

CAREERS



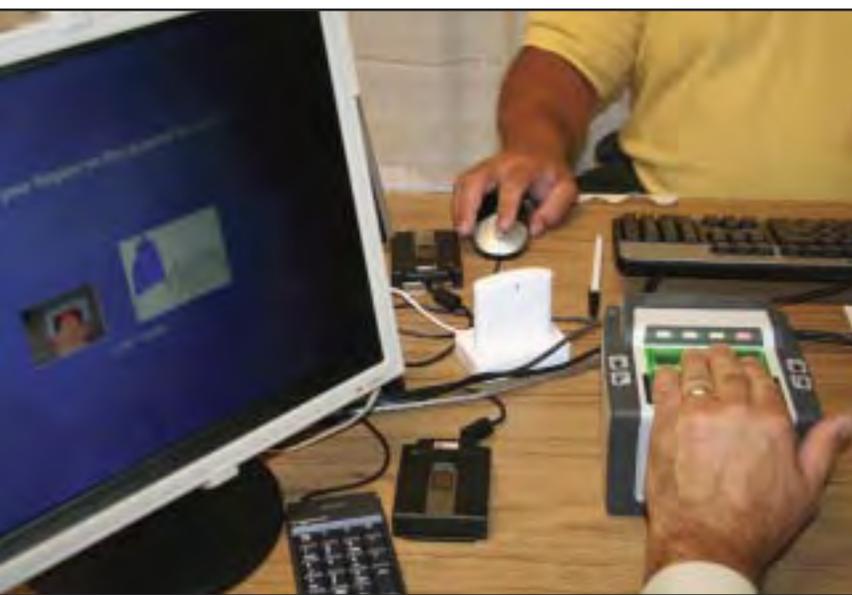
Mariner Credentialing

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The Coast Guard issues mariner credentials to individuals found qualified as to age, experience, professional qualifications, physical fitness, character, and lifestyle habits.



Every application for an original credential must be submitted to a regional exam center, and the applicant must also appear there for fingerprinting and identification. USCG photo.

We strive to make the credentialing transaction as simple and fast as possible while ensuring the quality, competence, and professionalism of the U.S. merchant mariner.¹

Evaluation Standards

All applications for a mariner credential must be submitted to a Coast Guard regional exam center (REC). Evaluation of these applications is performed at the

Coast Guard's National Maritime Center (NMC). There, applications are reviewed for:

Age—An applicant must have attained the minimum age required for the holder of the requested credential. For most licenses and certificates of registry (CORs), the minimum age is 21 (in some instances 18). A merchant mariner document (MMD) may be issued to a person at age 16 with parental consent; however, by law an able seaman must be at least 18 years old. There is no minimum age for any other qualified rating.

Citizenship—Licenses may be issued only to U.S. citizens with the lone exception of a license as operator of uninspected, undocumented passenger vessels. This license is limited to domestic near coastal waters not more than 100 miles offshore. An MMD may be issued to a U.S. citizen or to a foreign national who has been lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence. Citizenship and age are usually proved by presenting an original birth certificate or a certified copy issued by a state's Department of Vital Statistics (or equivalent body). Citizenship and age may also be proved by presenting a valid, current U.S. passport. A naturalized citizen should present his or her certificate of naturalization. Other proofs of citizenship and age are available but seldom used.

Character—The Coast Guard must assure that the holder of a mariner's credential can be entrusted with its inherent duties. All applicants are fingerprinted at a regional examination center, and the results are reviewed through national databases to determine if they have criminal backgrounds or terrorist affiliations. In addition, the national driver register is reviewed to see if the

DEFINITIONS

Merchant mariner document—Merchant mariner documents (MMDs) are issued to the crewmembers of commercial vessels for two purposes. The MMD serves as an identity document by depicting the photograph and other personal information about the mariner. It also serves as a qualification document by noting the unlicensed capacities in which the mariner is qualified to serve. Because service on vessels of more than 100 gross tons on other than inland waters requires an identity document, license holders engaged in such service must also have an MMD. This rather confusing array of credential requirements means that some mariners have only a license record, some have only an MMD record, and some have both.

License—Licenses are issued to people responsible for the safe navigation and propulsion of a vessel. The license certifies that the holder has the experience and knowledge to serve in a specified position of a particular vessel.

Certificate of registry—A certificate of registry (COR) as a staff officer is a mariner credential issued to individuals who serve aboard vessels as a purser, medical doctor (formerly surgeon), or professional nurse. For a COR as a medical doctor or professional nurse, that person must hold a valid medical license issued under the authority of a state or territory of the United States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, or the District of Columbia.

