

CREW RIGHTS COMPASS

Before You Speak to a Maritime Lawyer

Organise your records.
Prepare your questions.



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Read this first

You do not need to arrive at a first legal consultation with a finished legal argument. You need a clear account of the problem, the relevant documents you lawfully hold, the questions you want answered and any dates that may be urgent. This guide helps you prepare those things.

It is intended for seafarers and families dealing with concerns such as disputed pay, injury, dismissal, repatriation or a document they have been asked to sign. Preparation can make a conversation more focused. It cannot establish that a claim is valid, guarantee a result or replace a qualified lawyer's assessment.

Scope and edition

Educational reader edition, version 1.0, dated 20 October 2026. The author is a physician, not your lawyer. Independent maritime legal review has not been completed. No legal-client relationship arises from reading or buying this book. It contains general preparation guidance, not pleadings, filing instructions or a calculation of compensation.

Applicable law, deadlines, confidentiality, fees and procedure differ between countries and cases. A statement about one court, arbitration scheme or flag state may not apply elsewhere. Ask a qualified adviser about the actual circumstances rather than treating an example here as a legal rule.

DO NOT WAIT FOR A PERFECT FILE

If you face an imminent deadline, a request to sign an important document, detention, loss of essential care or immediate danger, seek appropriate help now. Explain what is missing and complete the file later.

5. Write a factual timeline

One event, one entry

Start with the relevant background: joining date, role and agreement. Then list the events in date order. Include what happened, where, who was involved, the source and any uncertainty. Keep the first version short enough to read before a call.

Separate what you directly observed, what someone told you, what a document says and your interpretation. For example, 'HR wrote that the deduction related to training' is a different statement from 'the deduction was lawful'. Let the adviser assess the legal significance.

A fictional example

3 March: joined the vessel as a retail employee. Source: joining confirmation and SEA, D01-D02.

31 March: received a payslip showing a USD 120 deduction labelled 'adjustment'. Source: D03. I do not know the calculation.

2 April: emailed payroll asking which period and policy the adjustment concerned. Source: D04.

5 April: received a reply referring to a commission reversal, without an itemised calculation. Source: D05.

8 April: sent a further request for the calculation. Source: D06. No reply recorded as of 12 April.

This example identifies a question. It does not imply that the deduction is invalid or that a claim would succeed. Notice that it avoids guessing why payroll acted as it did.

Handle gaps honestly

Write 'approximately', 'date not yet confirmed' or 'I do not remember' where appropriate. If a later document refreshes your memory, note that separately. Do not copy another person's recollection into your timeline as if you witnessed it.

For an event spanning different time zones or a ship-clock change, preserve the original time description and explain the uncertainty. Let the adviser decide whether conversion is needed for a filing or chronology.

Add a one-paragraph summary

State your role, ship and employer; the issue; the key date or document; what you want to understand; and what may be urgent. You do not need to estimate a large claim value to make an enquiry sound serious.

Review for fairness

Include relevant facts that do not support your preferred account. Remove insults and speculation. Check each referenced document ID. If you quote someone, distinguish exact words from your best recollection. A useful timeline makes uncertainty visible instead of disguising it.

READER TASK

Draft five entries first. Add more only where they help explain the issue, an important change or a deadline. Keep a fuller working chronology separately if necessary.

First-call summary

Name / role / safe contact / preferred language

Ship / flag / employer / dates on board

Problem in one sentence / what I want to understand

Urgent dates, time zone and source

Key records held / missing / immediate needs