

How to become a pilot

1. Career path and Familiarization Program

Marine pilot candidates typically start their career in the local fishing and tug & tow industry, ferry services, the Canadian Coast Guard or deep sea. They accumulate sea time in their chosen field in order to meet the minimum sea time requirements outlined in the *Pacific Pilotage Regulations* [http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/C.R.C.,_c._1270/index.html] and summarized under 2(g) below.

Once they have accumulated the required sea time, candidates may apply to join the Familiarization Program, where they will spend two years observing licenced pilots perform their duties. In order to enter into the Familiarization Program, candidates must possess a valid medical report, hold a *Master 500 GT, Near Coastal* certificate of competency (CoC), and be well on their way to meeting the sea time requirements in 2(g) below.

2. Examination prerequisites

Once a candidate has completed the required number of familiarization transits, which are defined in Section 4(1) of the *Pacific Pilotage Regulations*, he/she may apply to write the marine pilot exam. The prerequisites for exam candidates are as follows:

- a. Canadian citizenship
- b. Proof of attendance of the following courses:
 - SEN 2 / Automatic Radar Plotting Aid (ARPA)
 - Radio Operator's Certificate (ROC) or GMDSS Certificate (GOC)
 - Bridge Resource Management (BRM)
 - Marine Emergency Duties (MED)
- c. Valid Transport Canada medical
- d. Bio-psychosocial assessment (to be arranged by PPA)
- e. Valid *Master 500 GT, Near Coastal* certificate of competency
- f. Required number of familiarization trips, which varies based on the composition of the candidate's sea time
- g. Required sea time as defined below:
 - A minimum of 700 days as a Master on the B.C. coast; or
 - 365 days as a Master on the B.C. coast and 547 additional days in the region while holding a *Watchkeeping Mate's* certificate; or
 - 1,000 days on the B.C. coast while holding a *Watchkeeping Mate's* certificate.

Notes regarding sea time:

- While sea time can be earned while holding a *Watchkeeping Mate's* certificate of competency, it is necessary to have the *Master 500 Ton* certificate to write the exam. In addition, it is possible to earn up to 365 days of the above sea time while holding a Fishing Master III certificate or deep sea time.

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- For BC coast pilot candidates, the required sea time mentioned in 2(g) must have been served in at least two of the four pilotage areas (Area 2, 3, 4 & 5).
- For Fraser River pilot candidates, the required sea time mentioned in 2(g) must include at least 250 days served in Area 1.

3. Examination process

The marine pilot exam is divided into three consecutive components: the General Knowledge exam, the Local Knowledge exam and the oral exam. Exams are usually held once per year and the maximum number of overall exam attempts allowed for each candidate is six.

The first assessment in the exam process is the General Knowledge paper. This written exam with a passing grade of 70% is designed to assess a candidate's general ship knowledge and models the subjects required for a *Master 500 GT, Near Coastal CoC*. If a candidate scores 80% or higher, this result will be valid for two calendar years and the candidate will not be required to take the General Knowledge exam again during that time period.

The second step in the process is the Local Knowledge paper. This is also a written exam which focuses on the particular navigational challenges of the B.C. coast – local currents, tides, weather systems, etc. The passing grade is also 70%, however a candidate's result is only valid for the current exam attempt. The Local Knowledge paper must be written again at every exam attempt.

If a candidate's scores in the General Knowledge and Local Knowledge exams are 70% or higher, he/she can move on to the oral exam. The oral exam consists of a three to four-hour oral assessment of a candidate's overall suitability for a career in marine pilotage. The passing grade for oral exam is also 70%.

4. Eligibility list

Candidates who pass all of their exams will be placed on an eligibility list and their ranking on the list will be based on their overall exam marks. They will remain on the eligibility list for a maximum of two years, unless they can prove that they are maintaining their sea time in the area. As pilots retire and positions become available, candidates whose names are on the eligibility list are hired as apprentice pilots in the order that they are ranked.

5. Apprenticeship and licencing

During their apprenticeship, which may last from 9 to 24 months, and includes a variety of training courses including ship handling, escort tugs, ECDIS, etc. During this time they will be performing pilotage assignments with licenced pilots into all the ports on the BC coast, and there will be periodic assessments conducted by senior pilots. Upon successful completion of the apprenticeship, a Class II (restricted) licence is awarded to the new pilot. Once a pilot has served satisfactorily as a Class II licence holder for a period of one year, he/she will be awarded a Class I (unrestricted) licence.

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6. Additional notes for coast pilot candidates

B.C. coast pilots are qualified to navigate along the entire coast. The admission process ultimately hinges on the candidate's knowledge of, and experience in, local waters. Please note the following useful tips:

- Interested candidates should focus on getting wide exposure to the B.C. coast, including the Mainland coast, the Queen Charlotte Islands as well as the east and west coasts of Vancouver Island.
- If marine experience is limited to one part of the coast, it is recommended that candidates find work with a company servicing the entire coast. Alternatively, in order to get better acquainted with other parts of the coast, they could travel as passengers on either B.C. Ferries routes or other regional vessels such as those from Port Alberni, or the coastal supply vessels which serves coastal fish farms.
- Candidates should seek to obtain their *Watchkeeping Mate* certificate of competency and ultimately their *Master 500 Ton, Near Coastal* certificate of competency as soon as they have the required sea time. There are various ways to make it easier to obtain such certification, for example through the B.C. Institute of Technology (www.bcit.ca) or through self study. It is important to note that Transport Canada (www.tc.gc.ca) provides detailed syllabi for various levels of marine certification.

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