

Suva Training GLOSSARY OF SAILING TERMS

A

Aback: describes a sail when the wind strikes it on the lee side.

Abaft: towards the stern (back) of the boat or ship.

Abeam: at right angles to the *centerline* of the boat.

Aft: at or near the stern.

Amidships: the center of the boat, *athwartships* and fore and aft.

Anti-fouling: a poisonous paint compound used to protect the underwater part of a hull from marine growths.

Apparent wind: The direction and speed of the wind felt by the crew. It is a combination of *true wind* and that created by the movement of the boat.

Astern: behind the boat; to go astern is to drive the boat in reverse.

Athwartships: at right angles to the fore and aft line of the boat.

B

Back: when a wind backs, it shifts anticlockwise.

Back a sail: to sheet it to windward so that the wind fills on the side that is normally to *leeward*.

Backstay: a fixed stay that supports the mast from aft and prevents its forward movement.

Ballast: extra weight, usually lead or iron, placed low in the boat or externally on the keel to provide stability.

Ballast keel: a mass of ballast bolted to the keel to increase stability and prevent a keel boat from capsizing.

Batten: a light, flexible strip fed into a batten pocket at the *leech* of the sail to support the *roach*.

Beam: 1, the maximum breadth of a boat; 2, a transverse member that supports the deck; 3, on the beam means that an object is at right angles to the centerline.

Bear away: to steer the boat away from the wind.

Bearing: the direction of an object from an observer, measured in degrees true or magnetic.

Beat: to sail a *zigzag course* towards the wind, *close-hauled* on alternate *tacks*.

Belay: to make fast a rope around a *cleat*, usually with a figure-of-eight knot.

Bend: 1, to secure a sail to a spar before hoisting; 2, to moor a boat

Bight: a *bend* or loop in a rope.

Bilge: lowest area of a boat below the waterline, where the two sides meet at the [keel](#).

Block: a pulley in a wooden or plastic case, consisting of a *sheave* around which a rope runs. It is used to change the direction of pull.

Bottle screw: see Rigging screw.

Bow: the forward part of the [hull](#) of a [ship](#) or [boat](#), the point that is usually most forward when the vessel is underway. The other end of the boat is the [stern](#).

Broach: when a boat *running* down wind slews broadside to the wind and *heels* dangerously. It is caused by heavy following seas or helmsman's error.

Broad reach: the point of sailing between a beam *reach* and a *run*, when the wind blows over a quarter.

Bulkhead: a partition wall in a boat normally fitted athwartships

C

Caulk: to make the seams between wooden planks watertight by filling with cotton, oakum or a compound.

Cavitation: the formation of a vacuum around a propeller, causing a loss in efficiency.

Center-board: a board lowered through a slot in the *keel* to reduce *leeway*.

Center-line: center of the boat in a fore and aft line.

Center of effort (COE): the point at which all the forces acting on the sails are concentrated.

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Center of lateral resistance (CLR): the underwater center of pressure about which a boat pivots when changing *course*.

Chain pawl: a short lug which drops into a toothed rack to prevent the anchor chain running back.

Chain plate: a metal plate bolted to the boat to which the *shrouds* or *backstays* are attached.

Chart datum: reference level on a chart below which the tide is unlikely to fall. Soundings are given below chart datum. The datum level varies according to country and area.

Chine: the line where the bottom of the hull meets the side at an angle.

Cleat: a wooden, metal or plastic fitting around which rope is secured.

Clevis pin: a locking pin through which a split ring is passed to prevent accidental withdraw.

Clew: the after, lower center of a sail where the foot and *leech* meet.

Close-hauled: the *point of sailing* closest to the wind; see also *beat*.

Close reach: the *point of sailing* between *close-hauled* and a beam reach, when the wind blows forward of the *beam*.

Close-winded: describes a boat able to sail very close to the wind.

Coaming: the raised structure surrounding a hatch, cockpit, etc., which prevents water entering.

