



# BOARD OF PILOT COMMISSIONERS

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## CANDIDATE HANDBOOK

2026

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# INTRODUCTION

## 2026 Board of Pilot Commissioners Pilot Trainee Training Examination

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The Board of Pilot Commissioners' (Board or BOPC) Pilot Trainee Training Exam is developed and administered under regulations set forth in [California Code of Regulations \(CCR\) § 213. Pilot Trainees](#) and is designed to assess a candidate's proficiency to be a BOPC pilot trainee. The exam consists of three sections: the Knowledge-Based Test (KBT), the Simulator Evaluation Examination (SEE), and an Interview. The KBT will be administered to qualified applicants on Monday, July 20, 2026. The KBT exam will be computer-based, utilizing a web-based test platform. Applicants who meet or exceed the cut score set by the BOPC for the KBT will be invited to participate in the SEE, held from August 11-14, 2026, at Cal Poly Maritime, located in Vallejo, California. Candidates who pass the SEE will sit for a scored Interview to be held virtually, between August 19-21, 2026, which will be used in combination with experience points to rank the list of candidates who have passed both the KBT and SEE.

**The application period for the 2026 Trainee Training Examination is open until  
May 15, 2026 at 5:00 P.M. PDT.**

The **Examination Application** is [available on the BOPC's website](#), and is also available via written request. Any inquiries regarding the application, its contents, or process must be made in writing via email to: [bopc\\_trainee\\_exam@bopc.ca.gov](mailto:bopc_trainee_exam@bopc.ca.gov).

The application is provided as a fillable PDF. Once completed, please e-sign and print, or print and sign the application. Completed applications with supporting documentation and payment of the application fee may be delivered in person or mailed to the Board. If you submit your application by mail, it must be postmarked no later than Friday, May 15, 2026. If you submit your application in person, it must be received at the Board's office by 5:00 P.M. PDT on May 15, 2026. Additional information and application process specifications can be found within the Examination Application itself.

# HELPFUL LINKS

The following weblinks can help direct you to useful information about the BOPC, Pilot Trainee Training Examination application process, KBT, and SEE:

- 1) [Information Regarding the Board of Pilot Commissioners \(BOPC\)](#).
- 2) [Information Regarding the BOPC, Board Meetings, and Other BOPC Committees](#)
- 3) [Information about Frequently Asked Questions on How to Become a Pilot Trainee](#)
- 4) [Information about Examination Qualifications \(also outlined in this document\)](#).
- 5) [Information about Important Dates \(also outlined in this document\)](#).
- 6) [Information about Exam Resources](#)



# EXAMINATION TIMELINE

## MARCH 5, 2026

Application window for the 2026 Exam begins

Information regarding application status will be emailed to applicants as they are reviewed

## MAY 15, 2026

Application deadline for the 2026 Exam

## JULY 2026

Simulator Evaluation Exam (SEE) Guidelines released in late July

## AUGUST 11-14, 2026

Simulation Evaluation Exam (SEE) held for approved candidates at Cal Poly Maritime in Vallejo, California

## MAY 2026

Bibliography, Study Guide Blueprint, and Candidate Handbook released

## JUNE 2026

Knowledge-Based Test (KBT) Guidelines and Remote Proctoring Guidelines (RPG) for KBT released

## JULY 20, 2026

Knowledge-Based Test (KBT) held via live remote proctoring for approved candidates

## AUGUST 19-21, 2026

Virtual interviews held for approved candidates

# EXAMINATION QUALIFICATIONS

## Eligibility Requirements

To participate in the Pilot Trainee Training Examination, applicants must meet the minimum eligibility requirements as set forth by the California Code of Regulations, including (but not limited to):

1. Possessing a current, valid federal license, with an unlimited radar endorsement, either as a master of vessels of not more than 1600 gross tons or as a master of vessels of any gross tons
2. Being of good mental and physical health and of good moral character
3. Providing documentation verifying qualifying experience and recency

An overview of experience and recency requirements to qualify for the exam are shown in the table below. Applicants should carefully review the entirety of the eligibility requirements outlined in [Title 7, California Code of Regulations § 213. Pilot Trainees](#), to ensure that they are appropriately qualified.

