

YM Exam Preparation

Langkawi Sailing School has prepared these notes to ensure candidates for the Yachtmaster Exam are fully briefed and familiar with what is required.

Pre Exam Requirements.

A specific amount of experience is required prior to taking a Yachtmaster exam. A candidate is expected to have spent 50 days at sea, at least 5 days of which he or she should have been skipper. The minimum mileage requirement is 2,500 miles and five passages of over 60 miles should have been completed, two of which should have been overnight and two as skipper. Half of these requirements may have been done in non-tidal waters. The requirements and syllabi for the exam are covered in 'The RYA Sail Cruising Log Book (G15)'. Whilst it is not a requirement that candidates should have completed the Coastal Skipper / Yachtmaster theory course, the chances of passing the practical exam without having done this or had equivalent training are very unlikely.

Prior to taking the exam candidates should have VHF or SRC radio operators certificate and a First-Aid certificate, both of these can be obtained by attending a one-day course for each.

The Exam

The exam will take place over a period of eight hours for the Yachtmaster Offshore and six hours for the Yachtmaster Coastal; it is bound to be a nerve-racking experience even for very experienced skippers. The Examiner is there to confirm you are at a level to be awarded the Certificate. He is not there to trick you or ask you to do anything you have not done before or would be expected to be able to do as a yacht Skipper. I often explain to candidates that my main criteria is whether at the end of the exam I feel that I would trust the candidate to take my family out for a day's sailing. I do however expect the candidate to know collision regulations, sound signals and lights and shapes. An ability to work out tidal heights quickly and effectively is essential as is accurate navigation with and without the help of GPS.

Man Overboard

The exam will always involve a man overboard simulated recovery. The examiner will always make it clear as to whether or not he would like this exercise to be done under engine or sail. Usually the examiner will tie a coiled rope to a fender, throw it overboard followed with a shout of 'man overboard'. The examiner will expect the candidate to take over the controls of the boat and bring the boat to a halt alongside the fender and rope so that a crewmember can retrieve them with a boat hook. There are many different methods of achieving this, the only criteria is that it should be done quickly, with the boat under control at all times and without running over the fender and rope.

Marina Boat Handling

The candidate will be asked to turn the vessel round in a confined space and take the boat out of and into a marina berth in ahead or astern. Bringing the boat alongside a pontoon is also required as is leaving a pontoon with the use of a 'spring' if necessary.

Using all the equipment

Whilst it is important that candidates should be familiar with all the functions of a GPS, during the exam I would expect the candidate to demonstrate his or her abilities as skipper by being 'on deck' as much as possible and where necessary to keep out of shallow water to make use of 'clearing bearings' and the echo sounder rather than the GPS.

On the basis that it is often more important to know where you are not, than where you are, a navigational tool often overlooked in daylight and good visibility is the hand bearing compass.

Pre-exam training

Even if a candidate has completed all the relevant RYA courses it is a very good idea to go to a school and complete a Yachtmaster preparation course, this would usually be over 5 days with the exam on the last day. Not only will your skills be improved but you will also become familiar with the 'examination area'.

The Yachtmaster exam sounds daunting, but it is well worth the effort. Once you have passed you will be in possession of the most highly respected sailing qualification in the world.

How to increase your chances of passing the RYA Yachtmaster exam

Whilst it is very important to do a Yachtmaster preparation course at an RYA Training Centre, there is a lot more that you can do yourself to ensure a successful outcome to your exam.

Firstly it is important to realise that the preparation course is over 6 days with the exam included in that time, your instructor will have 4-5 days to get you up to speed depending on the number of candidates. This is an intensive training session specifically designed to prepare you for the Yachtmaster Exam. There is no fixed syllabus and training is tailored to suit the individual needs of the candidate. This is not designed to turn you into an RYA Yachtmaster, but to hone your skills which you have already gained elsewhere. It makes sense therefore to learn as much as possible before your preparation course.

Revision - Your examiner will test you on lights & shapes, sound signals, weather, rules of the road and buoyage. All of this you will have learnt in your Coastal Skipper / Yachtmaster Theory course, but you will not remember them well enough to pass the Yachtmaster practical exam and there will not be enough time to revise them during your Yachtmaster preparation course. **Learn them inside out before you arrive!!!!**

Traditional Navigation – Many candidates have learnt traditional navigation during a theory course and since then have been totally reliant on GPS for their navigation, the first time that they have actually drawn a tidal vector, a DR and an EP or a fix on a paper chart when out on the water is on their Yachtmaster preparation course. Under the pressure of being examined they cannot remember as to how many arrows go on each line or where the arrows should be. This will immediately show the examiner that the candidate is probably using traditional navigation for the first time that week, and it is unlikely that the examiner will pass the candidate when he or she has shown that their navigational skills are not even up to Day Skipper standard. In order to ensure that you get this vitally important part of the exam right on the day I suggest that candidates practice using traditional navigational techniques whenever possible during the months and / or years before taking the Yachtmaster exam. It should not be a chore, it is fun and it really does work!

Passage Planning - The examiner will ask you to produce a passage plan for an imaginary passage. What the examiner is looking for is to find out if you understand tidal gates and heights; he will **NOT** expect to see a plan that involves sailing against a tidal stream.

On the day – Be well prepared for your exam, make sure the boat is clean and tidy and have your log book, 1st aid and VHF certificates ready to show the examiner and a passport size photograph with your name printed on the back ready to give the examiner. In addition make certain that your application form for the exam is fully completed, you should have either a cheque made out to The Royal Yachting Association or credit card authorization already made out for the exam fee. The Yachtmaster Offshore exam fee for 2010 is 210.00 pounds; the Yachtmaster Coastal exam fee is 176.00 pounds. If all of this is done before the examiner arrives it may well impress him or her and start your exam on a positive note.

If during your Yachtmaster preparation course you have been shown the correct way of doing a particular exercise don't under the pressure of being examined revert to your way of doing it, just because you feel more comfortable doing it the way you have always done it. The examiner would prefer to see you trying to do it the correct way not very well than a way that is considered to be incorrect.

Gybing - both accidentally, without warning or badly executed is the single most frequent cause for Yachtmaster exam failure. When sailing with the wind more than 30 degrees abaft the beam **always** have a gybe preventer fitted. **Never** gybe without giving the crew loud and adequate warning and don't put the wheel over to take the stern of the boat through the wind until the crew have the mainsail sheeted in. Remember this is a sail cruising exam **not** a sail racing exam!! There is no hurry, safety is paramount.

Conclusion Having conducted a large amount of YM preps and Exams over the years. The same still applies those that are prepared and have done their homework will be successful.

Try to go out and enjoy the experience.

Good luck!!

