



Glossary of Boating Terms

A	
ABAFT	Toward the rear of the boat. Behind.
ABEAM	At right angles to the keel of the boat, but not on the boat.
ABOARD	On or within the boat.
ABOVE DECK	On the deck.
ABREAST	Side by side; by the side of.
ADRIFT	Loose, not on moorings or towline.
AFT	Toward the rear of the boat.
AGROUND	Touching or fast to the bottom.
AHEAD	In a forward direction.
AIDS TO NAVIGATION	Markers on land or sea which are located to enable navigators to avoid danger and fix their position.
ALEE	Away from the direction of the wind. Opposite of windward.
ALOFT	Above the deck of the boat.
AMIDSHIPS	In or toward the center of the boat.
ANCHOR LINE	A line used to hold a vessel fast to the anchor
ANCHORAGE	A suitable place for anchoring in relation to the wind, seas and bottom.
ASTERN	Towards the back of the boat, opposite of ahead.
ATHWARTSHIPS	At right angles to the centerline of the boat.
AWEIGH	Off the bottom of an anchor
B	
BATTEN DOWN	Secure hatches and loose objects both within the hull and on deck.
BEAM	The greatest width of the boat.
BEARING	The direction of an object (vessel, buoy, etc.) from an observer; bearings can be visual, or by radio or radar.
BELOW	Beneath the deck.
BIGHT	The part of the rope or line, between the end and the standing part, on which a knot is formed.

BILGE	The lowest point of a vessel's interior hull.
BILGE BLOWER	The electric fan that blows gasoline fumes out of the bilge.
BITTER END	The extreme end of any line. The inboard end of the anchor rode.
BLOWER	A device that blows fuel vapors trapped inside the vessel to the outside. Blowers should be run for about 5 minutes prior to starting a boat's inboard engine to reduce the risk of explosion.
BOAT	A fairly indefinite term. A waterborne vehicle smaller than a ship. One definition is a small craft carried aboard a ship.
BOAT HOOK	A short shaft with a fitting at one end shaped to facilitate use in putting a line over a piling, recovering an object dropped overboard, or in pushing or fending off.
BOOT TOP	A painted line that indicates the designed waterline.
BOW	The forward part of a boat.
BOW LINE	A docking line leading from the bow.
BOWLINE	A knot used to form a temporary loop in the end of a line.
BRIDGE	The location from which a vessel is steered and its speed controlled. "Control Station" is really a more appropriate term for small craft.
BRIDLE	A line or wire secured at both ends in order to distribute a strain between two points.
BRIGHTWORK	Varnished woodwork and/or polished metal.
BULKHEAD	A vertical partition separating compartments.
BUOY	An anchored float used for marking a position on the water or a hazard or a shoal and for mooring.
BURDENED VESSEL	That vessel which, according to the applicable Navigation Rules, must give way to the privileged vessel. The term has been superseded by the term "give-way".
C ABIN	A compartment for passengers or crew.
CAPACITY PLATE	A placard permanently mounted on the stern describing the total weight limit allowed onboard. Includes people, engine, fuel & gear that can be safely carried.
CAPSIZE	To turn over.
CARBURETOR BACK FLAME ARRESTOR	A safety device made of a mesh construction to prevent explosion from engine exhaust backfire.
CAST OFF	Undo mooring lines in preparation for departure.
CATAMARAN	A twin-hulled boat, with hulls side by side.
CHANNEL	(1.) That part of a body of water deep enough for navigation through an area otherwise not suitable. It is usually marked by a single or double line of buoys and sometimes by range markers. (2.) The deepest part of a stream, bay, or strait, through which the main current flows.
CHAFING GEAR	Tubing or cloth wrapping used to protect a line from chafing on a rough surface.