## Sea/Service Experience and Recency Requirements

Pathway	Minimum Qualifying Experience <sup>1</sup>	Additional Credential Requirement	Recency Requirement <sup>2</sup>
Master (self-propelled)	1 year in command of a self-propelled vessel greater than or equal to 1,600 Gross Registered Tons	None beyond the program's baseline license requirements	Entire 1 year within 4 years of exam application cutoff date; greater than or equal to 6 months within 2 years of exam application cutoff date
Chief Mate (self-propelled vessel)	2 years as Chief Mate on a self-propelled vessel greater than or equal to 1,600 Gross Registered Tons	Must hold a master's license of any gross tons	Entire 2 years within 5 years of exam application cutoff date; greater than or equal to 1 year within 3 years of exam application cutoff date
Commercial Pilot (non-crew member)	1 year as a full-time commercial pilot (not crew) directing/controlling vessels greater than or equal to 1,600 Gross Registered Tons in waters where pilotage is legally required	Must hold at least a federal license (with unlimited radar) as Master less than or equal to 1,600 Gross Registered Tons	Entire 1 year within 4 years of exam application cutoff date; greater than or equal to 6 months within 2 years of exam application cutoff date
Towing Vessel Command	2 years in command of: (1) a towing vessel greater than or equal to 50 Gross Registered Tons engaged in ship assist or bay/ocean towing or (2) a towing vessel less than 50 Gross Registered Tons where tug plus tow combined are greater than or equal to 1,600 Gross Registered Tons	None beyond the program's baseline license requirements	Entire 2 years within 5 years of exam application cutoff date; greater than or equal to 1 year within 3 years of exam application cutoff date

<sup>1</sup>Document with discharge certificates or CCP § 2015.5 declarations

<sup>2</sup>Relative to application cut-off date

# KNOWLEDGE-BASED TEST

## INFORMATION

### Knowledge-Based Test (KBT) Development

A Job Task Analysis (JTA) was carried out in early 2026 in alignment with established psychometric best practices. Throughout this process, a panel of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) identified and described the knowledge, skills, abilities, and tasks essential for effective performance as a licensed BOPC pilot (Pilot).

The essential job elements were subsequently reviewed by active Pilots, who confirmed their relevance and assigned weightings based on their importance to the Pilot role. A comprehensive description of the Pilot role is provided in the **JTA Blueprint**, which contains the tasks (and their relative importance) required of a Pilot. Both the KBT and SEE will be directly linked to the tasks within the JTA Blueprint.

The weightings produced through the JTA were used to create the **Exam Blueprint**, which specifies how KBT questions are distributed across the defined task areas. After completion of the JTA and the approval of the Exam Blueprint, a panel of SMEs convened to develop multiple-choice questions for the KBT and to design and validate the skills assessed in the SEE. Passing scores are determined through a two-step Standard Setting process based on a modified-Angoff methodology, consistent with psychometric best practices. In this process, SMEs review each test question and estimate its difficulty; these ratings are then evaluated for consistency and reliability, and the final cut score is established based on the aggregated results.

Approved applicants will have access to a Study Guide Blueprint (which contains the tasks and the corresponding knowledge areas from the Exam Blueprint) to guide candidates in their studies and preparation for the Pilot Trainee Training Examination. The 2026 Bibliography is available online at <https://bopc.ca.gov/2026-exam-resources/>. Copies of the Bibliography texts are available in the BOPC office for review. Approved applicants will complete a Practice Test in early June that will include sample test questions.

### Test Specifications

The KBT will consist of 85 multiple-choice questions that are linked to the Exam Blueprint.

There will be no topics covered on the exam that are not listed in the Exam Blueprint, and there will be no questions drawn from references other than those listed in the 2026 Bibliography.

## **Administration**

Approved applicants will sit for the KBT virtually using a live remote proctor. The KBT will be a computer-based test, utilizing a web-based test platform. Applicants will take the test in a secure location of their choosing, so long as they meet the requirements set forth in the 2026 Remote Proctoring Guidelines, which will be provided to applicants following their approval to test.

## **Remote Proctoring**

Remote proctoring is widely recognized within the testing industry and incorporates multiple safeguards to maintain test security and prevent cheating. Candidates are permitted to use their own computers, provided the devices meet the hardware and software specifications outlined in the 2026 Remote Proctoring Guidelines. A stable, moderate-speed internet connection is required, along with a functioning webcam, microphone, and speakers.

Throughout the entire exam session, each candidate will be continuously observed by a live proctor. A chat feature will be available for addressing technical issues during the test. Proctors are responsible only for monitoring and support and do not possess any pilotage-related expertise.

Please note that “smart glasses,” (e.g., Ray-Ban Meta glasses) are strictly prohibited.

A brief outline of the remote proctoring process is provided below; additional detailed information will be provided to candidates ahead of the exam:

1. The candidate receives notification of their eligibility to sit for the KBT.
2. The candidate receives the Remote Proctoring Guidelines, which detail the hardware and software requirements to take the test.
3. The candidate will receive a system check email approximately one (1) week before the KBT date, which will enable the candidate to ensure that their device and equipment are test-ready.
  - a. If the candidate has any questions, they should reach out to [SFBOPCsupport@dainisco.com](mailto:SFBOPCsupport@dainisco.com).
4. The candidate will receive a link to the KBT via email approximately three (3) days before the scheduled test date.
5. At the date and time of the exam, the candidate will access the link to the KBT and follow the instructions on how to perform a final system check and meet proctoring requirements.
6. The candidate will use a unique keycode provided to them in the email they receive three (3) days before the test to access their proctored test.

