

Ship Officer

Navigate and command commercial ships. You train as a cadet at sea, not in a lecture hall.

TYPICAL PAY

\$86,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$51k to \$150k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

3 to 5 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Ships' bridges, Great Lakes and coastal vessels, tankers, ferries, t...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
 Grade 12 English and math are the normal entry requirements. You also need a Transport Canada marine medical certificate saying you are fit for sea service before you start.
- 2 Nautical science or marine navigation programme** 3 to 4 years
 Three or four years mixing campus terms with sea phases. Georgian College in Owen Sound runs a three-year advanced diploma; the Marine Institute in Newfoundland runs a four-year diploma of technology.
- 3 Sea time as a cadet** About 12 months, inside the programme
 Roughly 360 days of approved sea service, logged in an accredited book and signed off by the officers you sail with.
- 4 Transport Canada examinations** Months of study
 Written and oral exams for the Watchkeeping Mate certificate of competency, plus safety courses such as Marine Emergency Duties training.
- 5 Sail, then climb the certificates** Years
 Watchkeeping mate, then chief mate, then master. Each rung needs more sea time and more exams.

Pros and cons

- + Strong pay with almost no living costs while you work
- + Long blocks of time off ashore
- + A certificate recognized around the world
- Weeks or months away from family and friends
- Broken sleep from watch rotations
- Small crews mean you cannot walk away from a personality clash

Good to know

The Great Lakes are a career on their own

Canadian lakers move grain, ore and stone between Thunder Bay and the St. Lawrence. Many Canadian officers never cross an ocean and still sail full time, with the winter lay-up giving them a long break each...

Cadets log every day at sea in a book

Sea service is proved with an accredited training record book that the ship's officers sign. Canadian cadet programmes require roughly 360 days of it before you can sit for your first certificate.

Optional boosts

Higher certificates of competency. Tanker endorsements. Dynamic positioning. Ice navigation.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Ship Chief Officer, wages (updated Nov 2025)
 Transport Canada: Seafarer certification
 Marine Institute, Memorial University: Nautical Science
 Georgian College: Marine Technology, Navigation

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in Canadian dollars, based on Government of Canada Job Bank wage data and published salary grids. They vary by province, employer and experience. Tuition is for domestic students. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/ca/careers/ship-officer>



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