



STATE OF WASHINGTON
BOARD OF PILOTAGE COMMISSIONERS

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Washington State Pilotage - FAQs

When is the next exam?

While an exact date has not yet been scheduled, we have targeted **April 6, 2021** for the next exam. The last Washington State Marine Pilot Exam was held November 5, 2018.

Will COVID-19 impact the timeframe of the next exam?

At this time we do not foresee any changes to our upcoming exam target date – we know the time commitment this takes on your part and once we set the final exam date we will do our very best to stick to that timeframe.

Where is the exam?

The Washington State Marine Pilot Exams are held in Seattle, WA.

What is the exam process?

The exam process involves submitting the application with required attachments, meeting the qualifications to take the exam, taking a written exam, and participating in a simulator evaluation.

The first step in the exam process is make sure you qualify. Check out the exam page on our website at <http://pilotage.wa.gov/exam-information.html>. Here you will find links to WAC 363-116-0751 Qualifications for Pilot Applicants and other pertinent information.

The next step is application. The application package is available on our website 4-6 months before the exam. You can also contact the Board office for a copy at either (206) 515-3904 or PilotageInfo@wsdot.wa.gov.

If the Board determines that you are qualified, based on [WAC 363-116-0751](http://www.wa.gov/wac/363-116-0751), then you will be scheduled to sit for the written exam. The exam is 150 multiple choice questions and is proctored by the Board's exam consultant. The Board will set a cut score after the written exam under the guidance of the exam consultant. If you score above the cut, you will move on to the simulator evaluation phase of the exam. Historically, you would take the exam on a Monday, find out if you passed on Wednesday and need to report in on Thursday to determine your simulator instructions/timeslot and then would be assigned your time in the coming week.

The simulator evaluation typically takes place in Seattle. The Board will set the cut score for the simulator evaluation under the guidance of the exam consultant. If you score above the cut, you will be placed, by rank, on a list to be called into the training program for the district you selected when a position becomes available.

If you are not successful, you are encouraged to apply for the next exam. The Board must hold an exam no more than four years after the previous exam was given.

I have reviewed the current sea service qualification summary and I still have questions about my ability to qualify. Is there someone I can discuss my qualifications with prior to applying?

Yes, please contact us! We strongly encourage you to reach out to Board staff and ask questions early in the process so that we can help you understand your eligibility for this exam or future exams. WAC 363-116-0751 states "The board will not provide applicants with a final determination verifying service until it receives an application form. An applicant will not get official notification of whether he/she qualifies to sit for the examination until the board reviews a formal application." However, it is referring to a FORMAL notification after Board action. We are available to help guide you through the processes prior to a formal board decision regarding eligibility.

Where do I get materials to study?

The Board will post an exam [reference materials](#) list on our website 4-6 months before the exam. Applicants are encouraged to form study groups!

Are the exam questions public information?

No. The exam questions are confidential.

How long does the exam take?

The written exam is one day only and you will have four and one-half hours to complete. You will receive very detailed exam procedures –which includes what you will need to bring, where you will need to be and other test taking advice after you have been accepted to sit for the exam.

How much does it cost to take the exam?

Exam costs vary from year to year and we do not yet know the fee structure for the 2021 exam. However, costs for the 2018 exam were as follows: \$400 for the application, \$1,500 for the written exam, and \$2,000 for the simulator evaluation.

If I applied but was determined to be ineligible for this exam cycle, would I receive any of the fees back? How about if I did not pass the exam?

Per WAC 363-116-078(2)(b), the Board may, at its discretion, refund all or part of the examination administration fee for a pilot applicant who is unable to sit for the written examination. If however, you do not pass the written or the simulator portion of the exam you are not eligible for a refund.

Do you need pilotage in the area in order to take the exam?

No. While it's a good idea to get as much federal pilotage as you can before the training program, you don't need any to qualify for the exam. Most trainees get their federal pilotage while they are training.

How is the exam graded?

The test is developed, administered, and graded by a professional organization. The Board sets the cut score for both the written exam ([WAC 363-116-076](#)) and simulator evaluation ([WAC 363-116-077](#)) under the guidance of the exam consultant.

