



STATE OF WASHINGTON

BOARD OF PILOTAGE COMMISSIONERS

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Concerning the 2026 Marine Pilot Exam in Washington State

Qualifications/Application Process

1. Do you want the application sent separately from the reference letters?

No, please submit all parts of your application together in either one email or one envelope.

2. When I submit my application, how will I know that you received it, and when will I know when I am accepted to sit for the exam?

You will receive an email from the BPC acknowledging acceptance of your application package, which will then explain your timeframe for review. After review, the Board must approve all applications which takes place at each monthly Board meeting. Another email will be sent after the Board meeting which will give details of next steps.

3. Can you apply for both districts?

Yes, there is an option on the application to choose to apply to either district. You will receive an invitation to train in whichever district has the first open opportunity and at that point you must choose to train in that district, or bypass that district and wait for the other district to have an opening. Once you have chosen a district that choice is final.

4. Could you provide insight into the number of candidates to be accepted?

There is no set number of how many trainees can make the list as long as you pass the cut score for both the written exam and simulator evaluation.

5. Are there 2 separate tests – one for Puget Sound and one for Grays Harbor?

No, there is one test with the option to apply for either Puget Sound, Grays Harbor, or either district. The test is not location specific and is not a test of knowledge of local waters.

6. When applying for the exam, does the applicant pay the entire application fee immediately? If not, when are the written exam and simulator evaluation payments due?

The payment instructions are included with the [application package](#), however only the application fee is due with the application. The written exam fee is due 10 days after an applicant is notified that they have been approved by the Board to sit for the written exam. If an applicant is successful in the written exam and moves on to the simulator evaluation, they will

pay for the simulator evaluation at that time, with new written instructions being submitted to those successful candidates.

7. I cannot find the text anchor practice. Can you be of assistance in obtaining difficult to find bibliography texts?

The pages of text that are recommended for study from the Bibliography are currently posted to the [BPC website](#) under resources.

8. What or how do you recommend studying for the exam?

The best way to study for the exam is to study the exam blueprint, the exam bibliography and the JTA domains published as well as being familiar with the FAQ's and simulation and written exam documents published during this process. Furthermore, we believe that there is no one right or wrong way to study for the exam – however our pilots have shared ideas such as pretending to write your own exam and making sure you can answer your own questions, flash cards for memorization, and having a study partner are some things that have worked for them.

9. Is 2 years holding the 1600 ton master requirement a period of time or a day for day sea time?

The two-year requirement is a period of time (not sea time). Candidates must meet one of the indicated service requirements while holding a minimum license as mate/master of steam or motor vessels of not more than 1600 GRT or 3000 GT (ITC). Any such license to be held by the applicant for at least two years before application.

10. If you are sailing chief mate unlimited oceans but 1600 Masters is not on our license though it's available to get on the MMC without any further testing per the USCG does that time/license count as equivalent for the necessary two years for pilot testing?

At the time of application, a candidate must hold a USCG license as master of steam or motor vessels of not more than 1600 GRT or 3000 GT (ITC) or equivalent. A Chief Mate Unlimited Oceans meets the license requirement to accrue the indicated sea time, however sailing Chief Mate Unlimited does not meet our current exam requirements. More details and all of the current exam requirements can be found in [WAC 363-116-0751](#).

Written Exam

11. Are calculators allowed on the Written Exam and if not, will there be any formulas needed to be solved?

No, calculators will not be needed on the Written Exam. While basic math is a part of the Written exam, there would not be any need to do any mathematic calculation requiring a calculator. You will be expected to understand the concepts of formulas and how they apply to piloting and their relationship to each other and their variables.

12. What will be allowed in the proctored room during the Written Exam?

While more specific information regarding the live proctoring will be released once you qualify for the exam, in general you will not be allowed to have anything with you except for water/coffee. You will not be allowed to use your phone and your browser will be locked down and your desk area will need to be clear.

13. How many questions will be on the Written Exam?

The Written Exam is multiple choice and 100 questions in length.

14. What is the duration of the written exam?

You will have a four-hour window in which to complete the exam, and yes, you are allowed a break during the testing window at a pre-determined time.

15. Would it be possible to put out a list of sample questions to help understand the type of questions to expect and the format?

Yes, the Exam Team is planning to release some sample questions soon.

16. Are the questions like U.S. Coast Guard licensing exam questions?

No, the questions on the Written Exam are not equivalent to USCG Licensing exams. Please refer to the published [bibliography and exam blueprint](#) to guide your study.

17. Will a local proctor be available for Written Exam at MITAGS West?

Unfortunately, we will not have a local proctor available at Mitags West, however our exam team is committed to helping you figure out the perfect remote proctoring option for you and will work with you individually to help make this happen.

18. If there is an Internet failure/loss of connection at your remote testing location, can your test be resumed?

Yes! And please know that much more information will be released to you regarding live proctoring as well as individual help from the exam team to make sure you have all the correct testing requirements, if needed.

19. If local knowledge is the base for being a pilot, why is local knowledge not being taken into account?

Local knowledge has been taken out of the equation to offer a level-playing field for mariners not from the Pacific Northwest. The purpose of the Written Exam and Simulator Evaluation is to identify the most successful candidates that have a high probability of succeeding in the State licensed Training Program and becoming licensed as a Washington State Pilot. Washington State desires to attract the best candidates from across the country and the testing process and training program are designed to give the opportunity for candidates to show their skills.