CHART	A sea going map for use by navigators.
CHINE	The intersection of the bottom and sides of a flat or v-bottomed boat.
CHOCK	A fitting through which anchor or mooring lines are led. Usually U-shaped to reduce chafe.
CLEAT	A fitting to which lines are made fast. The classic cleat to which lines are belayed is approximately anvil-shaped.
CLOVE HITCH	A knot for temporarily fastening a line to a spar or piling.
COAMING	A vertical piece around the edge of a cockpit, hatch, etc. to prevent water on deck from running below.
COCKPIT	An opening in the deck from which the boat is handled.
COIL	To lay a line down in circular turns.
COMPASS	Navigation instrument, either magnetic (showing magnetic north) or gyroscopic (showing true north)
COURSE	The direction in which a boat is steered.
CUDDY	A small shelter cabin in a boat.
CURRENT	The horizontal movement of water.
DANGER ZONE	The area encompassed from dead ahead of your boat to just abaft your starboard beam. You must stand clear of any boat in the "danger zone".
DAY BEACON	A fixed navigation structure used in shallow water upon which is placed one or more daymarks.
DEAD AHEAD	Directly ahead.
DEAD ASTERN	Directly aft.
DEAD RECKONING	The navigational art of determining your position based on course steered and speed rather than through obtaining a position from other means. (Using a chart or electronic device)
DECK	A permanent covering over a compartment, hull or any part thereof.
DINGHY	A small open boat. A dinghy is often used as a tender for a larger craft.
DISPLACEMENT	The weight of water displaced by a floating vessel, thus, a boat's weight.
DISPLACEMENT HULL	A type of hull that plows through the water, displacing a weight of water equal to its own weight, even when more power is added.
DOCK	A protected water area in which vessels are secured. The term is often used incorrectly to denote a pier or a wharf. The dock is the water adjacent to a pier or wharf.
DOLPHIN	A group of piles driven close together and bound with wire cables into a single structure.
DOWNWIND	A direction leeward, with the wind.
DRAFT	The minimum depth of water in which a vessel will float.
EBB (TIDE)	A receding current.

F ATHOM	A unit of measure. 1 fathom = 6 feet.
FENDER	A cushion, placed between boats, or between a boat and a pier, to prevent damage.
FIGURE EIGHT KNOT	A knot in the form of a figure eight, placed in the end of a line to prevent the line from passing through a grommet or a block.
FLARE	A pyrotechnic device used to signal a distress. The outward curve of a vessel's sides near the bow.
FLOOD	A incoming current.
FLOORBOARDS	The surface of the cockpit on which the crew stand.
FLUKE	The part of an anchor that is designed to dig in to the bottom.
FOLLOWING SEA	An overtaking sea that comes from astern.
FORE-AND-AFT	In a line parallel to the keel.
FOREPEAK	A compartment in the bow of a small boat.
FORWARD	Toward the bow of the boat.
FOULED	Any piece of equipment that is jammed or entangled, or dirtied.
FREEBOARD	The minimum vertical distance from the surface of the water to the gunwale.
G ALLEY	The kitchen area of a boat.
GANGWAY	The area of a ship's side where people board and disembark.
GEAR	A general term for ropes, blocks, tackle and other equipment.
GIVE-WAY VESSEL	A term used to describe the vessel which must yield in meeting, crossing, or overtaking situations.
GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM (GPS)	A form of position finding using radio transmissions from satellites with sophisticated on-board automatic equipment.
GRAB RAILS	Hand-hold fittings mounted on cabin tops and sides for personal safety when moving around the boat.
GROUND TACKLE	A collective term for the anchor and its associated gear.
GUNWALE	The upper edge of a boat's sides.
H ARD CHINE	An abrupt intersection between the hull side and the hull bottom of a boat so constructed.
HATCH	An opening in a boat's deck fitted with a watertight cover.
HEAD	A marine toilet. Also the upper corner of a triangular sail.
HEADING	The direction in which a vessel's bow points at any given time.
HEADWAY	The forward motion of a boat. Opposite of sternway.
HELM	The wheel or tiller controlling the rudder.

