

Short definitions of basic sailing terms.

-A-

abeam	directly to the side of the boat.
about	on the opposite tack.
aft	at or near the stern.
alee	to the leeward side.
aloft	above the deck.
apparent wind	the direction and speed of the wind felt by the crew. Combination of the true wind and that created by the motion of the boat.
astern	behind the boat.

-B-

backstay	any single wire supporting the mast from the stern.
batten	thin wooden strips fitted into pockets for stiffening the leech of a sail.
beam	measurement of the width of a boat.
beam reach	sailing with the wind coming across the boat's beam.
beam wind	a wind at right angles to a boat's course.
bear away	to steer the boat away from the wind.
beat	sailing against the wind by tacking (sailing a zigzag course towards the wind).
beating to windward	to sail to windward close-hauled, tacking as you go, to reach an objective to windward.
bend	to connect two ropes with a knot.
block	a pulley.
bollard	a short heavy post on a pier or boat used for fastening docking lines.
boom	spar that takes the foot of a sail.
bow	the forward part of a boat.
broach	turn sideways to wind and the surf.
broad reach	the point of sailing between a beam reach and a run, when the wind blows over the quarter.
buoy	floating navigational marker.

-C-

capsize	to overturn.
center of effort (coe)	the point at which all the forces acting on the sails are concentrated.
center of lateral resistance (CLR)	the underwater center of pressure about which a boat pivots when changing course.
centerboard	retractable keel to stop a boat's leeward drift.
chain plate	metal fitting bolted to the side of a boat to hold the ends of stays and shrouds.
cleat	fitting to which a line is secured, without knotting.
clew	aft bottom corner of a sail, where the foot and leech meet.

close-hauled	sailing close to the wind with sails pulled in.
close reach	the point of sailing between close-hauled and a beam reach, when the wind blows forward of the beam.
come about	to change course so as to be sailing at the same angle but with the wind on the other side.
course	the direction in which a vessel is steered, usually given in degrees.
cutter	single-masted fore-and-aft boat having an inner staysail and outer jib.

-D-

daggerboard	centerboard that does not pivot.
dinghy	a small boat used to ferry people to a yacht; also used for sailing or rowing; also called a tender.
downhaul	rope used to set up downward tension or haul down a sail or spar.

-E-

eye of the wind	direction from which the true wind is blowing.
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-F-

falling off	turn away from the direction of the wind.
foot	a sail's lower edge.
fore	at or toward the boat's bow.
fore-and-aft	lengthwise, in the direction of the keel.
foremast	mast nearest to the bow.
forestay	the foremost stay, running from the masthead to the bow.
furl	tightly roll up a sail.

-G-

gaff	spar that secures the head of a fore-and-aft sail.
galley	a kitchen on a boat.
genoa	large headsail, which overlaps the mainsail.
grommet	rope or brass ring in a sail or piece of canvas.
gunwales	upper edges of a boat's sides.
guy	adjustable steadying rope of a boat's rig.
gybing	see jibing.

-H-

halyard	line used for hoisting sails.
hank	fitting used to attach the luff of a sail to a stay.
hard-a-lee	to put the tiller all the way down toward the leeward side of the boat.
head	a sail's top corner; also a boat's toilet.
headsail	sail forward of the foremast.
headstay	a forward stay.
headway	moving forward.
heel	a boat's angle to horizontal, to lean over to one side.
helm	tiller or wheel.

hoist the length of the luff of a fore-and-aft sail.
hull the body of boat.

-I-

in irons to head into the wind and refuse to fall off.

-J-

jib a triangular headsail set on a stay forward of the foremast.
jibing changing direction with the wind aft; to change from one tack to another by turning the stern through the wind; also spelled gybing.
jibsheet line that controls the jib.

-K-

keel centerline backbone at the bottom of a boat.

