

## SAILING BASICS: 10 BEGINNER SAILING TERMS TO KNOW

### 10 Beginner Sailing Terms Everyone Should Know

While our glossary page provides a comprehensive list of [boating terms](#), we've also compiled this short list of 10 beginner sailing terms that everyone should know. If you're just learning how to sail, these handy terms can provide a helpful overview of sailing basics you need to become familiar with.



- 1. Aft** - The back of a ship. If something is located aft, it is at the back of the sailboat. The aft is also known as the stern.
- 2. Bow** - The front of the ship is called the bow. Knowing the location of the bow is important for defining two of the other most common sailing terms: port (left of the bow) and starboard (right of the bow).
- 3. Port** - Port is always the left-hand side of the boat when you are facing the bow. Because "right" and "left" can become confusing sailing terms when used out in the open waters, port is used to define the left-hand side of the boat as it relates to the bow, or front.
- 4. Starboard** - Starboard is always the right-hand side of the boat when you are facing the bow. Because "right" and "left" can become confusing sailing terms when used out in the open waters, starboard is used to define the right-hand side of the boat as it relates to the bow, or front.
- 5. Leeward** - Also known as lee, leeward is the direction opposite to the way the wind is currently blowing (windward).
- 6. Windward** - The direction in which the wind is currently blowing. Windward is the opposite of leeward (the opposite direction of the wind). Sailboats tend to move with the wind, making the windward direction an important sailing term to know.
- 7. Boom** - The boom is the horizontal pole which extends from the bottom of the mast. Adjusting the boom towards the direction of the wind is how the sailboat is able to harness wind power in order to move forward or backwards.
- 8. Rudder** - Located beneath the boat, the rudder is a flat piece of wood, fiberglass, or metal that is used to steer the ship. Larger sailboats control the rudder via a wheel, while smaller sailboats will have a steering mechanism directly aft.
- 9. Tacking** - The opposite of jibing, this basic sailing maneuver refers to turning the bow of the boat through the wind so that the wind changes from one side of the boat to the other side. The boom of a boat will always shift from one side to the other when performing a tack or a jibe.
- 10. Jibing** - The opposite of tacking, this basic sailing maneuver refers to turning the stern of the boat through the wind so that the wind changes from one side of the boat to the other side. The boom of a boat will always shift from one side to the other when performing a tack or a jibe. Jibing is a less common technique than tacking, since it involves turning a boat directly into the wind.

## BEGINNER SAILING TIPS

New to [sailing](#)? Let us help you master the basics with these handy [sailing tips](#) and instructions for beginners. You can also read our [sailboat buying guide](#) and watch videos on sailing, plus compare [sailboat brands](#) to find the right one for you. Both novice and experienced sailors alike can benefit from a quick review of these beginner sailing basics!



- **Choose calm, uncrowded waters** If you're just starting to master sailing basics and learn how to sail, then one of the most important beginner sailing tips to remember is to practice in ideal conditions of light winds and low traffic.
- **Choose a small boat** to learn how to sail It's easier to learn how to sail with fewer lines and sails. A small dinghy will be more responsive and easier to maneuver, and is also perfect for practicing test capsizes in (see tip #7 below).
- **Begin on a boat rigged with one sail** Similar to the above, beginning on a boat that's rigged with just one sail will make learning sailing basics easier and less complicated.
- **Follow sailing basics for safety** There are certain sailing basics for safe boating that should go without saying, no matter what your level of expertise. These include always telling someone before you go out on the water, always bringing a flotation device and knowing in advance how to swim. For additional information, please see our [safe boating](#) pages.
- **Research tide, wind and weather conditions.** Check the weather forecast so you can be prepared for whatever the weather might bring. Be sure to bring along adequate provisions, clothing and basic weather gear as needed. Boating and sailing basics means always being prepared.
- **Become familiar with sail control** The best sailors are the ones who are able to adjust sail settings to take the best advantage of different wind and water conditions. In general, sails should be relatively flat when the wind is either very light or very strong, and full when there is a moderate wind.
- **Capsize on purpose.** This may seem like one of the oddest beginner sailing tips we could suggest, but it's better to practice how to handle a capsized sailboat within a controlled environment, as opposed to an uncontrolled one. We learn best from experience, and the valuable sailing basics you'll pick up from going through a test-capsize in a small dinghy will serve you well in the event of a real-life one.
- **Respect the boom** Some of the most common sailing injuries are a result of not being aware when the boom is about to swing. To avoid a bump to the head, or even worse, being knocked overboard, one of the most important beginner sailing tips to always remember for both passengers and crew is to be conscious and respectful of the boom at all times.
- **Learn basic sailing terms.** Before you venture out on your first trip, be sure to acquaint yourself with basic [sailing terms](#). Make sure you know the difference between port, starboard, and other important concepts.
- **Practice makes perfect.** Don't try to teach yourself all the sailing basics. Invest in a good sailing course, research guides and books, and learn from friends with experience.



## 01 - The Parts of the Boat

The Hunter 140 shown here is a typical [centerboard](#) sailboat used for learning how to sail and for sailing in protected waters. It can hold two adults or three children. It is easily rigged and sailed. We will use this boat throughout this Learn to Sail - Full Course.

Shown here is the boat as it is typically left on a dock or mooring, with sails and rudder removed.

If you know very little about sailing, you might want to learn some basic terms referring to the boat and sailing technique before starting this course. Here is a [good place](#) to start.

The mast and boom are usually left in place on the boat. The forestay holds up the mast from the bow of the boat, and a single shroud on each side of the boat holds the mast side to side. The shrouds are mounted back of the mast, so they also keep the mast from falling forward. The stay and shrouds are made of flexible wire that can be disconnected to trailer or store the boat.

On most large sailboats, there are multiple shrouds to support the mast, along with a back stay support to the stern. Otherwise, this boat is representative of the basic standing rigging of a sloop, the most common type of modern sailboat.

## The Rudder



## 02 - The Parts of the Boat (The Rudder)

On most small sailboats, the rudder is mounted on the stern of the hull, as shown here. The rudder is a long, thin blade hanging vertically from a simple set of hinges (which varies somewhat among different boats). The rudder pivots on a vertical axis, swinging side to side, which turns the boat when it is moving through the water.

The rudder may be stored on the boat or removed, like the sails, after sailing. Here, the rudder is being reinstalled. On this model the rudder has a kick-up feature, which allows it to swing up if the boat strikes bottom.





