Captains License for Coasties
Courtesy of BMCS James Bordell
www.BoatswainsMate.net

Disclaimer: This is a guide is designed to help Coast Guardsman to get a background on what it takes to get their Merchant Marine license. The official source is the US Coast Guard Marine Safety Center. Their merchant marine licensing information can be found at the USCG Licensing website. The intent with this guide is to only break it down and get a basic understanding of what it takes to get your license.

Think of acquiring your license by two methods; study on your own and then testing at a REC or paying for a training course to pass the test. Also think of it involving two phases; testing and application.

I recommend visiting the USCG Licensing website http://www.uscg.mil/stcw/index.htm and printing out all information packages, forms, and applications to get an idea of what it is going to take. Use these forms as a planning tool and start working on getting your package together.

There is a lot of information on the web, printed in books and among your shipmates. Ask questions and start RIGHT NOW getting your license. Get a folder and start collecting your documentation. Print out the application check lists and information you need from the USCG licensing website.

A great benefit that Active Duty and Reserve personnel can take advantage to help pay for your license is to process an application for a CG Foundation Educational Grant. The grant provides reimbursement for text books and miscellaneous educational expenses up to certain amount and within certain guidelines. If you choose to study on your own and test out at a REC, your license could be free!

TESTING

The testing can be accomplished two different ways, either test out with the Coast Guard at a Regional Exam Center (REC) or test with a CG approved training course. Both of these methods have their pro and cons, it really comes down to what fits for you.

Regional Exam Center

- 17 REC locations in the US
- Study on your own using store bought study guides, Bowditch, Knights Modern Seamanship, CG correspondence material, ECT. (you have to learn it)
- Testing is done in modules (categories)
- 3 chances to pass the test per module
- Can usually complete tests within 2-4 days
- Cost: $95.00 examination fee (still have to pay application and issuance fee)
- Save all receipts and process a CG Educational grant for reimbursement of funds

Approved Training Course

- 240 CG approved “get your captains license” training courses
- Mandated curriculum with 56 hours of training and review (crammed into your head in two weeks)
- Extra 24 hours required for 100 ton upgrade

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- Extra 4 hours required for endorsements (tow or sail)
- Cost: $600 - $900 (still have to pay CG application and issuance fee)

APPLICATION

All applications will be processed by the Coast Guard. The difference between doing it yourself and going through an approved training course is the course representatives will assist you with the application. Just because you pass their test doesn’t mean you will get a license. You still have to get all of your documentation in order and submit it to the Coast Guard! This takes time and once the application is processed you have only one year to test and have all other requirements complete. Be aware that the clock starts ticking when the application is submitted. The training course test will be valid for one year also. The application review is extensive and time consuming. Once your application has been reviewed, you will be notified with what license type, grade and tonnage you are eligible for.

Take your application seriously. Review it completely for accuracy. The idea should be to submit this once with all required documents the first time to avoid delays. Do all of the leg work and have all required documents in order with the current dates.

You can use your Coast Guard experience to fulfill requirements of your license; however everything must be properly documented. Your experience won’t automatically transfer over just because you’re in the Coast Guard. Proper documentation is the key to a timely application. Make sure you use the CHECKLIST FOR DECK OR ENGINEER LICENSE to ensure you get what you need (remember my disclaimer).

Transcript of Sea Service – request a transcript of sea service from PERSRU to properly document your time onboard cutters. This should have the vessel tonnage and years/months onboard. You will have to break it down to what your duty was onboard and where the cutter operated as it applies to license issue (near coastal, great lakes, inland, etc).

Boat hours – the license reviewers will not accept print outs from AOPS. You will have to take the time underway and convert it to underway days, apply it to the Small Vessel Sea Service Form and have someone in the command sign to attest your experience.

Physical Examination Report – schedule an appointment and take this form with you for the doctor to sign.

Report of Chemical Drug Testing – By being in the Coast Guard you are currently in a drug testing program. Have your command sign a letter stating this fact.

First Aid/CPR – get with your training officer to see if your unit can schedule these courses. They apply to our job in the Coast Guard as well.

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