

# Glossary of Nautical Terms

The maritime world has a language of its own. It may seem silly to use special terms instead of simply using one that we use for the same thing shore side, but it actually serves a practical purpose. For example, why not just call a galley a kitchen; it's just a place where you cook food, right? Not exactly, in a kitchen you can leave pot of hot soup on the counter and, barring some geological event, it will still be there when you get back. In a galley, it is more likely to be all over the deck upon return. Using the proper terminology aboard a vessel helps to enforce the mindset that the maritime environment is different from that on shore and therefore, demands a different code of conduct.

## Objects:

**Bit:** Two adjacent posts used for mooring or making a line fast to

**Bollard:** A single post used for mooring or making a line fast to

**Boom:** (1) Horizontal spar attached to the foot of a sail; (2) A spar used for lifting such as on a crane or davit

**Bow:** The forward end of the vessel

**\*Bowsprit:** Spar protruding from the bow of a sailing vessel used for the attachment of the headsails

**Bulkhead:** A vertical partition inside a vessel

**Bulwark:** A partition extending above the weather deck of a vessel used to prevent seas from washing over and keep objects and personnel from going overboard

**Capstan:** Deck winch, usually configured vertically, used for hauling in lines See Windlass.

**Ceiling:** Planking on the interior sides the hull used for separating internal space from the frame bays; in some cases used to increase hull stiffness to prevent hogging particularly in wood vessels (Hogging is the sagging of the vessel towards the bow and stern due to lack of floatation from the narrowing of the hull. See "Hog")

**Chine:** Angle where the bottom plates (or planking) of a vessel meet the side plates (or planking) in vessels that do not have rounded bottoms

**Chock:** Fairlead with an open top

**Cleat:** Bar attached horizontally to its base used for making fast a line

**\*Clew:** Lower after corner of a sail to where a sheet would usually attach

**Deck:** Horizontal platforms on a vessel analogous to floors in a house

**Devil's Claw:** Claw used for securing the anchor chain, and ultimately the anchor by holding on to a link of chain

**\*Downhaul:** Line used for hauling in or taking a sail

**\*Foot:** Lower edge of a sail

**\*Gaff:** (1) Spar attached to the head of a gaff rigged sail (2) Large hook or spear used for lifting heavy fish

**Gunwale:** Uppermost edge of hull plating or planking

**Gypsy:** Cylindrical winch head used for hauling in lines

**Halyard:** Line used for raising sails, but also for hoisting other objects aloft i.e. flag halyard.

**Hatch:** Opening in the deck or cabin top used for ingress or egress of personnel or cargo

**\*Head:** (1) Topmost edge or corner of a sail (2) The place where one goes potty

**Helm:** The wheel of a ship; an archaic name for tiller

**Hull:** The main body of the ship; the shell

**Keel:** The strongest member of the ship which is generally situated longitudinally on the bottom of the vessel used for structurally stiffening the hull. In many cases its purpose is for maintaining directional stability such as with sailing vessels

**\*Leach:** Aftermost edge of the sail

**Lifeline:** Wire or railing run horizontally along the edge of the weather deck used to keep personnel on board

**\*Luff:** Foremost edge of a sail usually attached, or "bent on", to a mast or stay

**\*Mast:** Vertical spar used for the hoist of a sail; also used on non-sailing vessels as a means for elevating antennae, hoisting flags or as a spar for support a cargo boom

**Overhead:** The underside of the deck; analogous to the ceiling in a house

**\*Peak:** Uppermost, outer corner of a gaff-rigged sail

**Pulpit:** A platform or railed-in area located at the end of a bowsprit or forward-most end of the vessel

**Rode:** Line connecting the anchor to the vessel.

**Rudder:** Movable fin attached at the stern beneath the surface of the water used for changing the direction of the vessel

**Samson Post:** Reinforced post at the bow of the vessel used for mooring or towing of the vessel

\***Sheet:** Line used for controlling the angle, or trim, of a sail to the wind

\***Shroud:** Guy line or cable used for the lateral support of a mast

**Sole:** Deck of the cabin or forecastle

**Stanchion:** Vertical post used to support a beam, deck or lifeline

**Stay:** Guy line or cable used for forward support of a mast

**Stern:** Aftermost end of the vessel

\***Tack:** Forward-most lower corner of a sail

\***Throat:** Upper-most forward corner of a gaff sail

**Tiller:** Lever arm or staff used for steering by changing the angle of the rudder; outboard motors have a tiller for the same purpose

