

Petty Officer Duties and Responsibilities

In addition to your role as mediator and motivator, as a PO your job will largely be guiding your watch through their duties in sail handling, cleanups, obtaining grade standards and generally helping out around the ship. All of these tasks are done by routine, and there is a specific process and order to the various duties on board. This lecture is designed to familiarize you potential junior Officers with the specific day-to-day tasks that you will be performing and how to guide your watch through them.

We will begin with a walk-through of a typical day on board from the perspective of a PO:

Wake-Up:

You are woken up approx. 15 minutes before your trainees need to be awoken to give you enough time to prepare yourself for your watch before you worry about anyone else. This will be approx. 30-40 minutes before your watch is scheduled to start.

You gather everything you need for your watch including adjusting and donning your harness (often POs will sleep in their harnesses to minimize prep time and maximize sleep). You then wake your trainees quietly and respectfully, trying to disturb the other watch as little as possible.

Once they are ALL ON DECK you join them and report to your Watch Officer. You should have approx. 15 minutes to spare which you use to set stations for manoeuvring and dousing any non-working press. (you cannot usually set ALL your stations before your watch, but you should do as much as possible before COW)

You make sure your watch is present and correct for COW. This is an official ceremony that was developed for the sake of safety. If individuals are loud or rambunctious it is difficult to make sure their harnesses are adjusted correctly, etc. You need to keep your trainees quiet and respectful.

As soon as COW is complete, report to your Watch Officer for instructions.

Watch Handling:

POs do not touch the lines! You already had your trainee course, and you already had the chance to get really good at hauling on lines and calling "Tack Down". Trainees pay for that opportunity, and if you take that away from them, the program fails. With that in mind, running a watch can be difficult and frustrating, but also a lot of fun. In saying this, there are times when your help will be required or when something just needs to get done. At this point it is appropriate to step in and lend a hand.

When a manoeuvre is called, you kick into high gear and motivate your trainees to share your enthusiasm. You need to instil the idea that whenever they do something it should be done as efficiently and quickly as possible. You ensure people are at the correct stations, and then throughout the manoeuvre be watching for potential hazards and fouls.

Some common fouls include:

- Course tacks on life rafts (running block can also get fouled on the shrouds)
- Course sheets (same issues)
- Jib Sheets can get caught around the forestay
- Jibtop Sheets can get fouled on the jib stay
- Fisherman Sail gets fouled around the mainstay and needs to be manhandled around

- Fisherman peak halyard can get fouled in the shrouds when setting and dousing
- Tops'l Sheets get fouled around the course lifts when setting and dousing

Most important is to be alert and aware of the mechanics of a manoeuvre, and be able to see potential fouls before they happen. If a foul occurs, alert the person calling the orders so that they can halt the operation, and keep them informed of the progress of clearing the foul, e.g. "Foul in the course sheet!" and then "clear!"

Your job also becomes easier if your trainees become familiar with the process of calling fouls. If you remain consistent, they will pick up on this and with little guidance will be able to call and clear fouls themselves.

Often there are hazards that the trainees are not aware of as well. You need to also be looking for blocks flailing around and people putting their fingers too close to the sheaves of blocks. This is very important because trainees will initially have very little appreciation for the dangers thereof.

Preparing for COW (Change of Watch)

Before you can change watch and be relieved, the other Watch Officer needs to accept the decks and be willing to take responsibility of the ship. If the decks are not square or if an exercise is incomplete, you will not be allowed to change watch. Therefore, fifteen minutes before COW you need to walk around the decks and clear them away (lines coiled properly, no loose clothing scattered around, etc.). This works best if you take some trainees with you on your rounds and give them tasks as you find them. Eventually your trainees will appreciate that by doing this they get to change watch ASAP, and your involvement can be relaxed.

Again all you need to do is make sure that at the appropriate time your trainees are present and correct, and are behaving respectfully.

