



## Basic Sailing Terms You Should Know

- **Boom:** The long wooden or metal pole at the base of the mainsail. Watch out for the boom when tacking and jibing!
- **Bow/Stern:** The bow is the front of the boat, the stern is the back. Anything near the front of the boat is referred to as being “forward,” and anything toward the back is “aft” or “astern.”
- **Heeling:** This is the term used to describe how a sailboat leans over in the water, as it is pushed by the wind.
- **Helm:** This is where the pilot stands or sits to steer the boat. On larger boats, the helm may have a large steering wheel, but on smaller boats the helm can just be a tiller, which is basically a long wooden stick. Either of these devices (wheel or tiller) controls the boat’s rudder.
- **Jib:** The second-most common sail on a sailboat. The jib can always be found forward of the mast, and unlike the mainsail, does not have a boom.
- **Jibe:** A jibe is simply a way of changing direction, in which you bring the stern of the boat through the wind. Whether you choose to tack or jibe entirely depends on what’s around you, and the direction of the wind.
- **Keel:** The keel is a long, heavy fin on the bottom of the boat that sticks down into the water. It provides stability and is the reason why modern sailboats are nearly impossible to capsize.
- **Leeward:** The side of the boat farthest from the wind. When heeling over, this will always be the low side.
- **Lines:** On board a sailboat, we don’t have “ropes,” we have “lines” – lots of lines.
- **Mainsail:** The big triangular sail just aft of the sailboat’s mast. As the name suggests, this is the boat’s largest and most important sail. Running along its bottom edge, the mainsail has a thick pole called the boom.
- **Point of Sail:** The boat’s direction relative to the wind. For example, if you’re going straight into the wind, your point of sail is “in irons.” (Note: You can’t go anywhere in irons!) If the wind is blowing straight over the side of the boat, that’s called a “beam reach.” There are 8 commonly used points of sail, and you should learn them all.
- **Port:** Facing forward, this is anything to the left of the boat.
- **Rudder:** This is the device that controls the sailboat’s direction.
- **Starboard:** Facing forward, this is anything to the right of the boat. (It’s the opposite of “port”).
- **Tack:** This term has two distinct meanings, both of them are very important. As a verb, to tack is to change direction by turning the bow of the boat through the wind. But as a noun, your tack is the course you are on relative to the wind. For example, if the wind is blowing over the port side, you are on a port tack. If it’s blowing over the starboard side, you’re on a starboard tack.
- **Windward:** The side of the boat closest to the wind. When heeling over, this will always be the high side.