



## **Mendez Marine Advice on:**

### **HOW TO PREPARE FOR YOUR YACHTMASTER EXAM**

The RYA / MCA Yachtmaster Offshore and Coastal examinations are seen by many people as being the most useful & credible of all the yachting qualifications both in the UK and abroad. The RYA administers the scheme & examines candidates on behalf of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA).

The examination is a test (which can be as long as 12 hours at sea) of the candidate's ability to skipper a Yacht or Motor Cruiser.

There are separate exams for SAIL and POWER but it is possible to convert one to the other.

#### **What is a Yachtmaster?**

The definition is "a yachtsperson competent to skipper a cruising yacht on any passage which can be completed without the use of astro navigation". In practice this means coastal and cross channel passages.

As any yacht skipper will tell you, those passages close to land or across shipping lanes are the most difficult, particular if the weather is rough or the visibility poor. A Yachtmaster needs a wealth of knowledge not only to cope with straightforward sailing or motor cruising, but also to be able to cope when things go wrong and to be the person to whom the crew will turn for help and reassurance.

#### **Experience needed before the Yachtmaster Offshore exam?**

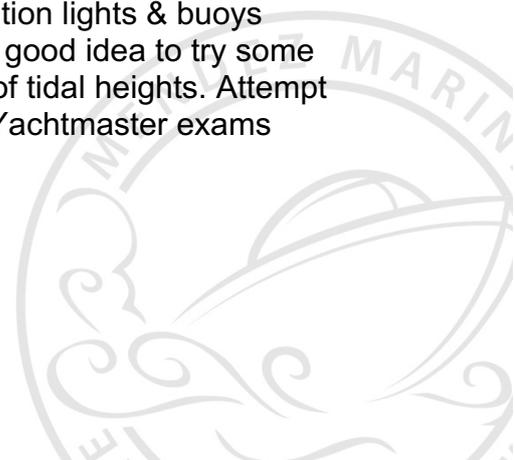
The official answer is "50 days, 2,500 miles (50% tidal), 5 days as skipper, 5 passages over 60 miles, including 2 overnight & 2 as a skipper".

Please [read here on the RYA website](#) for a full definition of passages and vessel allowed for them to count.

Remember the exam is essentially a test your ability to take charge of a yacht so your experience as skipper is the most important.

The mileage requirement is quite high & candidates should have been afloat in a variety of weather conditions to a variety of harbours & anchorages.

A Yachtmaster should be able to enter any well-charted harbour with sufficient depth, by day or night, for the first time. The only way to gain confidence is by practice, particularly at night when skill is required in picking out navigation lights & buoys against a background of shore lights. Prior to the exam, it is a good idea to try some new harbours, possibly those that require a good knowledge of tidal heights. Attempt the occasional night entry & be aware of the problems. Most Yachtmaster exams involve night sailing.





## **Coastal examinations:**

A Yachtmaster Coastal “has the knowledge needed to skipper a yacht on coastal cruises but does not necessarily have the experience needed to undertake longer passages. In other words the theory is the same for Coastal as for Yachtmaster but less practical experience and skill is required for the examination. The examination is a practical exam like the Yachtmaster, but takes less time, usually around 8 - 10 hours.

The experience required is: - 30 days, 2 days as skipper, 800 miles & 12 night hours. If you have successfully completed an RYA Coastal Skipper Practical Course Completion Certificate, the requirements become: 20 days, 2 days as skipper, 400 miles & 12 night hours.

## **Conversions:**

You may take your exam in either sail or power provided you are eligible in terms of experience etc. Then if you wish to convert to the other discipline you will need approximately half the mileage etc to be eligible for a conversion (some will need to be tidal) the exam lasts about 4 hours.

## **During an examination:**

We will arrange a date & time for the examiner to meet you on board the boat. All exams are slightly nerve-racking, even for highly experienced or professional skippers, but you can unwind by talking to the examiner & making sure you understand what is required. The examiner understands that the first hour or two is difficult & will emphasize that the idea is to give you the opportunity to demonstrate your skills rather than to try to catch you out.

You will be asked to undertake a short passage although you may have to plan and discuss a longer one. Discuss with the examiner what you are being asked to do. In general you should skipper the vessel in your normal style. If this means putting the kettle on every half-hour - then do it.

## **Collision Regulations:**

You will be expected to have a very complete understanding, including buoyage, lights and shapes. You will be tested on these and we cannot stress enough how important it is to thoroughly revise these over and over before you start the exam course. You will need a copy of the International Regulations for Prevention of Collisions at Sea (Col Regs) which you can buy at any good nautical bookshop or from Mendez Marine.

## **Navigation:**

You must know your position more or less accurately throughout the exam. Good skippers spend time on deck observing. A common mistake is to be busy plotting fixes when a glance up on deck would confirm the vessel's position from a navigation buoy or transit. Marks are not awarded for over-navigating.

You need to have a good knowledge and be able to use practically a Course to steer and EP over short distances, secondary ports including a computation of rates table. The test usually involves practical problems involving tidal streams & tidal heights. It is not cheating to look these up beforehand. There are sufficient variables on the day



without having to worry about numbers that can be looked the week before. During the exam preparation the instructor will guide you through a few tidal calculations to ensure that you are happy with the methods you are going to use to calculate heights & streams.

