

Frequently Asked Questions

Surface Operations

Updated Training & Qualifications Handbooks

(Clicking on the above will take you to the section of this document for questions that relate to that handbook)

The Surface Operations Training & Qualifications Handbooks versions A were released in 2022 and updated in 2023 to version B. New requirements are intended to increase Safety, Proficiency, and Professionalism; bring Auxiliary requirements into better alignment with Active-Duty Coast Guard requirements; and enable the Auxiliary to better assist our Coast Guard partners. The Frequently Asked Questions below respond to your questions about these new requirements. Where identical or similar questions were received, questions have been combined into a single question to avoid duplication. Check back for updates.

Auxiliary Training Handbook - Boat Crew

“Safe, Proficient, Professional”

Major changes:

- Coxswain Command and Control
- Recertification - Crewmember, Coxswain, PWC Operator
- Currency Maintenance Documentation Requirement
- TCT/RM Training
- General QE Requirements & QE Request Form
- Initial Qualification Process
- Session Wrap Up and Documentation
- Performance Criteria
- Night Certification
- Annual Currency Maintenance – Coxswain, Crewmember, PWC Operator
- U. S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Boat Crew Program Qualification Letter
- Third Year Currency Maintenance

- Q.1 The handbook uses the title of “Boat Crew” and there is a paragraph explaining the difference between the use of “Boat Crew and “Crewmember.” Should the term “Surface Operations” have been used?

The purpose of this paragraph is to differentiate between the terms boat crew and crewmember. In the case of this program, they are separate. Boat crew are the process and Crewmember are certified individuals. The “Glossary” defines Boat Crew to include the Coxswain, Boat Crewmembers, and all other personnel required on board a boat acting in an official capacity. [Page 1-4-C.1]

- Q.2 Reference is made about the need for OIC’s to liaison with the Auxiliary in their AOR and mention is made of appointing an AUXLO for that purpose. However, no mention is made of the AUC or ASC as the first points of contact for coordinating Auxiliary support. Why? Is the AUC and ASC role being eliminated or de-emphasized?

This paragraph deals with the CG Sector/Unit commanders. They do not have AUCs/ASCs. The person that a commanding officer appoints is the AUXLO – Auxiliary Liaison Officer. Auxiliary appointed AUCs/ASCs are not being eliminated. [Page 2-4, B.1].

- Q.3 Is the mentor program only administered at the district-level?

This document compliments the existing structure and tools that Auxiliary leadership and mentors may use to improve training efforts. Mentor training program administration varies. If not administered by the district, then this supports the existing structure established in each District, Sector etc. [Page 3-4 -Mentors]

- Q.4 Is annual mentor training by the OTO’s and QE staff mandatory?

OTO’s and QE staff “are encouraged to provide annual mentor workshops.” This goes back to the previous question and the Mentor Program administration. If the existing program in a specific district includes a mentor training program then it is a best practice and should be continued. If this type of program does not exist, then this is not saying one needs to be created. [Page 3-7-B.4]

- Q.5 “Flotilla Boat Crew Training Coordinator” is the first time I’ve seen this title used, is this a new Flotilla Staff Officer position and why is it needed?

It is not a new FSO position. Some Flotillas use a member to coordinate training along with the FSO-MT, OP, FC. If there is a large Flotilla that has many different training programs (OP, PA, VE etc.) then this coordinator would report to the FSO-MT about

the activities planned in that mission area. There also may be coordinators at the Division level depending on the span and control of the unit. [Page 3-8-B.6]

- Q.6 The wording under Coxswain Command and Control seems unclear. While any crewmember can call a halt to a patrol for safety or health reasons, the Coxswain is in command of the boat and patrol. Can you clarify?

The coxswain has the final responsibility is consistent throughout the program material. [Page 3-11-C.5]

- Q.7 Upon completion of crewmember certification, the Operations Program ribbon is awarded, and a bronze star are added for additional OPS qualifications. However, no mention is made that once certified as a QE the QE may add a “E” to the ribbon to identify their appointment as a QE. Is this recognition of QE’s being eliminated?

This handbook only deals with the qualification/certification of boat crew members (Coxswain, Crew, Personal Watercraft Operator). QE qualification/certification is not part of this handbook. [Page 4-3-A.4]

- Q.8 Should the recertification section mention that when a member is in REYR for a check ride the 3-Year check ride form submitted by the QE should be used to alert DIRAUX to take the member out of REYR status?