Cotter pin: soft, metal pin folded back on itself to form an eye.

Course: the direction in which a vessel is steered, usually given in degrees; true, magnetic or compass.

Cringle: 1, a rope loop, found at either end of a line of reef points; 2, an eye in a sail.

Cutter: a one-masted [fore-and-aft rigged](#) vessel with more than one jib (staysail) before the mast. If there is only one jib, the boat is a [sloop](#).

D

Dead run: running with the wind blowing exactly aft, in line with the *centerline*.

Deviation: the difference between the direction indicated by the compass needle and the magnetic *meridian* caused by object aboard.

Displacement: 1, the weight of water displaced by a boat is equal to the weight of the boat; 2, a displacement hull is one that displaces its own weight in water and is only supported by buoyancy, as opposed to a planing hull which can exceed its hull, or displacement, speed.

Downhaul: a rope fitted to pull down a sail or spar.

Draft: the vertical distance from the waterline to the lowest point of the keel.

Drag: 1, an anchor drags when it fails to hold; 2, the force of wind on the sails, or water on the hull, which impedes the boat's progress.

Drift: 1, to float with the current or wind; 2, US the speed of a current (rate UK); 3, UK: the distance a boat is carried by a current in a given time.

Drogue: a sea anchor put over the stern of a boat or life raft to retard *drift*.

Drop keel: a retractable *keel* which can be drawn into the hull, when entering shallow waters and recovering on to a trailer.

E

Eye of the wind: direction from which the true wind blows.

F

Fair: well-faired line or surface is smoother with no bumps, hollows or abrupt changes in directions.

Fairlead: a fitting through which a line is run to alter the lead of the line.

Fathom: the measurement used for depths of water and lengths of rope. 1 fathom = 6 ft. or 1.83m.

Fid: a tapered tool used for *splicing* heavy rope and for sail-making, often hollow.

Fiddle: a raised border for a cabin table, chart table etc., to prevent objects falling off when the boat

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heels.

Fix: the position of the vessel as plotted from two or more position lines.

Foot (of a sail): The lower edge (side) of a sail.

Fore or Forward: Toward the bow.

Fore-and-aft rigging: A fore-and-aft sail is a sail that can take the wind from either side of the sail, depending on the direction of the wind, as opposed to the [square sail](#) that is always turned so that it takes the wind on the same side of the sail.

Forestay: the foremost stay, running from the masthead to the stemhead, to which the headsail is hanked.

Freeboard: vertical distance between the *waterline* and the top of the deck.

G

Genoa: a large headsail, in various sizes, which overlaps the mainsail and is hoisted in light to fresh winds on all points of *sailing*.

Gimbals: two concentric rings, pivoted at right angles, which keeps objects horizontal despite the boats motion, e. g. compass and cooker.

Go about: to turn the boat through the *eye of the wind* to change tack.

Gooseneck: the fitting attaching the boom to the mast, allowing it to move in all directions.

Goosewing: to boom-out the headsail to windward on a run by using a *whisker pole* to hold the sail on the opposite side to the mainsail.

Ground tackle: general term used for anchoring gear.

Guard rail: a metal rail fitted around the boat to prevent the crew falling overboard.

Gudgeon: a rudder fitting. It is the eye into which the *pintle* fits.

Guy: a steadying rope for a spar; a spinnaker guy controls the fore and aft position of the spinnaker pole; the foreguy holds the spinnaker pole forward and down.

Gybe: to change from one *tack* to another by turning the stern through the wind.

H

Halyard: rope used to hoist and lower sails.

Hank: fitting used to attach the *luff* of a sail to a stay.

Hatch: an opening in the deck giving access to the interior.

Hawes pipe: see *Navel pipe*.

Head: the toilet.

Head (of a sail): The highest corner of a triangular sail; the highest edge of a rectangular sail.

Head-topwind: when the bows are pointing right into the wind.

Headfoil: a streamlined surround to a *forestay*, with a groove into which a headsail *luff* slides.

