

Sea-time Requirements for Deck Certificates

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Certificate	Sea-time (8-hour days) 3-watch System	Sea-time (12-hour days) 2-watch System
Ordinary Seaman	None: entry-level position	None: entry-level position
Lifeboatman ¹	12 months on deck or 24 months in other departments of ocean, coastwise, Great Lakes, and other lakes, bays, or sounds vessels.	8 months on deck or 16 months in other departments of ocean, coastwise, Great Lakes, and other lakes, bays, or sounds vessels.
Able Seaman - Special (O.S.V.) ²	6 months on deck of vessels operating on the oceans, the Great Lakes, or the navigable waters of the U.S.	4 months on deck of vessels operating on the oceans, the Great Lakes, or the navigable waters of the U.S.
Able Seaman - Special ³	12 months on deck of vessels operating on the oceans, the Great Lakes, or the navigable waters of the U.S.	8 months on deck of vessels operating on the oceans, the Great Lakes, or the navigable waters of the U.S.
Able Seaman - Limited ⁴	18 months on deck of vessels of 100 G.R.T. or more which operate in a service not exclusively confined to the rivers and smaller inland lakes of the U.S.	12 months on deck of vessels of 100 G.R.T. or more which operate in a service not exclusively confined to the rivers and smaller inland lakes of the U.S.
Able Seaman - Any Waters, Unlimited ⁵	36 months on deck of vessels operating on the oceans or the Great Lakes.	24 months on deck of vessels operating on the oceans or the Great Lakes.

Note 1: may be endorsed with qualification as “Proficient in Survival Craft and Rescue Boats” (PSC), and also “Proficient in Fast Rescue Boats” (FRB). These are both STCW endorsements.

Note 2: restricted to serving only aboard Offshore Service Vessels (oilfield).

Note 3: limited to vessels of <500 GRT on Near Coastal, Great Lakes and Inland waters (as specified in 46 CFR 10.501).

Note 4: limited to vessels of <500 GRT on **any** waters (as specified in 46 CFR 10.501).

Note 5: for reasons having to do with STCW, the Coast Guard now refers to an AB - Unlimited as “Any unlicensed position in the deck department” on the Merchant Mariner Documents (Z-cards) of deck officers.

The table above shows the minimum sea-time required to qualify for the deck certificates contained in Title 46, Chapter I, Part 12 of the Code of Federal Regulations (specifically, 46 CFR § 12.10-3 for lifeboatman and 12.05-7 for able seaman). These regulations are based on standing eight hours of deck watch per day in a three-watch system and, because of this, they don't reflect the reality of working on the vast majority of limited-tonnage vessels, which operate nearly exclusively on the two-watch system. To remedy that the column for 12-hour days in the two-watch system has been provided for comparison.

A far more useful way of evaluating and planning for the real-world training and manning requirements of the towing industry is needed. This table shows the minimum amount of actual *elapsed* calendar time, which factors in both the time spent at work and the time spent at home between work tours, needed to qualify to test for the different ratings. This is based upon the industry-standard "equal-time" schedule of one day off for each day worked. This often takes the form of a 2 weeks-on / 2 weeks-off schedule, although schedules of 3 weeks-on / 3 weeks-off or even 30 days-on / 30 days-off are also used. Also included is the "two for one" schedule of working two days to earn one day off, or 2:1, that is prevalent in the Gulf of Mexico - Gulf Coast region. This typically takes the form of a four weeks-on / two weeks-off schedule.

Certificate	Equal-time Schedule	Two-for-one Schedule
Ordinary Seaman	None: entry-level position	None: entry-level position
Lifeboatman	1 year & 4 months on deck, or 2 years & 8 months serving in other departments.	10 and a half months on deck or 1 year & 9 months in other departments.
Able Seaman - Special (O.S.V.)	8 months	5 & a half months
Able Seaman - Special	1 year & 4 months	11 months
Able Seaman - Limited	2 years	1 year & 4 months
Able Seaman - Any Waters, Unlimited	4 years	3 years

Companies are required by federal law to furnish you, upon written request, with a complete and accurate letter of your sea service within 30 days. If you encounter any undue difficulties with this process you should contact your nearest Coast Guard *Officer in Charge, Marine Inspection* (OCMI) for assistance or to lodge a complaint.