

Mission Creek Sail Tours

Sailing Nomenclature

"Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you did not do than by the things you did do. So, throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails.

Explore. Dream. Discover."

- Mark Twain

Words Make a Difference

You may have noticed that normal things have very different names on a boat. What looks like a window is called a "portlight", "port" or "hatch" depending on how it works. The kitchen is the "galley", the bathroom is the "head", and the floor is the "sole". To top it off, every line on a boat (there are no "ropes" unless it's made out of wire then it is a "rope") has a different name. It'll make you crazy.

A lot of the insanity is historical but there is one very good reason. It's much more efficient to say "Harden up the main sheet" than it is to say "Tighten the line there that is connected to the main sail. No! Not that one, the other one!" It's all about clear, concise communication. Once you are familiar with the lingo and the layout, you can go on any sailboat, anywhere in the world, from a 10' dinghy to a 50' racing yacht and know where everything is and how it works.

There are many, many terms that you will become familiar with the more you sail. Here are just a few.

The Boat Itself

Bow: the front, forward or pointy end of the boat

Stern: the back, aft or other end of the boat

Starboard: the right side of the boat when facing forward

Port: the left side of the boat when facing forward

Keel: the weighted fin or bulb at the bottom of the boat.

Rudder: the object at the stern of the boat that when turned, causes the boat to change direction

Tiller: the pole/lever connect to the top of the rudderpost that controls the rudder

Wheel: the steering wheel that controls the rudder mechanically or hydraulically

Winch: device that gives mechanical advantage when hauling on lines

Windward: the side of the boat the wind hits first

Leeward: the side of the boat opposite that of which the wind hits first

Draft: the depth of the boat from the waterline to the bottom of the keel

Beam: the widest part of the boat

Rigging

There are two types of rigging, standing and running. Standing rigging is the stationary stuff that supports the sails while running rigging moves and controls the sails.

Standing Rigging

Mast: the large vertical spar that support the sails and booms.

Boom: the horizontal spar connected to the mast by the gooseneck used to hold and extend the foot of the main sail

Forestay: the wire/cable that supports the mast from the bow and keeps the top of the mast from moving aft.

Backstay: the wire/cable that supports the mast from the stern and keeps the top of the mast from moving forward.

Shrouds: the wire/cable that support the mast from the sides and prevent it from moving sideways

Running Rigging

Halyards: the lines used to hoist or raise the sails. Also used to trim the sails.

Sheets: the lines used to change the angle of the sails. Also used to trim the sails.

Outhaul: line used to trim the foot of the sail

Downhaul: line used to trim the luff of the sail. A Cunningham is a type of downhaul.

Boom Vang: line used to pull the boom down preventing the boom from lifting

Reefing lines: lines used to shorten the sail to reduce power

Parts of the Sail

Head: top corner of the sail

Tack: bottom forward corner of the sail

Clew: bottom aft corner of the sail

Luff: forward or leading edge of the sail

Leech: aft or trailing edge of the sail

Foot: bottom edge of the sail

Cringle: reinforced rings in the sail used for reefing.

Reef points: rows of cringles in the sail used to shorten the sail to reduce power

Battens: wood or FRP strips that act as stiffeners for the sail. They help keep sail shape.

Miscellaneous

The boat we'll be sailing today is a sloop, meaning it's got one mast and two sails; a head sail and a main sail. The head sail will have different names depending on its size and function; jib, genoa, gennaker and spinnaker.

Sailboats themselves have different names depending on the number of masts and where they're placed. A ketch has two masts, the mainmast and the mizzenmast which is forward of the rudderpost. A yawl has two masts but the mizzen is aft of the rudderpost. A schooner also has two masts but the mizzen is taller than the main.

And finally, our word for the day is "Yacht" which comes from the 17th century Dutch word "jaght". A yacht is defined as a vessel used strictly for pleasure and really has very little to do with size.

For extra points, what's the difference between a boat and a ship?

We encourage everyone to provide feedback to our Staff so we can continue to improve our program.

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