Headway: the forward movement of a boat through the water.

Heave-to: to *back* the jib and lash the tiller to *leeward*; used in heavy weather to encourage the boat to lie quietly and to reduce *headway*.

Heaving line: a light line suitable for throwing ashore.

Heel: to lean over to one side.

Hull: the [watertight](#) body of a [ship](#) or boat.

I

Isobars: lines on a weather map joining places of equal atmospheric pressure.

J

Jackstay: a line running fore and aft, on both sides of the boat, to which safety harnesses are clipped.

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Jury: a temporary device to replace lost or damaged gear.

K

Keel: the main backbone of the boat to which a *ballast keel* is bolted or through which the *centerboard* passes.

Ketch: a two-masted sailing vessel with a *mizzenmast* stepped forward of the rudder post.

Kicking strap: a line used to pull the boom down, to keep it horizontal, particularly on a reach or run.

L

Lanyard: a short line used to attach one object to another.

Leech: 1, the after edge of a triangle sail; 2, both side edges of a square sail.

Lee helm: the tendency of a boat to bear away from the wind.

Lee shore: a shore on to which the wind blows.

Leeward: away from the wind; the direction to which the wind blows.

Leeway: the sideways movement of a boat off its *course* as a result of the wind blowing on one side of the sails.

Lifeline: a wire or rope rigged around the deck to prevent the crew falling overboard.

Limber holes: gaps left at the lower end of frames above the *keel* to allow water to drain to the lowest point of the *bilges*.

List: a boat's more or less permanent lean to one side, owing to the improper distribution of weight, e.g., *ballast* or water.

Log: 1, an instrument for measuring a boat's speed and distance traveled through the water; 2, to record in a book the details of a voyage, usually distances covered and weather.

Luff: the forward edge of a sail. To luff up is to turn a boat's head right into the wind.

Luff groove: a groove in a wooden or metal spar into which the *luff* of a headsail is fed.

Lurch: the sudden roll of a boat.

M

Marlin spike: a pointed steel or wooden spike used to open up the strands of rope or wire when splicing.

Mast Step: the socket in which the base of the mast is located.

Measured mile: a distance of one nautical mile measured between buoys or *transits/ranges* ashore, and marked on the chart.

Member: a part of the skeleton of the hull, such as a *stringer* laminated into fiberglass hull to strengthen it.

Meridian: an imaginary line encircling the Earth that passes through the poles and cuts at right angles through the Equator. All lines of longitude are meridians.

Mizzen: 1, the shorter, after-mast on a *ketch* or *yawl*; 2, the fore and aft sail set on this mast.

N

Navel pipe: a metal pipe in the fore deck through which the anchor chain passes to the locker below.

Noon Sight: a vessel's latitude can be found, using a sextant, when a heavenly body on the observer's *meridian* is at its greatest altitude. The sight of the sun at noon is the one most frequently taken.

O

Off the wind: with the sheets slacked off, not *close-hauled*.

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On the wind: *close-hauled*.

Out haul: a rope used to pull out the foot of a sail.

Overall length (LOA): the boat's extreme length, measured from the foremost part of the bow to the aftermost part of the stern, excluding bowsprit, self-steering gear etc.

P

Painter: the bow line by which a dinghy, or *tender*, is towed or made fast.

Pintle: a rudder fitting with a long pin that fits into the *gudgeon* to form a hinged pivot for the rudder.

Pitch: 1, the up and down motion of the bows of a boat plunging over the waves; 2, the angle of the propeller blades.

Point of sailing: the different angles from which a boat may sail; the boat's *course* relative to the direction of the wind.

Port: the left-hand side of the boat, looking forward (opp. of *starboard*).

Port tack: a boat is on a port tack when the wind strikes the port side first and the mainsail is out to *starboard*. A boat on the port tack gives way to a boat on a starboard tack.

Position line/ Line of position: a line drawn on a chart, as a result of taking a bearing, along which the boat's position must be i.e. Two position lines give a fix.