**Waterline:** The upper limit of the wetted surface of the hull while sitting in calm water

**Wildcat:** Winch drum sprocketed to for heaving in chain

**Windlass:** Horizontal winch for heaving in the anchor rode.

## **Places:**

**Bilge:** The interior bottom of the hull

**Bridge:** Elevated deck above the main deck from which activities on deck can be seen by the captain or officer of the watch; usually the area from where the ship is navigated

**Cabin:** Enclosed personnel area

**Charthouse:** Cabin used for the navigation of the vessel

**Companionway:** Passageway through which personnel can move

**Forecastle (pronounced Fo'c'sl):** Living space generally for non-officers traditionally located in the forward end of the vessel

**Foredeck:** Uppermost deck forward in the bow area

**Forepeak:** Forward-most compartment located in the 'v' of the bow separated from after compartments by a bulkhead. Used for storage.

**Galley:** Where food prep is handled; although analogous, it is NOT a kitchen

**Head:** Where personnel go potty

**Hold:** Enclosed non-living compartment used for storage

**Lazarette:** After-most compartment primarily used for storage; sort of like a forepeak in the stern

**Locker:** Enclosable storage space

**Quarterdeck:** Uppermost deck aft in the stern area

**Saloon:** General personnel area

**Wheelhouse:** Cabin enclosing the steering station. Also known as the Pilot House.

## **Orientation:**

**Aft:** Toward the rear of the vessel

**Amidships:** In the middle of the vessel, longitudinally or laterally

**Aloft:** Above the deck usually in the rigging

**Athwartships:** From one side of the ship to the other; orientation perpendicular to the ship's length

**Below:** Below the main deck; down

**Fore:** Toward the front of the vessel

**Leeward:** Downwind

**Port:** The left side of the vessel when facing forward

**Starboard:** The right side of the vessel when facing forward

**Windward:** Upwind

## **Actions:**

**Avast:** Stop; used particularly when hauling on a line

**Belay:** The process of making a line fast

**Capsize:** Turn upside down

**Cast Off:** Remove a line from its fasten point; opposite of belay

**Come about:** Turn around; more specifically in sailing, to tack

**Gybe:** Passing the stern through the wind so as to change the wind direction from one side of the vessel to the other

**Haul:** Pull

**Heave-to:** Orienting a vessel to the wind and waves in order to minimize the movement through the water without anchoring or mooring

**Heel:** The leaning of a vessel to one side due to the wind

**List:** The leaning of the vessel to one side caused by a lateral change in the vessel's center of gravity

**Pitch:** The up and down movement of a vessel, particularly in the bow

**Roll:** The side to side rocking of a vessel

**Tack:** Passing the bow of the vessel through the wind so as to change the wind direction from one side of the vessel to the other

**Yaw:** The side to side lateral movement of a vessel

## **Characteristics:**

**Beam:** The width of a vessel's hull at its widest point

**Camber:** The lateral arching of the deck from one side to the other; analogous to the grade of a road

**Displacement:** The weight of a vessel. Equal to the weight of water that the vessel pushes aside

**Draft:** The deepest depth of a vessel; the vertical distance between the waterline and the lowest part of the keel

**Flare:** The outward curve from the waterline to the top of the bow for the purpose of deflecting waves

**Gross Registered Tons:** Volume measurement used for the classification of vessels according to size

**Hog:** The sagging at the bow and stern causing a relative rise in the middle of the vessel; the downward curve towards the ends of the vessel

**LOA (Length Over All):** Length of the vessel's hull extremities

**Shear:** The opposite of hog; the rising or upward curve towards the ends of the vessel

**Sparrd Length:** Length of a vessel measured from the extremities of any overhanging or extending spars of a vessel

**Stiff:** A vessels tendency to roll very little usually due to a low center of gravity

**Tender:** Opposite of stiff; a vessel's tendency to roll to extreme angles usually due to a high center of gravity. Also the ship's boat is sometimes referred to as the tender.

**Tumblehome:** The inward curving of the hull from the waterline up towards the deck

**Waterline Length:** Length of the hull at the surface of the water

\*Terms used in reference to sailing vessels