Introduction

Like many professions, seafaring has a language peculiar to its practitioners. It is a language that is rich in terminology, but more importantly, it is a language of great precision. It is important that you have a general working knowledge of this language and understand its usage. In this manual, from time to time, you will see terms in italics. Many of the terms are explained in the text or in the attached glossary. You will find it useful to remember and study them.

Tools of a Sailor

There are many different tools that a sailor might employ but the two most immediate and helpful tools on a sailing vessel are a marlinespike and a knife.

Marlinespike

It is recommended that you acquire a marlinespike of approved design of between 8 and 10 inches in length. The tool is tapered, with a head on one end and a point (usually a kind of duckbill) on the other. It is used primarily for splicing wire rope, but it is particularly useful for opening shackles and freeing up knots that may have been tied incorrectly. It is also used to heave seizures and various lashings tight.

Knife

The other most useful tool is a good sharp knife. The only guidelines here are that it should be a sheath knife with a blade between 4 and 6 inches in length. The blade should be thick and stiff and, alleged tradition notwithstanding, it is very useful that it have a point as well. Both the knife and spike should have a hole drilled in one end for attaching a lanyard for working aloft.

Basic Knots
There are literally hundreds of different knots. It is expected that you will learn how to tie and use properly the basic knots listed in this section.

All knots have a couple of things in common. There is generally a best use for a given knot, and the knot should be able to be untied with a minimum of effort after it is used.

**The Bowline**

Sometimes called the king of knots. It is used to tie a loop in a line so that the loop will not collapse when it is put under a load. It is often used for tying a loop in the end of a dockline. It’s beauty comes from the fact that no matter how much of a load is put on the line, the knot will remain easy to untie.

**Round Turn and Two Half Hitches**

The name of this knot tells you how it is tied. It is used for tying up something (boats, fenders, etc.) that has the line you are tying under tension. It is a good knot for tying the painter of a boat to a ring or around a post, or tying a fender to a sheer pole. The bowline is difficult, if not impossible to tie around anything if the line is under tension, not so with this knot.

**Constrictor Knot**

Sometimes you want a knot that is difficult to untie. This knot is used to put a temporary whipping on the end of freshly cut line to keep it from unlaying. It is also useful as a temporary seizing on line that is being eye spliced.

**Rolling Hitch**

Used primarily to tie one line to another in such a way that the line being tied won’t slip. It is also useful for tying a line to a post if you don’t
A variation of this knot is used as a *stopper* on dock lines and halyards.

**Sheet Bend**

A good knot to be used when tying one end of a length of line to another, especially if the two lines are of different diameters.

**Reef Knot**

In scouting this is known as a square knot. It can be used for tying the ends of two lines together. Its primary use is for reefing sails, because it is easy to *shake out*. It is also a treacherous knot for the same reason. When you want it to hold for sure, use a sheet bend.

**Clove Hitch**

Used primarily for tying a line to a post or bar. For that reason it can sometimes be used instead of a round turn and two half hitches. The *ratlines* are tied around the *shrouds* using a clove hitch.
**Figure Eight**

This knot is tied into the end of a line, bulking it up to prevent it from running through a block or other piece of rigging if the line is accidentally let go.

![Figure Eight Knot](image)

**Buntline Hitch**

As its name implies, this knot is used to tie a buntline to the cringle in the foot of a square sail. In construction it is in fact a clove hitch tied onto itself. This knot, if tied properly, will not shake out of a luffing sail, yet it remains easy to untie when needed.

![Buntline Hitch](image)

**Other Basic Marlinespike Skills**

**Marlinespike Hitch**

This is a temporary hitch used around a marlinespike for heaving. If tied properly it will untie itself with a pull after the marlinespike is removed.

![Marlinespike Hitch](image)

**Common Whipping**

A whipping is put around the end of a rope to keep it from unlaying. It is more permanent and
better looking than a constrictor knot. The common whipping should only be used if you don’t have a needle and palm.

**Palm and Needle Whipping**

A whipping put on with a sail needle and a sailmaker’s palm. If done properly it will last as long as the line it is put on.

**Passing a Stopper**

This is used to temporarily hold a line under load so that it can be belayed or moved to another location. It is a variation of the rolling hitch. On the brigantines it is primarily used to hold *halyards* while they are being belayed to a pin. As part of your training you will be shown how to “pass the stopper”.

**Coiling Down**

A seamanlike way for stowing a line on a *belaying pin* or cleat. Neat coils are made in a clockwise direction on the deck and then the whole coil is hung on the pin the line is belayed to.

**Gasket Coils**

A type of coil put into the gasket of a sail to keep it out of the way until it is needed. It can also be used to tie up individual lengths of line for stowing.
Belaying

Belaying a line properly is a very important and mandatory skill for a sailor for his safety and the safety of the ship.

To a Belaying Pin

Lines are always belayed around a pin in a figure eight pattern. No matter how the line is led to the pin, the line should come around the top of the pin in a clockwise direction (from left to right as you are looking at the pin). Three complete figure eights around a pin will hold a line under any tension. Any more than three complete turns looks lubberly and should be avoided.

To a Cleat

As with belaying pins, the line is passed around the cleat in a figure eight pattern with the line coming around the top of the cleat (if the cleat is vertical) in a clockwise direction.