The next page 4-9 says what needs to be done: Members in REYR status do not automatically revert to certified status in AUXDATA II upon completion of the missing tasks or hours. A formal letter must be submitted to the OTO from the FSO-OP, MT, or FC stating (1) that the member has completed the missing requirement and (2) request that the member be re-instated [Page 4-9-C.2]

- Q.9 How are Coxswains expected to keep up with annual currency maintenance tasks?

As with many other qualifications in the Coast Guard they are also now required to complete annual currency maintenance tasks. AUX is following that progress to increase safety, proficiency, & professionalism in the boat crew program [Page5-2-A.1, A.2 example]

For example, if a member is certified as a coxswain on 15 July 2020, that member’s first currency year begins on 01 January 2021, and the member must meet all annual currency requirements by the end of 2021 (31 December 2021). The third-year currency requirements must be met by 31 December 2023.

Q.10 To operate at night, do we now need a separate nighttime certification?

Starting January 2023 there will be an additional qualification required to conduct night missions. For the Auxiliary's Surface Operations purpose, it was agreed the definition of night will be beginning at sundown and continue until sunrise. All members currently certified as crew or coxswains will be considered night qualified for 2023. Starting in 2024 members who wish to continue performing night operations must meet the annual night qualifications. Members who do not meet the night qualifications will still be able to perform daytime operations. [Page 5-3, 5-4]

Q.11 Why do we have new initial nighttime requirements?

To cover the case where a mission is delayed, and a day crew must return at night. This ensures the crew at least has had some experience with operating at night.

Q.12 Is night certification achieved by completing the new annual tasks a 2nd time, but at night?

Not all annual tasks will be repeated at night. See the annual currency maintenance task tracker Enclosures, <http://forms.cgaux.org/abctm1.php> [Page 5-3, 5-4]

Q.13 Will nighttime currency maintenance check rides become necessary every three years for those who wish to maintain their night certification?

Yes, if a member wants to maintain their night certification, then those tasks will be part of the annual and 3-year check rides as noted on the Enclosures, <http://forms.cgaux.org/abctm1.php>

Q.14 How will nighttime certification be reflected in AUXDATA?

AUXDATA II is being programmed so the OTO can check a "night certified" box. [Page 5-3, 5-4]

Q.15 How will AUXDATA treat a request for orders for a Coxswain whose daytime certification is valid, but their nighttime certification has lapsed?

When the order approver checks the status of the coxswain it will show as night certified or not and if the hours are at night, then the orders will not be approved. [Page 5-3, 5-4]

Q.16 Will we be able to run a report for Coxswains and Crewmembers based on completion or noncompletion of annual currency as well as nighttime currency?

Yes [Page 5-3, 5-4]

Q.17 Will additional night navigation and piloting requirements require check rides to be done in two sessions or one longer one late afternoon to nighttime?

Yes - The night portion will need to be conducted after sunset. If that means two separate sessions or a single patrol that goes from day to night that is not specified by this handbook but rather as part of planning for training. [Page 5-3, 5-4]

Q.18 In summer months, sunset ranges from 2005 on 21 May and 1953 on 21 October. Do these facts also complicate the scheduling of check rides?

Yes – all comments are true. Remember the goal of the updated boat crew program to increase Safety, Proficiency, and Professionalism. [Page 5-3, 5-4]

Q.19 Coxswains must now complete 6 of their annual 12-hours underway as Coxswains?

The Auxiliary is following in the Safety, Proficiency, & Professionalism footsteps of USCG to increase proficiency of the Auxiliary Boat Crew program. [Page 5-4]

Q.20 Regarding Annual Currency Maintenance requirements referring to Coxswains "self-certifying" completion, there seems to be 13 specific tasks that the Coxswain will have to "attest" to both the Coxswain and the crew performing. Is this just going to be on the "comments" section of the AUXDATA patrol order, or will the Coxswains be expected to create separate "activity logs" for those tasks during the mission?