Pulpit: a metal *guard rail* fitted at the bows of a boat to provide safety for the crew.

Pushpit: a metal *guard rail* fitted at the stern.

Q

Quarter: the portion of the boat midway between the stern and the beam; on the quarter means about 45 degrees *abaft* the beam.

R

Rake: the fore and aft deviation from the perpendicular of a mast or other feature of a boat.

Range: 1, see *transit*; 2, of tides, the difference between the high and low water levels of a tide; 3, the distance at which a light can be seen.

Rating: a method of measuring certain dimensions of a yacht to enable it to take part in handicap races.

Reach: to sail with the wind approximately on the *beam*; all sailing points between running and *close-hauled*.

Reef: to reduce the sail area by folding or rolling surplus material on the boom or *forestay*.

Reefing pennant: strong line with which the *luff* or leech *cringle* is pulled down to the *boom* when reefing.

Rhumb line: a line cutting all *meridians* at the same angle; the *course* followed by a boat sailing in a fixed direction.

Riding light to anchor light: an all around white light, usually hoisted on the forestay, to show that a boat under 50 ft. (15m.) is at anchor. It must be visible for 2 miles. (3 km.).

Rigging screw: a deck fitting with which the tensions of standing rigging, e.g. stays, shrouds, etc. are adjusted.

Roach: the curved part of the *leech* of a sail that extends beyond the direct line from head to *clew*.

Run: to run with the wind *aft* and with the *sheets* eased well out.

Running Backstay: an adjustable stay that supports the mast from aft and prevents its forward movement.

Running rigging: all the moving lines, such as *sheets* and *halyards*, used in the *setting* and *trimming* of sails.

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S

Scope: the length of rope or cable paid out when anchoring.

Scuppers: 1, holes in the toe rail that allow water to drain off the deck; 2, drain cockpit through hull.

Seacock: a valve that shuts off an underwater inlet or outlet passing through the hull.

Seize: to bind two ropes together, or a rope to a *spar*, with a light line.

Serve: to cover and protect a *splice* or part of a rope with twine bound tightly against the lay.

Serving mallet: tool with a grooved head, used when serving a rope to keep the twine at a constant and high tension.

Set: 1, to hoist a sail; 2, the way in which the sails fit; 3, the direction of tidal current or steam.

Schooner: a large family of ship types. What every schooner has in common is that it's mainly [fore-and-aft rigged](#) (the main sail *must* be a fore-and-aft sail), and that it has at least two masts (a foremast and a mainmast; a two-masted vessel with a mainmast and a mizzen mast is not a schooner).

Shackle: a metal link with a removable bolt across the end; of various shapes: D, U.

Sheave: a grooved wheel in a *block* or *spar* for a rope to run on.

Sheet: the rope attached to the *clew* of a sail or to the boom, enabling it to be controlled or *trimmed*.

Shrouds: ropes or wires, usually in pairs, led from the mast to the *chain plates* at deck level to prevent the mast falling sideways; part of the standing rigging.

Sloop: a single-masted sailing boat with a mainsail and one head sail.

Spar: a general term for any wooden or metal pole, e.g., mast or boom, used to carry or give shape to sails.

Spindrift: spray blown along the surface of the sea.

Spinnaker: a large, light, balloon shaped sail set when *reaching* or *running*.

Splice: to join ropes or wire by unlaying the strands and interweaving them.

Split pin: see *cotter pin*.

Spreaders: horizontal struts attached to the mast, which extends to the *shrouds* and help to support the mast.

Stall: a sail stalls when the airflow over it breaks up, causing the boat to lose way.

Stanchion: upright metal post bolted to the deck to support guardrails or lifelines.

Standing part: the part of a line not used when making a knot; the part of a rope that is made fast, or around which the knot is tied.

Standing rigging: the shrouds and stays that are permanently set up and support the mast.

Starboard: right-hand side of a boat looking forward (opp. of *port*).