Is there a maximum age to take the pilot exam or to become a pilot?

Per [RCW 88.16.090](#) the minimum age to be licensed is 25 and the maximum age is 70.

How many pilot trainees do you anticipate accepting into the program?

There is no set number. The test results and cut score dictate how many there will be. As a reference, 16 successful candidates were called into the training program from the 2012 trainee waiting list. So far, 10 from the 2016 trainee waiting list have been called into the training program, and 9 from the 2018 trainee waiting list.

What is the process to become a pilot after you pass the exam and make it into the training program?

The training program consists of 3 phases: Observation, Training, and Evaluation. Each phase consists of roughly 100 trips. In addition to the trips, there are local knowledge and conning quizzes that must be taken for each route. These quizzes are done in the BPC office.

To be eligible for licensing, a trainee must: complete the conning quizzes and local knowledge exams, successfully complete the 3 phases of the training program (Observation, Training, and Evaluation), attend Portable Piloting Unit (PPU) training, and must have all necessary federal pilotage endorsements on their Master Mariner Credential (MMC). Other requirements for licensing can be found in [WAC 363-116-080](#).

How long is the training period?

Trainees have up to 36 months to complete the program. However, the average completion time is usually around 18-24 months.

What is the schedule while in the training period?

To earn a full stipend, trainees must take 18 trips during any given month. The trips are selected and arranged by the trainees, and are scheduled at the trainees' discretion as long as they are following the State's [rest rules](#) and additional rest rules, if any, for the particular pilotage district they are training in.

Is it feasible to hold a second job while training?

While receiving a stipend from the BPC, trainees are not allowed to hold other employment. Please contact the BPC for more information.

What is the compensation as a trainee?

Trainees receive a monthly stipend of up to \$6,000. For additional information regarding the stipend, please review the [Policy Statement](#) found on our website.

What is the compensation as a pilot?

There are two different districts in Washington State: Puget Sound and Grays Harbor. Pilots in the Puget Sound Pilotage District are members of Puget Sound Pilots, an association of independent contractors. Pilots in the Grays Harbor Pilotage District are employees of the Port of Grays Harbor. Compensation for each district is different. The BPC's [Annual Reports](#) are a good resource for compensation information in each district.

What is the difference between the Board of Pilotage Commissioners (BPC), Puget Sound Pilots (PSP) and Port of Grays Harbor Pilots (PGH)?

The role of each entity is commonly confused. The BPC is a state agency which provides regulatory oversight of pilotage in Washington State. The BPC proposes legislation, adopts rules and enforces adherence to the Pilotage Act, trains and licenses marine pilots, reports and investigates incidents, and grants exemptions to qualified vessels from pilotage.

PSP and PGH provide efficient pilotage services, which includes safely and independently pilot vessels, dispatch pilots, operate pilot boats, administer benefits and retirement packages, provide tariff billing, revenue collection, and pilot boat expenses, and coordinate continuing education for pilots.

What is the schedule while working as a pilot?

In the Puget Sound Pilotage District, pilots work 2 weeks on, 2 weeks off. In the Grays Harbor Pilotage District, pilots currently work 1 month on, 1 month off.

Does the program support diversity?

ABSOLUTELY! We have a non-discriminatory open application exam process. The BPC, in partnership with Puget Sound Pilots, established the Joint Diversity Committee in 2016 which has established connections with multiple women's maritime organizations. The committee examines barriers for women and ethnic minorities in the maritime industry, and looks for ways to increase pathways and exposure for those groups. The training program went through psychometric enhancements and validation in 2017 ensuring that all trainees receive the same opportunity to reach the same level of knowledge and expertise.

What is the Puget Sound's safety record?

Former USCG Commander, Captain Joe Raymond, Sector Puget Sound, offered the following comments regarding our region:

"When I first came here four years ago, I asked my staff to pull the safety stats and compare us to the other big ports around the country; New York, Houston, Galveston, New Orleans, LA Long Beach, San Francisco. The differences are really stunning. I will say, without hesitation, that Puget Sound is the safest large port in the country. And that's something to be very proud of." – Captain Joe Raymond, January 19, 2017