## **Scoring and Notification**

In accordance with the California Code of Regulations and psychometric best practices, the data from the KBT will be analyzed by a team of psychometricians. A passing score will be recommended to the BOPC.

Once the passing score is developed and validated, candidates who completed the KBT will be notified whether they passed or failed the KBT via email.

# SIMULATOR EVALUATION EXAMINATION INFORMATION

## **Simulator Evaluation Examination (SEE) Information**

The 2026 Simulator Evaluation Examination (SEE) is designed to assess a mariner's proficiency to become a pilot trainee. The SEE will be held at Cal Poly Maritime in Vallejo, CA from August 11-14, 2026 for candidates who successfully passed the KBT.

Simulator training or experience is not a prerequisite to passing the SEE. A broad outline of the skills to be assessed and other information will be provided to candidates advancing to the SEE portion of the examination process.

## **Scoring and Notification**

In accordance with California Code of Regulations and psychometric best practices, the data from the SEE will be analyzed by a team of psychometricians with guidance provided by SMEs. A passing score, developed utilizing a modified-Angoff process, will be recommended to the BOPC for approval after the SEE sessions occur.

Once the passing score is developed and validated, candidates who completed the SEE will be notified whether they passed or failed the SEE via email. In addition to the overall results (i.e., pass/fail decision), candidates will receive a SEE Feedback Form, which will provide feedback about their performance.



# INTERVIEW AND FINAL SELECTION

## **Interview Component Information**

All candidates achieving a passing score in both the Knowledge-Based Test (KBT) and the Simulator Evaluation Examination (SEE) will be asked to participate in a virtual interview process. This process will be administered with the assistance of psychometricians and Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to develop benchmark scoring criteria and passing points for each interview question. The interview will be conducted by a panel comprised of a representative of the California Department of Human Resources and members of the BOPC, including one public member, one industry board member, and one Pilot board member.

## **Final Selection Information**

All candidates achieving passing scores on both the KBT and the SEE shall be placed on the Pilot Trainee Training Program eligibility list in order of their combined scores from the following four (4) equally weighted components:

1. Experience Points
2. Knowledge-Based Test Score
3. Simulator Evaluation Examination
4. Virtual Interview



# APPENDIX: JTA BLUEPRINT

The Job Task Analysis (JTA) Blueprint contains all tasks delineated by a group of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) as being part of the Pilot job role. A high-level summary of the JTA Blueprint's Domains (broad, overarching content areas) and Subdomains (more specific content groupings within a Domain) are presented here.

Please note that any content areas with a **grey background** are NOT being tested on the KBT.

## **Domain 1: Planning and Pilot Safety (12%)**

- Subdomain 1.1: Planning and Preparation
- Subdomain 1.2: Scheduling
- Subdomain 1.3: Suspension of Operations
- Subdomain 1.4: Transfer Regulations and Procedures
- Subdomain 1.5: Pilot Transfers

## **Domain 2: Bridge Resource Management (7%)**

- Subdomain 2.1: Planning and Preparation
- Subdomain 2.2: Communication
- Subdomain 2.3: Situational Awareness
- Subdomain 2.4: Error Chains

## **Domain 3: Master-Pilot Exchange (MPX) (6%)**

- Subdomain 3.1: Personnel
- Subdomain 3.2: Vessel Characteristics
- Subdomain 3.3: Plans and Regulations
- Subdomain 3.4: Pilot-Pilot Exchange (PPX)

## **Domain 4: Undocking and Docking (17%)**

- Subdomain 4.1: Planning and Preparation
- Subdomain 4.2: Maneuvering/Execution
- Subdomain 4.3: Speed Management

### **Domain 5: Navigation (14%)**

- Subdomain 5.1: Maneuvering/Execution
- Subdomain 5.2: Traffic Management
- Subdomain 5.3: Speed Management

### **Domain 6: Use of Anchors (8%)**

- Subdomain 6.1: Planning and Preparation
- Subdomain 6.2: Maneuvering/Execution

### **Domain 7: Shiphandling (21%)**

- Subdomain 7.1: Planning and Preparation
- Subdomain 7.2: Vessel Characteristics' Effects on Shiphandling
- Subdomain 7.3: Maneuvering
- Subdomain 7.4: Turning
- Subdomain 7.5: Maneuvering with Tugs
- Subdomain 7.6: Restricted/Narrow Waterway
- Subdomain 7.7: Emergency Shiphandling

### **Domain 8: Specialized Pilot Roles (5%)**

- Subdomain 8.1: Piloting Cruise Ships
- Subdomain 8.2: Operations Pilot Duties

### **Domain 9: Local Knowledge (12%)**

- Subdomain 9.1: Regulations Specific to Piloting in the San Francisco Bay Area
- Subdomain 9.2: Berths, Docks, and Buoys
- Subdomain 9.3: Port Operations
- Subdomain 9.4: Area-Specific Factors Impacting Traffic Management



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