then check the cargo details and whether the load port can accommodate the vessel within the laycan. If the timing is tight, I would call the owner to see if they can adjust the vessel's speed or route, and check with the charterer if the laycan has any flexibility. If both sides can move, I would push for a quick recap. If not, I would be honest about the risk and suggest alternatives, such as a different vessel or a revised loading window, to keep the relationship intact.”*

## 4. How do you keep up with freight market movements and what tools do you use?

**Why they ask**

Market awareness is essential, and this shows whether you rely on real data or guesswork.

**How to structure your answer**

Technical and tools: list your sources, routines and how you turn information into advice.

**Example answer**

*“I start each morning with Clarksons and the Baltic Exchange reports, then check Bloomberg for broader economic indicators that might affect demand. I use Excel models to track rates on key routes and update a daily note for clients. I also speak with brokers and port agents regularly to pick up sentiment that does not show up in the numbers. That mix helps me give owners and charterers a clear view of where the market is heading.”*

## 5. Tell me about a time you managed a dispute over laytime or demurrage.

**Why they ask**

Disputes are common in shipping, and this checks your ability to stay commercial while protecting your client.

**How to structure your answer**

STAR, but emphasise how you de escalated the situation and what you learned about contract terms.

**Example answer**

*“A charterer claimed demurrage after a vessel waited at berth longer than expected. I pulled the statement of facts and found that the delay was partly caused by a port restriction that was already known before the fixture. I arranged a call with both sides, walked through the timeline and showed where responsibility sat. We agreed to split the difference and amended the charter party wording for future voyages. The relationship survived because I focused on the facts rather than taking sides.”*

## 6. How would you build and maintain relationships with new shipowners and charterers in a competitive market?

**Why they ask**

Broking runs on trust and repeat business, so this reveals your long term approach.

**How to structure your answer**
Client facing strategy: show how you research, make contact, add value and follow through.

**Example answer**

*“I would start by researching the owner's or charterer's fleet, typical routes and recent fixtures, so my first call is relevant. I would offer something useful straight away, like a market update or a potential cargo match, rather than just asking for business. After a fixture, I would stay in touch with useful information and check in regularly. Over time, that consistency turns a one off deal into a working relationship built on reliability.”*