During a Meal:

When called down below to eat, there is a tendency for trainees to rip off their harnesses and scatter them around. Watch out for that and remind them to keep their stuff (esp. harnesses) in their lockers. Have them eat quickly, and ask the cook how much of the food is theirs. This should take no more than 15 minutes. Have them clear their dishes and get ready for the next activity (either going on watch, cleaning up, or returning on deck for whatever activity you have planned).

And always remember what it feels like to be the watch waiting on deck to eat, or the one that gets below and finds that there isn't enough food.

Cleaning Up:

Running an efficient cleanup is an important part of your job as a PO, and something that officers cite as the mark of a good PO. Make sure that tasks are delegated fairly, and that everyone is constantly working for the duration of the cleanup (this includes you!). It's much easier to motivate your trainees if they see that you are working just as hard as they are; there is a lot to be said for leading by example.

Make sure that the jobs are divided differently for each cleanup, this will keep your trainees from feeling singled out or unduly put-upon.

Remember to keep an eye on the cleanup and make sure that trainees are not cutting corners – something they have a tendency to do. If improper products are used or if the surfaces are only wiped instead of cleaned, the crew will get sick. Never mix cleaning products together in the same container and always rinse the dishes thoroughly before they are dried. Remember to use the drying towel that is the *driest* as well, as this stops the spread of bacteria.

Sunset:

Sunset is an important ceremony on board, and it is important to recognize the reasons why we give Sunset such pomp. Before we can legally (and comfortably) sail through the night, we use the sunset ceremony as a reminder to check the safety equipment and running lights, ensure that the stores are secured, clear the decks and square them away, make sure that trainees understand the rules of night watch (buddies, staying awake, maintaining a proper lookout, etc.). Your superior officers will expect you to prepare the trainees for sunset on your own so that they can focus on preparing the rest of the ship for sunset.

Don't forget to tell them to think up a sound-off!

Night Watch:

At night you will spend most of your time back aft with your Watch Officer. This is the perfect opportunity to talk about any issues that have been arising in your watch. You will also be acting as a liaison between your watch officer and the trainees up forward, because at night we try not to shout unless we need to. You should make sure that they stay in their buddies and are staying awake. This is also a good opportunity to reinforce the importance of reporting anything they see to the officer of the watch.

You can keep the trainees occupied and awake by rotating them on the helm (remember that every trainee should leave the course with at least 2 hours of helm time) and by having them walk or lunge around the deck on the half hour.

Other Issues:

Seasickness

Most people are fully capable of working *even when they're feeling queasy!* This means that if someone is seasick, you can be accommodating by giving them tasks close to the leeward rail (leeward let-off, etc.). You do not have to consider them as incapacitated. However, in all cases, report the illness to your watch officer.

Injury

If you or someone in your watch is injured, report it to your watch officer immediately. This includes minor cuts or abrasions, because even a minor open wound can easily become infected on the boat. Medical supplies are carefully stocked and tallied, so it is especially important to let your officer know what supplies you are using from the day kit, and if anything else is needed, you must ask the Captain or XO. Do not touch the medical supply box back aft.

Damage to the Vessel

It is *extremely* important that your superior officers (esp. the Captain) be fully aware of everything that is going on with the boat at all times. Most of their job involves long-ranged planning that hinges on them being up-to-date with any issues to do with the vessel. Therefore, if anything ever breaks or stops working, report it immediately, even if you are positive that it is a non-issue or that you can repair it yourself. In most cases you will be correct, and will be able to fix it yourself, but your officers need to know what was broken so that they can keep an eye on any related issues for the future.

Napping

It is very rare that as a PO you will be able to take a nap during the day, but it is possible once in a while. If you feel that you have done everything that you need to (this includes cleaning up, teaching your trainees, helping with any sail handling taking place, etc.) then you are free to

ask permission to take a nap. It is important to ask because often your officer will know about upcoming manoeuvres and will need to know where you are.