Radio officer's license—This mariner's credential is issued to an individual who serves aboard a vessel to operate the shipboard radio equipment. That person must hold a valid first- or second-class radiotelegraph operator's license issued by the Federal Communications Commission.

Merchant mariner credential—This is a general term that may refer to a merchant mariner document, license, certificate of registry, STCW certificate, or radio officer's license.

applicant has been convicted of certain vehicular offenses within the three years preceding application. Congress mandated this review following the grounding of the *Exxon Valdez* because evidence of alcohol or drug abuse is often first visible through driving convictions. An applicant with a recent criminal conviction may be assigned an assessment period during which he or she is required to demonstrate evidence of good character before a credential will be issued.

Physical competence —

Mariners must be in good health and physically able to perform the duties required by their licenses or MMD endorsements for a rating (such as able seaman, qualified member of the engine department, or tankerman).² All applicants for these positions must submit a report of a physical examination. A person applying for an "entry rating" as an ordinary seaman, wiper, or member of the steward's department does not need to undergo a full physical examination. Deck officers and able seaman must be able to distinguish colors to identify aids to navigation, colored lights that provide information about the course of a nearby vessel, and colors printed on navigational charts. Engineering officers, qualified members of the engine department, and tankermen are only required to distinguish between the colors red, green, blue, and yellow.

If an applicant for a mariner's credential is unable to meet the physical examination standards for that credential, that person may qualify for a medical waiver after further review of the medical issue(s). Persons who do not qualify for a medical waiver will be issued a denial letter. This letter will contain their appeal rights.

Training and experience—Applicants must provide proof that they have completed the required training and/or assessments to qualify for a credential. The trainee must present a course completion certificate as proof of successful completion of the course(s). The trainee should present that certificate to the REC as part

of the application package. It will be verified and returned to the applicant.

Many licenses, CORs, and qualified ratings require the applicant to present evidence of seagoing service. This may be submitted as certificates of discharge, letters, or other documents certifying the vessel's name, amount and type of experience, tonnage, route, and horsepower and propulsion type. Foreign and military sea service may be acceptable.

Fees—User fees are required to process mariner credentials, and are divided into three areas: evaluation, testing, and issuance. The typical fee for most license and merchant mariner document transactions is either \$50.00 or \$100.00. Checks, money orders, and credit cards are accepted. Applicants may also pay online at www.pay.gov.

The Evaluation Process

When the evaluator completes the review, several outcomes are possible:

- If the applicant is qualified for the credential



and a test is required, the applicant will then be required to successfully pass an examination.

- If no test is required, the credential is issued.
- Applications that are substantially complete but lacking minor pieces of information will be held in pending status until the applicant can produce the missing information.
- Incomplete applications, such as those lacking major pieces of information, will be denied and returned to the applicant.

Once an application is approved, it is valid for one year, during which time the applicant must pass any required examination. After one year, the application becomes invalid. Then, if the applicant again wishes to apply, he or she must submit another application and pay the user fee. An issuance fee is due when the credential is issued.

Original Credential

Every application for an original credential must be submitted to a regional exam center, and the applicant must also appear there for fingerprinting and identification.

General requirements—Applicants must prove they possess all requirements for the credential they are seeking, as provided for in the credentialing regulations.

Proof of identity—For an original mariner credential, two current forms of identification are required. One of these must contain a photo of the applicant.

Proof of citizenship—Applicants for mariner credentials must provide acceptable proof of nationality and, if applicable, immigration status.

Fingerprinting—Applicants are fingerprinted and a background check is conducted. In addition, a national driver register check is conducted.

Physical requirements—A completed physical examination report must attest that the applicant is fit for the rating for which he or she is applying.

Chemical test for dangerous drugs—The applicant must provide evidence of having passed a chemical test for dangerous drugs or that he or she is participating in an approved random drug testing program.

Verification of sea service—Individuals must present certificates of discharge, letters, or other official documents that certify their sea service aboard vessels. Foreign or military sea service is acceptable. This information should include the vessel's name, capacity in which sea service was obtained, official or state number, tonnage, waters sailed, type of horsepower, and type of propulsion.

Recency—Applicants for a mariner license (deck or engine) must have at least 90 days of qualifying service on vessels of appropriate tonnage or horsepower within the three years immediately preceding the date of application.