20. How can I be reassured that remote proctoring is safe if no one else in pilotage across the country is using it?

While it is true that many pilotage districts are not currently utilizing remote proctoring, instead of looking at other pilotage districts, we looked at the testing, examination, and assessment industry as a whole. Many high stakes exams are using remote proctoring and have been for years utilizing the ISO standards. Additionally, we did a lot of research to make sure that we were choosing the correct platform and believe remote proctoring to be the wave of the future. We are proud to be on the leading edge of the Maritime industry.

Simulator Evaluation

21. In the simulator, will we be tested as a captain? Also, how many crew will the captain have?

You are acting as the Pilot during the evaluation. You will have a Captain and a Helmsperson with you on the bridge.

22. Can you say what type of vessel will be used during the simulator?

Candidates successfully meeting the cut score for the Written Exam will be given more information prior to the Simulator Evaluation.

23. Will there be equipment failures anchoring, docking, undocking, restricted channels and meeting situations utilized during the Simulator Evaluation?

Please review any Exam Simulator Evaluation Advisements, Exam Blueprint, Job Task Analysis, along with all FAQ's and any further information that may be released.

24. How long will the Simulator Evaluation take?

For your specific Simulator Evaluation you should be prepared to be there for at least an hour.

25. Why will you be testing in the smaller OSV SIM room and not the larger ship main bridge SIM at MITAGS West?

This was determined by the Exam Team to be the best fit for the Simulator Evaluation.

26. Are there charts that we can review to prepare for the Simulator Evaluation?

No charts. Please review all Exam Simulator Evaluation Advisements, Exam Blueprint, Job Task Analysis, along with all FAQ's and any further information that may be released.

Post-Exam/Training Program

27. Is there a limit to how many successful candidates can be placed on the list to be called up for the training program?

There is no set number or limit.

28. Assuming passing both the Written Exam and Simulator Evaluation, will respective individuals be provided with their ranking?

Yes – after each cut score is set, results will be posted to the [BPC website](#) using only your unique anonymous exam ID number. Only after the entire process is completed and the Board has approved the final ranked list will a ranked named list be published (without scores only ranking).

29. Will there be an interview process after the Simulator Evaluation prior to finalizing the list?

No, the ranked list is a combination of the Written Exam and Simulator Evaluation scores only.

30. How many pilot spots are currently open in Puget Sound that the current trainees from the last exam cannot fulfill, and how long can one stay in the graduate program waiting for a slot to open? And will the stipend be paid while waiting?

This is a hard question to answer as no one knows exactly when a pilot may retire (besides the mandatory retirements at age 70), have an unforeseen circumstance, or when the number of pilots may be recalculated. What we can say is that the BPC is constantly monitoring the numbers so that we always have a pilotage pipeline. We have not had to utilize the Graduate Program since 2017 for any significant amount of time and if it would need to be used, trainees would continue to be eligible to receive stipend.

31. If Grays Harbor is an applicant's first choice, but the port is at their maximum for pilots, are applicants able to maintain their call position for Puget Sound?

Applicants can choose to train in either district and have the option to decline whichever district they receive an invitation from to await an invitation for the other district.

32. Which port would give you a better chance of being a pilot, and is there a large pay difference between the districts?

We invite you to research and learn about each district as they are both so unique – one a pilot association while the other being an employee of the Port. Financial information regarding both districts is available on the BPC website in the [annual reports](#).

33. How long do I have to enter the training program?

You have 30 days and 3 attempts when the BPC issues you an invitation to train to respond and accept a spot in the Training Program. However, there are ways to delay entry with the Board's consent which are outlined in [WAC 363-116-078](#).

34. Will those not employed by WSF be required to obtain the ferry route pilotage and Puget Sound?

First let us clarify, no one is employed by WSF or by the State of Washington – trainees are either receiving a \$9500/month stipend (Puget Sound) or have the option to be employees of the Port of Grays Harbor or remain on stipend throughout the training program (Grays Harbor). All trainees are required to receive the federal first-class pilotage endorsement for the district they choose (which includes all ferry routes for Puget Sound.) You may begin to work on your pilotage endorsement before you enter the training program, but you must have the endorsement before you are licensed and within the maximum training program length for your district.

35. Will the BPC ever move to splitting the pilotage into a North sound and a South sound region, so essentially making Puget Sound pilots into two separate regions?

There are no plans to change any of the current districts in Washington State.

36. While in the training program, are there health insurance options available?

Trainees are not employees of Washington State. Therefore, medical insurance is not available through the BPC. We encourage aspirants and applicants of the Puget Sound Pilotage District to look through health insurance options at [Washington Health Plan Finder](#). The Grays Harbor Pilotage District is a little different. Trainees have the option of becoming employees of the Port of Grays Harbor during training, which provides access to the Port's medical insurance and other benefits.

37. Do you have to reside in Washington during training or after becoming licensed?

There is no Washington state requirement that state-licensed pilots must live in the state.

38. Can you work during the training program?

While receiving a stipend from the BPC, trainees are not allowed to hold other employment.

39. How challenging is it to obtain full federal pilotage in the 36-month maximum training timeframe?

Successful candidates on the Pilot Training Program waiting list are encouraged to begin work on their federal endorsements as soon as feasible as we know it is challenging but all of the trainees have been able to meet this challenge within the timeframe. Many current pilots have entered the Training Program with no federal pilotage and were able to successfully receive all of their endorsements in the required timeframe.

40. What are the expectations of shiphandling skills for a new trainee to have prior to entering the program?

We believe that successful candidates who have met the threshold minimums for our exam will bring the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in our Pilot Training Program.

41. Do pilots typically come from 1 segment of the industry over another - towing versus shipping versus ferries?

Successful candidates have come from all industries across the continuum and the diversity of experiences are welcomed.