### **Boat Handling:**

The exam will involve lots of boat handling. The handling is usually done in harbour & often involves some sort of berthing & unberthing to pontoons, piles or mooring. You should understand how the boat is going to react under power. What is its turning circle? Does it have a predictable kick astern? Can you turn in a confined space? What will the wind do? Similarly, practice maneuvering to pick up mooring buoys or anchoring. Remember does your crew understand how you expect them to act during the manoeuvre? The examiner is not looking for first time every time success - but you do need to demonstrate a good understanding of how the boat reacts at slow speed. Again, experience in a variety of conditions is the key to success.

### **Man Overboard:**

The exam will almost always include some kind of simulated man overboard recovery. You have to discover a system that works for you and the boat. It should not include any dangers, and you must not risk losing sight of the casualty, but must end up with the vessel stopped next to the "man" in the water. How would you get him back on board? Careful crew control makes all the difference.

### **Safety:**

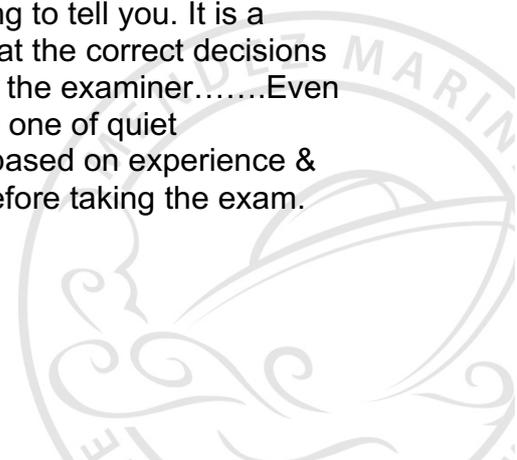
Most candidates understand safety procedures & are safety conscious. Do remember that if you have decided that Lifejackets should be worn at all times then you should follow your own advice.

### **Meteorology:**

Listen to the forecast before the examination. You will be asked questions about the present weather situation & how this might affect a passage plan. You need to understand how weather systems influence sea conditions & how to make plans based on this knowledge. Frequently decisions based on the weather include other variables such as type of boat & strength of crew, so the examiner might ask you to consider a number of possibilities. Your opinions based on experience are required; there is rarely a definitive answer.

### **Ability as Skipper:**

The most important assessment on the day is whether you are fully in command of the vessel. Being in charge is not about shouting or giving a stream of commands. It is about leading the crew, communicating with them, making sure that they understand what is going on & listening to them when they have something to tell you. It is a quality sensed by the crew when they feel safe & confident that the correct decisions are being made. Don't forget to feed and water the crew AND the examiner.....Even the best skippers make mistakes but the overall impression is one of quiet competence. The examiner is looking for this ability which is based on experience & knowledge; hence the requirement for skippered passages before taking the exam.





## **Pre-exam training:**

Although you are not required to have pre-exam training, we recommend a four days practice with an instructor and getting used to the boat as invaluable, and will usually be sufficient if you already have the necessary experience and are competent with all the theory aspects. We run four day Yachtmaster preparation courses most months throughout the year, and will arrange the exam for you on the last day. We use friendly highly qualified instructors, who will assist you in every way to prepare for the exam. They will concentrate on finding out your strengths and weaknesses, and act accordingly. If you intend to use your own boat, we can arrange the exam for you, and offer any private own boat tuition as required

## **Commercial Endorsements:**

These are required for any skipper's qualification used on a commercial vessel. To obtain yours you will need to attend a one day Sea Survival course, have a medical fitness examination from your own doctor (either an ML5 or an ENG1) then apply to (and pay) the RYA for the endorsement. Note from the 1<sup>st</sup> April you will also need to have passed the RYA PPR course (online about half a day).

## **Notes for Exam Candidates:**

Please note that these exams are very thorough wide ranging tests and being a very experienced skipper is not enough. Candidates will be tested on methods and techniques which are not used every day - even by prudent experienced skippers, the use of GPS makes everyone "rusty" and the level of proficiency expected in manual navigation skills and boat handling is very high. Exam preparation sessions are intended to be an intensive last minute final practice for the exam.

Candidates should already be very experienced as a skipper, proficient at the theory aspects and have full knowledge of rules and regulations etc. before starting the final preparation session. Please do not expect to cover the entire Yachtmaster syllabus in just a few days. It is imperative that you do some serious revision before starting the prep course.

## **Examination fees:**

Yachtmaster	£210
Coastal Skipper	£181
Yachtmaster Ocean	£159
Partial re-exam	£ 96
Conversion	£113
Issue of Duplicate	£ 30
VHF / SRC	£ 60
Commercial Endorsement	£ 33
PPR course (from 1 <sup>st</sup> April)	£ 39

## **Requirements prior to exam:**

- 1) VHF Certificate SRC, LRC or GOC
- 2) First Aid (1 day minimum)
- 3) Passport size photo
- 4) Exam fee (payable to RYA)
- 5) Logged relevant experience
- 6) Completed application form

If you have any questions about the exams, or have booked an exam with us and have any doubts about your ability, please call us for friendly helpful advice —

**Tel: 01489 588977**