HELMSMAN	The person who steers the boat.
HITCH	A knot used to secure a rope to another object or to another rope, or to form a loop or a noose in a rope.
HOLD	A compartment below deck in a large vessel, used solely for carrying cargo.
HORSEPOWER	The equivalent of a lift of 550 pounds one foot in one second.
HULL	The main body of a vessel.
I NBOARD	(1.) More toward the center of a vessel; inside; (2.) A motor fitted inside a boat.
INTRACOASTAL WATERWAY (ICW)	bays, rivers, and canals along the coasts connected so that vessels may travel without going into the sea.
J ACOBS LADDER	A rope ladder, lowered from the deck, as when pilots or passengers come aboard.
JETTY	A structure, usually masonry, projecting out from the shore; a jetty may protect a harbor entrance.
K EEL	The centerline of a boat running fore and aft; the backbone of a vessel.
KNOT	(1.) A measure of speed equal to one nautical mile (6076 feet) per hour.(2.) A fastening made by interweaving rope to form a stopper, to enclose or bind an object, to form a loop or a noose, to tie a small rope to an object, or to tie the ends of two small ropes together.
L ATITUDE	The distance north or south of the equator measured and expressed in degrees.
LAZARETTE	A storage space in a boat's stern area.
LEE	The side sheltered from the wind.
LEEWARD	The direction away from the wind. Opposite of windward.
LEEWAY	The sideways movement of the boat caused by either wind or current.
LINE	Rope and cordage used aboard a vessel.
LOCK	A structure having movable gates for ships and boats to pass up and down to different water levels in a canal, river, or tidal basin.
LOG	A record of courses or operation. Also, a device to measure speed.
LONGITUDE	The distance in degrees east or west of the meridian at Greenwich, England.
LUBBER'S LINE	A mark or permanent line on a compass indicating the direction forward parallel to the keel when properly installed.
M ARLINESPIKE	A tool for opening the strands of a rope while splicing.
MIDSHIP	Approximately in the location equally distant from the bow and stern.
MONOHULL	Single hull boat in contrast to a multihull such as a catamaran or a trimaran.

MOORING	(1)An arrangement for securing a boat to a mooring buoy attached to permanent ground tackle or (2) an area where vessels are kept at anchor.
MOORING LINES	Wire, manila, or nylon rope used to secure a boat to a fixed object such as a dock, seawall, pier, shoreline or mooring ball;
N NAUTICAL MILE	One minute of latitude; approximately 6076 feet - about 1/8 longer than the statute mile of 5280 feet.
NAVIGATION	The art and science of conducting a boat safely from one point to another.
NAVIGATION RULES	The regulations governing the movement of vessels in relation to each other, generally called steering and sailing rules.
O UTBOARD	Toward or beyond the boat's sides. A detachable engine mounted on a boat's stern.
OVERBOARD	Over the side or out of the boat.
OVERTAKING	Said to happen when on vessel is passing another from behind.
P IER	A loading platform extending at an angle from the shore.
PILE	A wood, metal or concrete pole driven into the bottom. Craft may be made fast to a pile; it may be used to support a pier (see PILING) or a float.
PILING	Support, protection for wharves, piers etc.; constructed of piles (see PILE)
PILOTING	Navigation by use of visible references, the depth of the water, etc.
PLANING	A boat is said to be planing when it is essentially moving over the top of the water rather than through the water.
PLANING HULL	A type of hull shaped to glide easily across the water at high speed.
PORT	(1) The left side of a boat looking forward. (2) A harbor.
POWER WINCH	A powered device on deck, on a spar or otherwise mounted which is used to haul a line.
PRIVELEGED VESSEL	A vessel which, according to the applicable Navigation Rule, has right-of-way (this term has been superseded by the term "stand-on").
Q UARTER	The sides of a boat aft of amidships.
QUARTERING SEA	Sea coming on a boat's quarter.
R RIGGING	The wire rope, rods, lines, hardware, and other equipment that support and control the spars and sails; standing rigging is semi-permanent once set up; running rigging is continually adjusted as the sails are hoisted, doused, trimmed, or reefed.
RODE	The anchor line and/or chain.
ROPE	In general, cordage as it is purchased at the store. When it comes aboard a vessel and is put to use it becomes line.
RUDDER	A vertical plate or board for steering a boat.
RUN	To allow a line to feed freely.