Checklists for Coxswain, Crew and Personal Watercraft Operators will be completed by the member and signed by either the member or other as noted. This will be used annually to provide the IS officer for entry and the on the 3rd year currency check ride the QE will use this form to ensure all currency tasks have been completed prior to the check ride. The member will add the patrol order number to column, date, and sign: Coxswain can sign for crew. Lead Coxswain can sign for themselves. [Page 5-4]

Q.21 Can annual currency tasks completed during a 3-year check ride count toward meeting the annual currency requirements in that same year?

Yes. Tasks completed during a 3-year check ride will count toward meeting your annual currency requirements in that same year. Coxswains/Crew should have BOTH forms available during their check ride. At completion of the check ride, the QE will complete the check ride form and the QE or coxswain can sign off on the annual currency checklist form.

BOTH forms must be submitted during the year that the 3-year QE check ride is completed. The Annual Currency form is submitted by the member to the FSO-IS and the 3-year check ride form is submitted by the QE to the District OTO.

EXAMPLE: A man-over-board (MOB) task completed during a 3-year check ride can be signed off on both the 3-year check ride form AND the annual currency maintenance form.

Q.22 Can annual currency tasks completed during any patrol during the year count toward meeting a 3-year QE check ride that same year?

No. When you are due for your 3-year QE check ride you must complete the check ride. Completion of annual currency requirements during the same year does NOT apply toward your QE check ride completion.

Q.23 If there is a concern about our ability to operate at night, then why isn't there any concern about knowing our AOR?

The AOR is covered in the initial certification process. Annual runs of the AOR are left up to the training program set up and the Coxswain. It is a best practice and can be further defined as part of the piloting and navigation exercise. [Page 5-4]

Q.24 List of annual tasks directs us to follow Coxswain training signoff 09-04 for night navigation. This is a task for a break-in coxswain and includes laying out a course on a chart. If a facility lacks any type of electronic charting, then a paper chart is the only way to complete this task. But, if the boat has a chart plotter, this task should be done using the installed navigation equipment. If I get sent offshore on a SAR case, I'm going to use my chart plotter and radar and not breakout a paper chart. Should the use of the electronics be mentioned?

In the condition paragraph the following sentence covers electronic navigation: "All chart work, including courses, distances, time to run and electronics set up shall be completed prior to getting underway." [Page 5-4]. Wording updated: "Compass course laid out on the chart or entered into the electronic navigation device, indicating predicted turns, and ETA established."

Q.25 The annual TCT/RM training designed to be delivered at the local level does not require a TCT Facilitator?

The last line will be updated in next update coming in Jan 2023 and will read “It will be designed to be delivered at the local level by someone designated by the OTO.” [Page 5-5-A.6]

Q.26 Why do Active-Duty sometimes serve as Auxiliary QE’s?

In many Sectors the Active Duty are well versed in Auxiliary procedures and work closely with training and currency of their auxiliary boat crews. They are also supported to travel to inland areas to conduct training and qualification workshops/weekends with Auxiliary units that are not close to the coast. This joint understanding and training promote a closer working relationship between the Auxiliary & USCG. It has also been effective in increasing the Auxiliary “call outs” since the Station knows the unit and facilities involved. [Page 6-2-A.2]

Q.27 Do QEs need to complete the TCT-QE course annually?

The first line will be updated in next update coming in Jan 2023 and will read “All QEs must complete the TCT-BRM course annually.” This is the same annual TCT as required by boat crew program. There is not a separate TCT course requirement just for QEs. [Page 6-3-A.3]

Q.28 Why should AQEC’s arrange for Boat Crew Training Classes in their AOR?

Not a requirement for the AQEC. Some programs throughout the Auxiliary are managed differently from District to District. The word “should” is not an assignment but is a generality of the management of the program based on District specific guidance. [Page 6-6-#13]

Q.29 Why isn’t the mentor in the list of people to be notified when a member fails an oral board or check ride?

The member’s leader (FC or FSO-MT) should be informed. The main portion of who should be notified is the member’s leader. The notification is left up to local procedure. Not specifying one over another due to different procedures in different Districts. [Page 6-11]

Q.30 Why must QEs note on the check ride form what the weather and sea conditions were and what size of facility was used?

This covers grounds if there are any issues if a member is unable to complete any task. “In cases where a candidate cannot perform a task because of extenuating circumstances beyond their control.” This language is from the original manual. [Page 6-13-E.2]

Q.31 Are QEs required to accept walk-in candidates?

