

# How to choose a welder or fabricator

What needs certified welding, how to specify a job so quotes are comparable, and why the steel grade matters more than the price

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Fabrication quotes are hard to compare because "make me a trailer" is not a specification. Two quotes for the same sentence can differ by a factor of three and both be honest - one is 2 mm wall thickness in mild steel, the other is 4 mm.

## What it should cost

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Small repair and fabrication work is usually quoted per job, with an hourly rate somewhere between about \$90 and \$150 for a workshop with a skilled welder. Trailer builds, gates, frames and structural steel are priced by material plus labour, and the material is often the smaller part of the number.

The reason quotes diverge is specification. Wall thickness, steel grade, weld type, finish and whether the item is galvanised all change the price substantially. Ask for the quote to state each of those, and then compare quotes on the same specification rather than on the total.

Coastal and marine work costs more than inland work because it needs a different grade or a protective finish. A quote that does not ask where the item will be used is a quote that has not costed the corrosion.

## What the law requires

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Structural, load-bearing and vehicle work falls under standards that require the welder to be qualified for that class of work, and for the certification to be documented. Trailer manufacture in particular has specific requirements covering the chassis, the coupling and the brakes, and a home-built or uncertified trailer can fail inspection.

Pressure vessel and gas cylinder repair should only be done by a business qualified for it. This is not a job to price-shop, because the failure mode is an explosion.

Welding businesses should hold public liability insurance, and if they are working on your site they may also need workers compensation cover. Ask for the certificates.

## Red flags

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A quote with no specification attached - just a price for a description.

A willingness to weld anything structural without asking what it is for.

No answer, or a dismissive answer, about steel grade.

Quotes that undercut everyone else by a wide margin with no explanation.

No insurance.

Material quoted as "mild steel" for an application that is clearly exposed marine or structural work.

## What good looks like

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They ask what the item is for and where it will live before quoting.

The quote names the grade, the thickness and the finish.

They say plainly when a job needs certified welding rather than quietly doing it anyway.

They raise the corrosion question themselves for coastal work.

They tell you when a repair is not worth doing and why.

## What to ask

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- "Can you give me a drawing or a written specification before I accept the quote?"
- "What steel grade and wall thickness are you quoting, and why that instead of the alternatives?"
- "Is this item structural or load-bearing, and does the work need certified welding?"
- "What finish is included - bare, primed, painted, galvanised?"
- "If it is going near the coast, what are you doing about corrosion?"
- "Are you insured, and can I see the certificate?"
- "What is the lead time, and what depends on material availability?"

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