Radar certificate (deck license only)—Individuals applying for a deck license that authorizes service on radar-equipped vessels of 300 gross registered tons or more or towing vessels of 26 feet

or more in length must present a valid radar certificate from a U.S. Coast Guard-approved course.

Radio officer—Applicants must present an original of a currently valid first- or second-class radiotelegraph operator's license issued by the Federal Communications Commission.

Certificate of registry (medical doctor or professional nurse only)—Applicants must hold a currently valid, appropriate license as a physician, surgeon, or registered nurse issued under the authority of a state or territory of the United States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, or the District of Columbia.

Transportation Worker Identification Credential
The Coast Guard has a pending regulatory project related to the implementation of the TWIC in the maritime sector.

You should keep well informed of the requirements, implementation schedule, and application process to obtain a TWIC.

All holders of merchant mariner credentials will be required to obtain a TWIC from the Transportation Security Administration.

After the implementation date, you may not operate under the authority of a mariner credential without a valid TWIC, and failure to obtain or hold a TWIC may serve as the basis for suspension or revocation of the mariner credential.

Information pertaining to the TWIC may be found at www.tsa.gov/twic.



STCW—People to be employed on vessels seaward of the boundary line specified in Title 46 CFR, Part 7, aboard vessels of greater than 200 gross registered tons (domestic tonnage) or 500 gross tons (ITC tonnage) must meet STCW training and assessment requirements.³

Credential Renewals

All mariner licenses, MMDs, CORs, and radio officer licenses are issued for a period of five years. At the end of this five-year period, if the mariner has not had a credential raise of grade (explained later) the credential must be renewed.

A credential may be renewed up to one year before its expiration date. There is a one-year grace period to renew the credential past its printed expiration date with no penalty. However, the mariner may not serve under the authority of an expired credential.

Beyond one year after the expiration date, the mariner must demonstrate continued professional knowledge (by completing a course approved for this purpose, or by passing the complete examination for that license) before the credential will be renewed.

Mariners may conduct an “inactive credential renewal” if they are unwilling or otherwise unable to meet certain requirements (i.e. professional or physical requirements). The following restrictive endorsement will be placed on the back of the credential: “License renewed for continuity purposes only; service under the authority of this license is prohibited.” Holders of licenses with this continuity endorsement may have it rescinded at any time by satisfying all the credential renewal requirements.

The renewal process is similar to applying for the original credential. Applications must be submitted to an REC, and applicants appear at an REC for fingerprinting and identification. Requirements and necessary documents are the same as for original credential applications. Some differences:

- Individuals renewing a tankerman endorsement must present proof of two transfers in the last five years or completion of a Coast Guard-approved course.
- Individuals having a radar endorsement on their license must present a valid radar observer certificate from a Coast Guard-ap-

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Additional information about mariner credentialing may be found at www.uscg.mil/nmc or <http://homeport.uscg.mil> under “merchant mariners” in the list of missions.

proved course for service on radar-equipped vessels of 300 gross registered tons or more or vessels 26 feet or more in length.

Raise of Grade

As a mariner advances to a higher level of authority and responsibility associated with a license, MMD, or COR (for example, from mate to master, ordinary seaman to able seaman, assistant engineer to chief engineer, wiper to qualified member of the engine department, or junior assistant purser to senior assistant purser), he or she must obtain a credential for this raise in grade.

Applicants must prove they possess all the requirements for the credential raise of grade they are seeking, as provided for in the credentialing regulations. The process is the same as that for obtaining a credential renewal, so this new credential will be valid for five years.

Appeals

If an application is denied, the applicant will be given the reason for the denial in writing. The applicant will also be given a copy of his or her appeal rights. Any applicant may submit an appeal following the procedures specified by the regulations contained in 46 CFR Part 1.03.

About the author:

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Endnotes:

- ¹ The National Maritime Center and regional examination centers directly impact the credentialing functions contained in Title 46, Code of Federal Regulations, Parts 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16; Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circulars; policy and guidance documents; and the Marine Safety Manual Volume III, Marine Industry Personnel.
- ² The physical regulatory requirements for the credential sought should be reviewed by an applicant to determine if he or she meets the physical standards. Mariners subject to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchstanding for Seafarers, 1978, as amended in 1995 (STCW), must also demonstrate that they have the strength, coordination, flexibility, and agility to perform their expected duties. This includes applicants for an MMD with entry-level ratings when the applicant will be serving on seagoing vessels to which STCW applies.
- ³ STCW information may be found at www.uscg.mil/nmc. Mariners on vessels that do not proceed seaward of the boundary or operate on the Great Lakes are not required to have an STCW certificate.