-L-

lashing a rope used for securing any movable object in place.
lateen rig with a triangular sail secured to a yard hoisted to a low mast.
lee the side opposite that from which the wind blows; the opposite of weather.
leech outside edge of a sail.
lee helm the tendency of a boat to swing leeward unless held on course.
leeward away from the wind; the direction to which the wind blows, down wind.
line any length of rope that has a specified use.
luff to get so close to the wind that the sail flaps; also the forward edge of a sail.
luff up to turn the boat's head right into the wind.

-M-

mainmast principal mast on a boat.
mainsail boomed sail projecting aft from the mainmast
mainsheet line that controls the main boom.
make fast secure a line.
mast vertical spar to which the sails and rigging are attached.
masthead top of the mast.
mizzen the shorter, after-mast on a ketch or yawl.

-N-

-O-

on the wind close-hauled.

-P-

painter the bow line by which a dinghy, or tender is towed or made fast.
point To head close to the wind.
point of sail the different angles from the wind on which a boat may sail; the boat's course relative to the direction of the wind.

port the left-hand side of a boat, looking forward towards the bow (opposite of starboard).

port tack when a boat sails with the main boom to starboard and wind hits the port side first.

privileged vessel a boat that has the right-of-way (ROW).

-Q-

-R-

reach sailing on a tack with the wind roughly abeam, all sailing points between running and close-hauled.

ready about order to prepare for coming about.

reef reduce the sail area by folding or rolling surplus material on the boom or forestay.

rig arrangements of masts and sails.

rigging ropes and wire stays of a boat; securing masts and sails.

rudder vertical metal or wooden plate attached to the stern, whose movements steer the boat.

rules of the road Right-of-way (ROW) regulations to prevent collisions between boats.

run to sail with the wind aft and with the sheets eased out.

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

-S-

set to hoist a sail.

shackle a U-shaped piece of iron or steel with eyes in the ends, closed by a shackle pin.

sheave a grooved wheel in a block or spar for a rope to run on.

sheet line that controls a sail or the movement of a boom.

ship shape neat, seamanlike.

shrouds transverse wires or ropes that support the mast laterally.

spar pole, mast, or boom, that supports a sail.

spinnaker a large, light, balloon-shaped sail set forward of the mainsail when running before the wind.

splice to join ropes or wires by unlaying the strands and interweaving them.

spreaders horizontal spar attached to the mast, which extend the shrouds and stays and help to support the mast.

standing rigging the shrouds and stays which are permanently set up and support the masts.

starboard right-hand side of a boat looking forward towards the bow (opposite of port).

starboard tack tack on which the wind strikes the starboard side first and the boom is out to port.

stay wire or rope which supports the mast in a fore-and-aft direction; part of the standing rigging.

staysail sail set on a stay inboard of the forwardmost sail.

step a recess into which the fell of the mast is placed.

stern	after end of a boat.
stringer	a fore-and-aft member, fitted to strengthen the frames.
-T-	
tack	the lower forward corner of the sail, where the luff and the foot meet; also the diagonal made with the wind by a sailboat when close-hauled, (to change from one tack to another by coming about).
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.
tell-tales	small lengths of wood sewn through a sail near the luff and leech to allow the air flow over the sail to be checked.
tender	see dinghy.
tiller	short piece of wood by which the rudder is turned.
topsides	the part of a boat's hull which is above the waterline.
transom	a flat surface at the back of the hull to which the rudder is attached.
traveller	a slide which travels on a track and is used for altering sheet angles.
trim	to adjust the angle of the sails.
true wind	the direction and speed of the wind felt when stationary, at anchor or on land.

-U-

-V-

-W-

wake	a boat's track, behind.
waterline	the line along the hull at which a boat floats.
weather	windward, opposite of leeward.
weather helm	boat with a tendency to swing into the wind unless held on course.
weather side	the side of a boat on which the wind is blowing.
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 "help" when tightening a line.
windward	the direction from which the wind blows, towards the wind (opposite of leeward).

-X-

-Y-

-Z-