

Water Transportation Workers

SOC: 53-5000 • Career Profile Report

■ Key Facts

\$66,490

Median Salary

84,300

Employment

+1.0%

Growth Rate

■ Requirements & Salary Range

Education: See Requirements (BLS)

■ Automation Risk Assessment

Medium Risk - 35.0% probability of being automated in the next 10-20 years.

This job has some routine elements but still requires human judgment and interaction.

■■ Work-Life Balance

4.6/10 - Fair work-life balance

■ Personality Fit (RIASEC)

Higher scores indicate better personality fit for this career type.

Realistic	8.6/10	Investigative	4.4/10
Artistic	3.4/10	Social	5.8/10
Enterprising	4.8/10	Conventional	7.4/10

■ Top Skills Required

Customer-service skills, Hand-eye coordination, Hearing ability, Interpersonal skills, Manual dexterity, Mechanical skills, Physical strength, Visual ability

✓ Strengths

- High Demand
- Flexible Work
- Continuous Learning

■ Challenges

- Burnout Risk
- Rapid Technological Change

■ What They Do

Water Transportation Workers are professionals who operate, maintain, and support vessels used to transport people and goods across **oceans, rivers, lakes, and coastal waterways**. This broad occupation includes crew members who keep ships running safely and efficiently, ensuring the smooth movement of cargo and passengers that underpin global trade, tourism, and maritime logistics. Rather than focusing on office-based tasks, water transportation workers perform hands-on, mission-critical work in dynamic and often challenging environments.

This career is well suited for individuals who enjoy physical work, teamwork, and life on or near the water. Many roles emphasize operational skill, safety awareness, and discipline, making this field essential to both commercial transportation and national infrastructure.

What Do Water Transportation Workers Do?

Water transportation workers perform a wide range of duties depending on vessel type and role. Together, they ensure vessels are navigated safely, machinery operates correctly, and cargo or passengers are handled properly.

Common responsibilities include:

- Operating and navigating ships, boats, or barges
- Maintaining engines, electrical systems, and onboard equipment
- Loading, unloading, and securing cargo
- Monitoring weather, water conditions, and navigational hazards
- Following maritime safety and environmental regulations
- Assisting passengers and responding to emergencies
- Keeping detailed logs and operational records

Types of Water Transportation Workers

This occupation includes several distinct roles across the maritime industry:

- Ship and Boat Captains: Command vessels and are responsible for navigation, crew safety, and operations.
- Mates and Pilots: Assist captains and help navigate vessels through ports and waterways.
- Marine Engineers: Operate and maintain propulsion systems and mechanical equipment.
- Sailors and Deckhands: Handle deck operations, maintenance, and cargo tasks.
- Ship Engineers and Oilers: Support engine room operations and mechanical upkeep.
- Passenger Vessel Crew: Serve on ferries, cruise ships, and tour boats.

Skills and Abilities Needed

Water transportation workers must combine technical ability with physical endurance and safety awareness.

Core Operational Skills

Personal Qualities That Matter

Education and Training Pathway

Training requirements vary by role and vessel type, but most water transportation workers follow a structured pathway:

- High School Education: Basic education with emphasis on math, mechanics, and safety
- On-the-Job Training: Hands-on learning under experienced crew members
- Maritime Certifications: U.S. Coast Guard credentials and safety training, depending on role
- Sea Time Requirements: Logged work hours at sea to qualify for advanced positions
- Continuing Training: Ongoing safety, navigation, and compliance updates

Where Do Water Transportation Workers Work?

These workers are employed across a wide range of maritime environments:

- Cargo Ships and Tankers
- Barges and Inland Waterway Vessels
- Fishing and Commercial Boats
- Passenger Ferries and Cruise Ships
- Ports, Harbors, and Terminals
- Offshore and Coastal Operations

Work schedules often involve shifts, rotations, or extended time onboard vessels.

Is This Career Difficult?

Water transportation work can be physically demanding and mentally challenging. Workers must operate in changing weather, confined spaces, and high-risk environments where safety is critical. Long hours, time away from home, and strict compliance requirements make resilience and discipline essential for success.

Who Should Consider This Career?

This occupation may be a good fit if you:

- Enjoy hands-on, physical work
- Are comfortable working on or near water
- Prefer non-desk-based careers
- Value teamwork and clear chains of command
- Want a role that supports global trade and transportation

How to Prepare Early

- Take courses in math, mechanics, and physical sciences
- Develop swimming and water safety skills
- Build physical endurance and strength
- Learn basic mechanical and electrical concepts
- Explore maritime training programs or apprenticeships

Water transportation workers keep global commerce and travel moving, making this occupation vital to economies, supply chains, and everyday life around the world.

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Source: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/transportation-and-material-moving/water-transportation-occupations.htm>