Maintaining the PO's Mess

It is your responsibility to keep the PO's mess clean and tidy at all times. There is no excuse for gash on the deck or on bunks. You have storage lockers, use them. In an emergency people other than you will need access to that compartment, and they cannot deal with tripping hazards.

Manoeuvres and Calls:

During manoeuvres there will usually be at least three POs on deck, so you need to spread yourselves out between the three most likely places that you will be needed – one P.O. for each rail, and one P.O. up forward.

Tacking

- “Ready About” – Get your trainees to their stations as quickly as possible, undo the coils but leave the lines belayed
- “About Ship, Helm's A' Lee!” – The helm has been turned and the vessel has begun to respond. Pay attention to the sails, the squares will begin to luff and then backfill. Once the course is completely aback, the watch officer will call:
- “Tack the Jib (Jibtop, Fisherman)!” – The jib, etc. are tacked over to the opposite side from that of the squares. This is because they cannot tack themselves over, like a boom-footed sail can. You are simply ensuring that as soon as they can fill on the correct side, they will. The squares will continue to drive the bow through the wind until the main tacks itself over and fills properly. At this point, the officer will call:
- “Let Go and Haul” – This is the fun part for your trainees. The squares come over and are hauled in close to the leeward shrouds (i.e., close-hauled). You need to pay special attention to the course tack fouling on the liferaft, and the windward course gear (make sure that it's not too tight). Once the course tack comes in all the way, the trainees get to yell “Tack Down!” to signal that it is OK to begin hauling in on the course sheet.

Gybing

- “Stand By to Gybe!” – Go to stations
- “About Ship, Helm's A' Weather!” – The ship has begun to turn. As soon as the main tacks over, the officer will call
- “Gybe the Jib (Jibtop, Fisherman)!” – The fore-and-aft running sails that cannot tack themselves are brought around by the trainees.

Bracing

- “Stand by Sheets and Braces” - Go to stations.
- “Brace the yards, (X) to (Y)” - Execute the evolution.
- “Ease the sheets” or “Aft on your sheets” This is in reference to the fore'n'aft sails. This command is so we can match the trim of the jibs and fisherman to the squares.
- (X) can be either slowly or hard. Hard being a all the way to one side, such as when wearing ship. Slowly is a controlled brace, with the side that is letting off leaving a turn on their pins. This is more common, and is used to adjust the squares when altering course.
- (Y) is either port or starboard. An example of a call would be “Brace the yards, slowly to port”

Wearing Ship

- “Stand by to Wear Ship” – Go to stations. At this point the ship will start bearing off.
- As the ship turns we will brace the yards slowly to square, listen for bracing commands.
- Next we will gybe the ship, so listen for gybing commands.
- Once gybed we will come back up on the wind on the opposite tack, so get ready for another bracing call

Teaching:

When teaching, you will fall into certain rhythms that feel comfortable to you – this is fine. However, make sure that your trainees are actively participating, and don't fall into the trap of becoming a monotonous talking head. Games like Pins and Cleats are great, as well as quizzes on the grade standards material.

Emphasize the safety and conduct portions especially, but find ways to reinforce everything you have taught as they come up during a regular watch. For example, if you have just taught the portion about points of sail, after a manoeuvre ask them what point of sail the ship is currently on.

Duties as per 2003 TBI Standing Orders:

“For normal operation, there will be three Petty Officers, one responsible to each of the Watch Officers. A Petty Officer shall be responsible for the basic organization of his or her watch. He or she shall be responsible for the timely and thorough completion of the watch' s duties, including, but not restricted to, clean-ups, basic sail handling and manoeuvring while on watch, helmsmanship, and basic safety. Petty Officers shall ensure that the trainees in their watch report for watch duty suitably prepared and on time. Petty Officers shall report any concerns regarding the trainees in their watch to their Watch Officer, including, but not restricted to, issues concerning safety, training, or morale.”