Some QEs welcome walk-ins with the understanding that the member requesting a QE MUST HAVE ALL the required documentation and be ready. The “focus should be on the candidates who were scheduled for the mission” allows any QE to say no to walk-ins. [Page 6-14-E.3, #2]

Q.32 Why aren’t “Personal Physical Fitness and Vision” requirements explained on page 3-3, section A.2 Physical Standards?

Keeping the information in the AQH-BC cuts down on the number of documents that are updated when changes happen. [Enclosure 1, 2]

Q.33 Why do we need 4 check ride forms?

The AQH-BC is strictly for initial certification process. The ATH-BC is the overall training program.

Q.34 Why do we have new fitness and vision requirements?

The initial requirement was to have an annual physical and eye exam for all boat crew members administered by a licensed doctor. The Auxiliary pushed back on this saying that the cost of this would be prohibitive to some members. The compromise was to find a reasonable alternative to meet the requirement. That compromise is what you see in the document. These were not just pulled off the internet or out of someone’s pocket. USCG doctors have reviewed and approved the requirements.

Q.35 How will eye tests be administered?

The directions are at the top of the form: Holding the chart approximately 10.5 feet away from the candidate, for each eye, independently, the QE will have the candidate/requalification read the **third** line from top. If needed, corrective lenses may be worn.

The QE will administer the eye test on a 3-year check ride.

- Q.36 What happens if a crew member or coxswain is unable to pass the QE vision assessment?

If a crew member or coxswain is unable to pass the QE vision assessment, they may go to an eye doctor for further evaluation. During their visit to an eye doctor, vision results must be documented at 20/40 or better (with corrective lenses) to continue as crew or coxswain. If surface members do not meet this threshold, they will not be allowed to continue as crew or coxswain. There are many other positions members can fill. They would be appreciated in any of these roles.

Note: If a crew member or coxswain wishes to request a waiver from their DIRAUX for failure of a vision test with the members eye doctor recommendation, they are welcome to request one. Determination will be made by the DIRAUX if they would like to waive the vision with mitigation requirements or not.

- Q.37 Task 15 currently reads “piloted and labeled navigation chart,” I think it should be “plotted.” But more importantly why are we doing this on paper?

CORRECTED [Enclosure 2]

If the boat has electronic navigation capability, then QEs should have the option for the Coxswain to complete this task using the installed electronics. If the facility has an electronic chart system, then they use that, but must still complete the chart task. Some areas do not have charts available. If this is the case, then members should do their best to complete the Chart task and defer any task that would require use of charts to navigate.

- Q.38 Task 19 currently reads: Discussed and demonstrated knowledge of filling out and processing required reports. What reports? What reports are on paper? Patrols are requested & completed in AUXDATAII.

QE should be checking AUXDATA II prior to QE session Coxswains to make sure entries are correct and approved. Then QEs can ask questions about procedure without the need to “watch” the Coxswain do the electronic entries. Paper forms that could be used include the SAR or MISHAP report forms.

- Q.39 Who has task signing authority for Annual Currently Maintenance Task Trackers?

Coxswain can sign for crew. Lead Coxswain can sign for themselves.

Auxiliary Boat Crew Qualification Handbook

“Safe, Proficient, Professional”

Major changes:

- Streamlined qualification task types and formatting to better align with counterpart Boat Forces Coxswain and Boat Crewmember Personal Qualification Standards.
- Added Deferred task requirements and definition.
- Added Physical Fitness and Vision screening task requirements.
- Added the Personal Locator Beacon to the Personal Protective Equipment task for Crewmember.
- Changed the standard time for Man Over-Board recovery to 3 minutes to improve the chances of survivability of a Person in Water.
- Combined all search pattern plotting tasks into a single task.
- Added proficiency in the Use of GPS/DGPS (if equipped) and Use of Radar (if equipped) to the Coxswain Underway Check Ride form and Coxswain Currency Maintenance Check Ride Form.
- Added proficiency in the use of GPS/DGPS (if equipped) to the Personal Watercraft Operator Underway Check Ride form and the Currency Maintenance Check Ride Form.

Q.40 Will QEs that have to travel to accommodate night QE check rides be reimbursed for their expenses (hotel/travel)?