Starboard tack: a boat is the star board tack when the wind strikes the starboard side first and the boom is out to the *port*.

Stay: wire or rope which supports the mast in a fore and aft direction; part of the *standing rigging*.

Steerage way: a boat has steerage way when it has sufficient speed to allow it to be steered, or to answer the helm.

Stem: the most forward part of a boat or ship's [bow](#); an extension of the [keel](#) itself, to which the [port](#) and [starboard](#) side planks of the [hull](#) are attached.

Stern: the back or [aft](#)-most part of a [ship](#) or [boat](#).

Sternway: the backward, stern-first movement of a boat.

Stringer: a fore and aft member, fitted to strengthen the frames.

Suva: 1, The capital of Fiji. 2, a staysail schooner designed by Ted Geary and built for Frank Pratt of Coupeville, WA, in 1925. Owned by the Coupeville Maritime Heritage Foundation since 2015.

T

Tack: 1, the lower forward corner of a sail; 2, to turn the boat through the wind so that it blows on the opposite sides of the sails.

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Tacking: working to windward by sailing *close-hauled* on alternate *courses* so that the wind is first on one side of the boat, then on the other.

Tack pennant: a length of wire with an eye in each end, used to raise the tack of a headsail some distance off the deck.

Tackle: a purchase system comprising of rope and *blocks* that is used to gain mechanical advantage.

Tang: a strong metal fitting by which *standing rigging* is attached to the mast or other *spar*.

Tender of dinghy: a small boat used to ferry stores and people to a yacht.

Terminal fitting: fitting at the end of a wire rope by which a *shroud* or stay can be attached to the mast, a *tang* or a *rigging screw/ turnbuckle*.

Tide: the vertical rise and fall of the oceans caused by the gravitational attraction of the moon.

Toe rail: a low strip of metal or molding running around the edge of the deck.

Topping lift: a line from the masthead to a spar, normally the boom, which is used to raise it.

Topsides: the part of a boat's hull that is above the waterline.

Track: 1, the course a boat has made good; 2, a fitting on the mast or boom into which the slides on a sail fit; 3, a fitting along which a traveller runs, used to alter the angle of the sheets.

Transit: two fixed objects are in transit when seen in line; two transits give a position fix.

Traveller: 1, a ring or hoop that can be hauled along a *spar*; 2, a fitting that slides in a *track* and is used to alter the angle of the *sheets*.

Trim: 1, to adjust the angle of the sails, by means of *sheets*, so that they work most efficiently; 2, to adjust the boat's load, and thus the fore and aft angle at which it floats.

True wind: the direction and speed of the wind felt when stationary, at anchor or on land.

Turnbuckle: see *Rigging screw*.

U

Underway: a boat is underway when it is not made fast to shore, at anchor or aground.

Uphaul: a line used to raise something vertically, e.g., the spinnaker pole.

V

Veer: 1, the wind veers when it shifts in clockwise direction; 2, to pay out anchor cable or rope in a gradual, controlled way.

W

Wake: the disturbed water left *astern* of a boat.

Waterline: the line along the hull at which a boat floats.

Waterline length (WL): the length of a boat from *stem* to *stern* at the *water line*. It governs the maximum speed of *displacement hull* and effects a boat's *rating*.

Weather helm: (opp. of *lee helm*).

Weather side: the side of a boat on which the wind is blowing.

Wetted surface: the area of the hull under water.

Whisker pole: a light pole used to hold out the *clew* of a headsail when *running*.

Winch: a mechanical device, consisting usually of a metal drum turned by a handle, around which a line is wound to give the crew more purchasing power when hauling taut a line, e.g. a jib *sheet*.

Windage: those parts of a boat that increase *drag*, e.g., rigging, spars, crew, etc.

Windlass: a horizontal winch, typically used to haul up the anchor chain.

Windward: the direction from which the wind blows; towards the wind (opp. of leeward).

Y

Yawl: a two masted boat with a mizzen stepped aft of the rudder stock/post.