Tips for Sea Year

These are just my personal experiences at sea. They show you similar lists in the sea projects, but I can personally vouch for the ones that really are important. Most of these I did, some of these are things that I should have done. The list is mostly for engineers, but several things apply to deckies as well.

- Take 2 weeks to familiarize yourself with the ship. Spend the time working all around the engine room, and just get a feel for how everything works.
- Take a calendar and MARK THE END OF THE 2 WEEK PERIOD. I did not do this, and I ended up not starting anything until a month in.
- Print out the entire sea year binder before going out to sea. Every single page of every project.
- In the back of each project is a piece of paper with a checklist of every single part of each project. TAKE IT OUT, AND KEEP IT SOMEWHERE YOU WILL CONSTANTLY SEE IT.
- Every time you finish a drawing, or finish a description/question check it off on the list! In addition, go through the physical copy of your project, and put an X through the question! (mainly the number, but I X'd out the whole question) This helps TREMENDOUSLY in keeping track of your progress. It will seem VERY slow at first, but once you get into a rhythm, the X's will start piling up. I also made a point of using a black marker and coloring in the boxes off to the right of each section on the checklist when the whole thing was done. (I.E. system tracings are all under question 1, each with a description and tracing checkbox. X out each piece, then X the box next to the section heading)
- YOU DO NOT NEED TO DO THE PROBLEMS IN ORDER. I was stupid and I was trying to answer question 2 before question 3, and so on. Dig through the projects until you find a question you can (or want to) answer, complete that part, then repeat. CFR questions are really easy to get out of the way, with very little knowledge of your ship.
- If your ship has a working lathe, do your shop project ASAP. My shop project was done before I'd even started on the rest of my projects. It's a super simple build, you don't need any knowledge particular to your ship, and it gets it out of the way early. My chief was telling me about a LOT of cadets that wait until last minute to do it, and something ends up going wrong, and it turns out like crap.
- Speaking of the shop project, try and score extra pieces if you can. Most ships will have materials you can use if you screw up your original pieces (like most people do, including me), but it's always a good idea to just have some spares that are already the size you need.
- Make backups. They'll pound this into your head during sea year lecture, but it's for a reason. I would've lost everything if not for my backups. I had copies on: my school computer, CD, external hard drive, flash drive, and Wal-Mart's cheapest netbook computer (bought as a backup computer, and it was great for taking ashore, instead of my school comp)

- Make sure you read everything thoroughly before answering the questions. I got docked a lot of points for not following directions on some questions. Make sure you DO actually put line sizes and temp/press stuff on your drawings. They DO check for that, and they DO take off a lot of points if you don't have them, as I found out.
- Once you start doing projects DON'T STOP. Make sure to do AT LEAST one question every night. I spent 3-4 hours every night on projects, save for a few nights here and there when I took a break. Make it your goal to get at least one question part done each night. There's a LOT more pieces to the project puzzle than first meets the eye. You don't realize just how much there is to do until you start working. In 2015 alone, I lost some good friends to incomplete projects. And they ALL said "I've got plenty of time, I'll get them done before turn-in"
- Use your resources wisely. Find out where the engine room manuals are right away, and how they're organized. If your ship has copies of the engine room schematics, find out where they are (DO NOT COPY THEM, reference them for help and to confirm you traced everything, but DO NOT COPY DIRECTLY! The graders have seen thousands of projects, and they know a copied drawing when they see one). Finally, the actual engineers are the greatest resource ever. Respect them. Listen to them. Whether you plan to sail or not, if you show them or at least make them believe that you are genuinely interested in sailing and learning everything you can, they will be fifty times more likely to help you (and maybe give you money to go ashore). Asking questions and showing interest can be the difference between chipping paint for 100 days and having a GREAT sea year!

Finally, some random tips and tricks that I found helpful:

- Calendar: I preferred a self-standing one. (just tape it to your desk) allows you to keep track of time very well, mark daily work, and keep track of sea days.
- LASER POINTER! I emphasize this heavily, because this was extremely helpful in tracing out systems. Actually having something you can keep trained on a single pipe as you follow it around the engine room will make tracing a LOT easier. Buy several of them, or lots of batteries, you will probably go through most of them, as I did. I bought a handful of cheap $1.50, keychain laser pointers for on my ship, and I used them constantly. (also great for getting someone's attention in the engine room)
- Buy a boiler suit or work pants WITH AS MANY POCKETS AS YOU CAN FIND. I was constantly in need of pocket space to put tools, a knife, pen/pencil, pocket notebook, gloves, flashlights, etc. So if you're buying work clothes, do your best to optimize pocket room. You could also buy a small Husky tool belt/pouch, or something of the sort. Keep it small, not one of those 20 pocket, wraparound deals.
- Make sure to have a thick, heavy duty work belt that can stand up to the weight of a tool belt every day, or just the weight of all the tools in your pocket. I had to buy a new belt out at sea because it stretched out and wouldn't stay buckled.
- Always keep a small (6-8")adjustable wrench with you (you never know when you'll need one)

- I recommend you also always carry a multi-tool with lots of stuff on it. The ones at the NEX are good.
- Flashlight: Very important to have a flashlight on you at all times, you'll constantly be crawling around dark spaces, or needing to see inside some crevice. I recommend a small, LED flashlight to maximize battery life. Northern Tools sells "LED pocket flashlights" for $5. 3 AAA batteries will last you half of sea year. Very light, very small, very bright, and it has a very simple construction, so it really won't break, and it's easy to clean. Headlamps are also very useful when tracing systems, so you can climb around the ship and keep your hands free.
- If your ship has some spare line laying around (less than .5" thick), ask if you can have a 5-10' length of it. When tracing systems, having a piece of line helps when tracing systems through the deck. There are a LOT of pipes all over the place, so if you need to track, say, a lube oil pipe out of a generator engine, and it drops down through the deck (with an open hole through the deck) tie the line to the pipe, and drop the end down through the hole. This will make finding the pipe 10x easier when you go below to continue tracing it. Just use discretion when tying line around random things, and be sure it won't interfere with anything, or come close to any moving parts when you drop it down.

Get your projects done ASAP. The more time you spend working on them, the more time you have to go ashore, or just take a day off. It does <u>suck</u> to spend EVERY waking moment either working or doing projects, but in the end it REALLY pays off to get them done long before you get off the ship. You will probably hate it, and you will probably want to throw everything over the side of the ship, but if you just work through it and find a schedule that works for you, you will get to see some AMAZING things out at sea; things your friends can only dream of! Stick with your sea partner ashore and onboard, ALWAYS use protection, be safe, be smart, be inquisitive, and above all: do everything you can to have fun!!