[Consult the OTO about financially supporting the QE program.](#)

Q.41 How were the new vision requirements determined?

[The 20/40 requirement is the same as the Merchant Mariner Medical Manual: Must have vision in at least one eye that is correctable to 20/40 or better. This requirement comes from 46 CFR 10.305: A mariner must have correctable vision to at least 20/40 in one eye and uncorrected vision of at least 20/200 in the same eye. \[02-02\]](#)

Q.42 Why do we need to plot SS and VS search patterns? These are drift patterns and not intended to be plotted on paper charts or chart-plotters.

[Plotting on a paper chart is still part of SC&E for both the Auxiliary and USCG. Charts are part of facility inspection and offer for use. Read the NOTE in TASK COXN-06-04 Tasks, COX-06-04-AUX, and COX-06-05-AUX covering the plotting of six search patterns. The trainee will select three and plot three of these patterns, based on appropriateness of the patterns for the type of facility and the needs of the](#)

operating area. This can be done either on chart or an ECS. Use of a chart or ECS by the QE is based on the facility equipment.

- Q.43 I have been told that the Active-Duty Coast Guard has abandoned paper chart plotting at small boat stations. Should the Auxiliary do the same?

The Auxiliary will have a hard time getting rid of paper charts. Yes, the CG is going away from their usage, but with that said, their assets are all standardized and come with a standardized navigation system. Auxiliary facilities are all different. Plotting on a paper chart is still part of SC&E and part of Auxiliary facility inspection & offer for use.

- Q.44 How do you know if the hours underway are at night? Just because one enters sunrise/set there is no indication of when the patrol time occurred.

UPDATED enclosure to say: Time U/W at night in HH:MM [Task Tracker U/W night hours]. We are only looking for total time U/W at night. For example: Patrol starts at 1700. Sunset is at 1800. Night hours cannot start until 30 min after sunset. Patrol ends at 2200. Total night hours U/W would be 3 hours and 30 minutes.

- Q.45 The ALAUX mentions a boat crew member in REYR must test for nighttime qualification. Does it matter why they are in REYR since it could be for either Navigation Rules testing (Coxswain) or underway hours (less than 12) - or both?

If this is the sentence you are referencing: Members in REYR status must follow reference (A) if they would like to obtain nighttime certification. Then, if the member wants to be night certified then they must complete the tasks. If the member chooses to come out of REYR and not be night certified, then they complete the tasks/hours they are missing and that is all.

- Q.46 In the event a member goes into REYR in the future (after 1 Jan 2023), will they have to undertake the nighttime certification to become night certified as part of their getting out of REYR?

Yes

- Q.47 Reference books for reading assignments can be costly. Where can we access these resources at no-cost to the Auxiliarist?

Reference books are generally available at the local Coast Guard station and can be used for training or at the local library for check-out. There is no need to purchase copies of expensive books.

Q.48 When are QE's "requalified/recertified"?

All QEs must be evaluated by the OTO or CQEC on a 3-year cycle.

Q.49 What happens if a boat crew member goes into REYR for NIGHT hours or tasks?

NIGHT tasks hours need to be made up to get out of REYR. Only NIGHT Certification is in REYR if all DAY hours/tasks are completed/current.

Q.50 Do DAY tasks need to be completed BEFORE NIGHT tasks?

No. There is no order for completing tasks.

Q.51 Do all annual currency tasks need to be completed during the same year as a currency check ride?

All currency tasks that are completed DURING a 3-yr check ride count toward that year's currency requirements. No need to do the same task 2 times in that same year.

Q.52 What happens if I delay submitting my patrol order reimbursement request?

All requests for patrol reimbursement should be completed as soon as possible after a patrol. Ideally within a day or two. Member and OIA have 15 days from completion of the patrol date to submit the patrol request to FINCEN for reimbursement. Submission delays will result in either delayed reimbursement or a cancelled mission without reimbursement, as follows:

After 15 days, mission reimbursement will be delayed.

After 45 days, mission will be cancelled, and coxswains will not be reimbursed.

Note: If a patrol order is cancelled and the patrol did happen, the member will have to start the patrol order process over with a new patrol order number and will be reimbursed for the patrol they conducted. Bottom line – get it right the first time!