

Welcome aboard the S/V Seawulff

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"Welcome aboard" a guide to Maritime customs and traditions.

The best sailors learned their skills by watching the more experienced sailors, but your first few experiences aboard a boat will likely be somewhat bewildering. 5 feet from the dock is a whole new world; on the following you'll find a brief guide to that world.

And a new crew member has two primary tasks. First, keep yourself safe and comfortable so you can pay attention to this new world. Second, be a polite, cooperative guest so the skipper will welcome you back.

There is a sensible saying at sea; one hand for yourself and one hand for the ship. It means that your first job is to take care of yourself, so you can take care of the boat. Be aware, hold on, and be stable. Brace your back and your feet against something solid when you sit. Whenever you move, look for the next reliable handhold, so you're balanced, even when the boat is rocking. Try to get the rhythm of the boat's motion, and move with it. It's like dancing.

Being a good crewmember is mostly about paying attention and being open to learning as you go along. Stick with the essentials; stay safe, adapt gently to the new environment, ask thoughtful questions, listen to the skipper, and don't get in the way. If you can do that much, you'll be comfortable aboard before you know it.

-----" **time**"-----if this gaffer plans to leave the dock at 0940 that's 9:40 AM on the 24 hour clock a common way of telling time aboard, he might be planning to catch the tide changing at that hour. For the Landsman, the tide goes up and down. For the sailor, it's also powerful current moving in and out, helping or hindering his boat. Sailors pay close attention to the tides. Beyond time. Be flexible, two. The skipper can't predict the wind and the weather. He may estimate a return by 1530 3:30 PM regular time, but don't schedule and important meeting at 1600. Because the boat may not get back until much later. Boats are at the mercy of big forces that change without warning.

-----" **clothing**"----- on the water wearing is layering. Even on a warm day the wind on the water can be cold. Conversely on a cool day you can work up a sweat. Wear layers you can peel off or put on. A fleece sweater and a wind breaking rain jacket are always good to have when headed out on the water. a hat is also a smart idea. On cool days, you lose major amounts of heat from your head; on sunny days, the hat bill will keep the bright sun out of your eyes so you can see more clearly, with less squinting. Hats blow off.

-----" **personal flotation devices**"----- personal flotation devices are lifejackets. The US Coast Guard requires every boat to have a PFD the on board for each crewmember. Should you wear one? Ask the skipper. Some sailing clubs make wearing PFD a rule. The skipper may have his own rules; if he wears a PFD, you should. If you don't swim you should positively wear PFD, and if wearing flotation makes you feel less apprehensive, put one on. But wearing flotation gear isn't about your swimming skills. A PFD is designed to keep even an unconscious person floating upright. If, heaven forbid, you do go overboard, the PFD allows you to remain upright until you are picked up.

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----" **shoes**"----- boat decks are almost always wet and slippery. Boat shoes, with special slit rubber soles are best. In any case, wear shoes with rubber soles that won't leave marks on the deck. Sandals with proper soles are common and comfortable aboard boats, but they should not be of the flip-flop variety; they should have captured heels so you don't slide out of them. Open toes can make you trip over lines. In fine weather your bare feet will often do nicely, though they're more slippery than you think and are vulnerable to toe stubbing on the deck hardware

-----" **sun protection**"----- you get much more sun on boats because you're receiving sunlight reflected from the water surface all around you in addition to that which you received from above. A hat will help, but high sun protective factor usually above sun protector 30 sun block is a necessity. Sunglasses especially ones with polarized lenses, are a comfort on any but the Cloudiest days because the sea reflects and maximizes the light. Bring plenty of water, even when it isn't hot. The sun and the wind will dehydrate you.

-----" **keep it together**"----- carry things in a sturdy bag that is easy to stow, one superstition is that bringing a suitcase aboard his bad luck. Here are a few other things that are left ashore. Don't bring delicate breakables, as boats are unstable environments that rock 'n roll don't bring anything that could be ruined by a shower or sprayed which is a fact of life on board. Don't bring noisy things like CD players or radios; sailors develop a respect for the quiet. Loud music could drown out important sailing orders, and has a way of distracting attention.

-----" **boat culture**"-----customs that may seem odd or out of date have good reasons for their existence. Before stepping on deck ask may I have permission to come aboard? This question is like knocking on the door. It's an old naval tradition and a sensible thing to do. You're asking the captain if the boat is ready for you, where you step, where you sit, and where you put your things. You're also being respectful of the skipper's control over his space. Addressing the boats commander as captain or skipper shows your respect for the authority and responsibility any boat handler carries. Even in a dinghy, you may address the person who is directing the boat as skipper or captain. The Capt. will tell you if he or she prefers an informal address. But in the beginning, you can't go wrong using the honorific title.

Asking not only displays good manners, it's a good safety drill. Ask before you go forward; the skipper may be planning to tack or trim the sail. Ask before you go below, so the skipper will know where you are at all times. Ask before you tie or untie a line, throw an electrical switch, or pull a lever. Nautical forces like wind and waves are unexpectedly powerful, and you don't want to unleash them haphazardly. Always ask there is no shame in it.

-----" **stowing her gear**"----- putting your things out of the way is important on a boat because the walkways on deck and below should be kept clear. Lumping them on a berth or countertop isn't a good solution; everything shifts when the boat heels. Ask about a good place to store your gear, and get some help for the first time.

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-----" **stay in the boat**"-----don't hang over the rail, trail your feet in the water, ride in the bow, or jump about. Generally, stay in the cockpit and don't cause your shipmates to worry about your safety. When you're in a small boat, like a dinghy, approaching the dock or another boat, it's essential that you keep your fingers inside the boat. Don't grab the rub rail for support. The force of a wave lifting a small boat against a dock, the hull of a large boat, or even another small boat, is enormous. Fingers are delicate and indispensable.

-----" **boom**"----- most dangerous item on a sailboat usually is the boom, the spar at the foot of the mainsail. In some common situations there is a real possibility of the boom whipping from one side of the boat to the other with great force. Consider the boom a widow maker and stay low so they can swing overhead and clear of you.

-----" **traffic pattern**"----- you'll see an obvious traffic pattern as the boat's crew works. It's usually a triangle skipper at the helm, first mate crossing the sides to handle the jib sheets, but every boat is a bit different. On your early voyages, your job is to keep out of that pattern so the crew can work smoothly. You may be asked to help with the work; if you are, keep the pattern in mind and don't block it.

-----" **lines beware**"----- rope isn't a word a sailor uses often. The word refers to the raw material on a spool, but once a piece is cut from that spool, it's called a line. What a line is subsequently called depends on what it does. Sheets control the angle and the shape of sails; halyards lift and lower the sails, spars or flags; rode refers to anchor line. There are also nettles, dock or mooring lines, guys, lifts, and a dozen other specific ways cordage is named. But all lines present a potential hazard. Sailors talk of the malevolent intelligence of line, meaning its tendency to grab a foot or a hand or even a kink at the wrong time. Stay clear. Don't get tangled in coils. On a boat, slack lines can suddenly tighten without warning. Winches and cleats holding line under tension are potentially dangerous. Watch your fingers and thumbs. Safe procedure becomes a second nature as you learn the ropes, but be especially cautious at first.