RUNNING LIGHTS	Lights required to be shown on boats underway between sundown and sunup, and during periods of reduced visibility.
S SCOPE	Technically, the ratio of length of anchor rode in use to the vertical distance from the bow of the vessel to the bottom of the water. Usually seven to one for calm weather, more scope in storm conditions.
SCREW	A boat's propeller.
SCUPPERS	Drain holes on deck, in the toe rail, or in bulwarks or (with drain pipes) in the deck itself.
SEA COCK	A through hull valve, a shut off on a plumbing or drain pipe between the vessel's interior and the sea.
SEAMANSHIP	All the arts and skills of boat handling, ranging from maintenance and repairs to piloting, sail handling, marlinespike work, and rigging.
SEA ROOM	A safe distance from the shore or other hazards.
SEAWORTHY	A boat or a boat's gear able to meet the usual sea conditions.
SECURE	To make fast.
SET	Direction toward which the current is flowing.
SHIP	A larger vessel usually thought of as being used for ocean travel. A vessel able to carry a "boat" on board.
SLACK	Not fastened; loose. Also, to loosen.
SOLE	Cabin or saloon floor. Timber extensions on the bottom of the rudder. Also the molded fiberglass deck of a cockpit.
SOUNDING	A measurement of the depth of water.
SPRING LINE	A pivot line used in docking, undocking, or to prevent the boat from moving forward or astern while made fast to a dock.
SQUALL	A sudden, violent wind often accompanied by rain.
SQUARE KNOT	A knot used to join two lines of similar size. Also called a reef knot.
STANDING PART	That part of a line which is made fast. The main part of a line as distinguished from the bight and the end.
STAND-ON VESSEL	That vessel which has right-of-way during a meeting, crossing, or overtaking situation.
STARBOARD	The right side of a boat when looking forward.
STEM	The forward most part of the bow.
STERN	The back part of the boat.
STERN LINE	A docking line leading from the stern.
STOW	To put an item in its proper place.
SWAMP	To fill with water, but not settle to the bottom.
T TENDER	(1) A small boat accompanying a yacht or other pleasure vessel, used to transport persons, gear, and supplies; sometimes called a dinghy. (2) Most commonly refers to one who tends to a drawbridge. Boaters contact the bridge tender to get the bridge raised so they can pass under.

THROTTLE	Regulates the flow of fuel, and thus the speed, of an internal combustion engine.
THWARTSHIPS	At right angles to the centerline of the boat.
TIDE	The periodic rise and fall of water level in the oceans.
TILLER	A bar or handle for turning a boat's rudder or an outboard motor.
TOPSIDES	The sides of a vessel between the waterline and the deck; sometimes referring to onto or above the deck.
TOWING	Assisting a vessel unable to maneuver by pulling, pushing or towing alongside.
TRANSOM	The stern cross-section of a square sterned boat.
TRIM	Fore and aft balance of a boat. To set and adjust sails.
U NDERWAY	Vessel in motion, i.e. when not moored, at anchor, or aground.
UNDERWRITER'S LABORATORIES	One of the chief testing organizations, helping to set US safety standards.
V BOTTOM	A hull with the bottom section in the shape of a "V".
W AKE	Moving waves, track or path that a boat leaves behind it, when moving across the waters.
WATERLINE	The imaginary line drawn on the hull by the water's surface where a boat settles when loaded normally.
WAY	Movement of a vessel through the water such as headway, sternway or leeway.
WINDWARD	Toward the direction from which the wind is coming.
Y ACHT	A pleasure vessel, a pleasure boat; in American usage the idea of size and luxury is conveyed, either sail or power.
YAW	To swing or steer off course, as when running with a quartering sea.

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