



Just for Fun

Boating Etiquette 101: From the Rules of the Road to Docking and More!

Post by Janelle Cox - Published on 20/07/22 12:30 PM



If you're a **first-timer or "newbie,"** simply asking another friend that boats, if you even have one, is unreliable as every boater is different, and some might play by their own rules. In this case, it's best to trust us, the experts.

Below you'll find some boating etiquette basics, from the "rules of the road" to docking and dock manners, fueling, and more, so you can avoid being THAT boater everyone loves to hate.

Safety First

Above all else, boating safety should be your number one priority. Make sure you and everyone on your boat are wearing **life jackets**, and familiarize yourself with how to use them. In addition, boating under the influence of drugs or alcohol is never a good idea. You should always have a designated driver.

Suppose you're ever in doubt about something while boating; **err on caution**. It's better to be safe than sorry!



Ramps and Trailer Etiquette

If you're **boating with a trailer**, there are a few things you need to know before hitting the road. First and foremost, always check your trailer lights and brakes before heading to the ramp. You don't want to be that boater who has to call a tow truck because their trailer lights aren't working! Also, double-check that the drain plug off

the transom is tightly in place—you don't want any water leaking or gushing into your boat once you splash it!

When backing up your trailer, take it slow and have a friend or spouse guide you. And, when loading or unloading your boat, be patient and take your time. Most accidents at the launch ramps happen because boaters get frustrated or feel hurried by others waiting to launch. But there's no need to rush! You'll get to the water in due time.



The "Rules of the Road"

Like driving a car, boaters have to follow a set of rules too. We refer to them as the "rules of the road." We've implemented these rules so everyone can enjoy their time on the water while staying safe.

Some of the most important rules include:

- If two boats are approaching head-on, always yield to the vessel on your starboard (right) side. When passing another boat, boaters should pass on the left side.
- Stay in a single-file line when boating in a group.

- Slow down or stop your boat if you are creating a large wake.
- When boating in foggy conditions, boaters should use their horn or whistle to signal their location.
- A sailboat under sail has the right-of-way over a powerboat. If the sailboat is running with an engine, it's now a "powerboat" regardless if the sails are up.



If you ever get into an accident while boating, check out [this blog](#) and follow the outlined steps.

Docking and Dock Manners

If you're new to boating, **docking** can be one of the most daunting tasks, especially if you're trying to dock in a crowded marina. But, don't worry; with a bit of practice (and patience), you'll be docking like a pro in no time!

To avoid being THAT boater, here are some docking Do's and Don'ts:

Do:

- Give yourself plenty of time to dock. We know nothing is more frustrating than waiting for someone to dock their boat so you can finally tie up and head on

shore, but there's no need to rush!

- Put the engine in neutral before pulling up to the fuel dock. Taking it slow will reduce the risk of damaging your vessel and others. It will also keep any damage minimal if you make contact.
- Communicate with the people who are helping you dock, whether it's through hand signals or via radio.
- Use fenders or bumpers to protect your boat and others from damage.
- Boaters should tie cleat lines in figure eights so they don't come undone. Also, be gentle when tying up.
- Keep a **telescoping boat hook** or pole handy in case you need to push away or reposition off the dock, or to avoid bumping a boat in an adjacent slip or mooring.
- Be a good neighbor on the marina docks. If you hang out on the dock, in your chairs, or otherwise, keep pathways clear and take your chairs in when you're done. Remember, you're in a shared space, so be considerate, kind, and a good neighbor.
- If you're staying at the docks overnight, keep the noise to a minimum. Remember, there might be other people around you trying to sleep!
- Share your rum! If you have some, offer it to the other boaters around you! (Just kidding... sort of.)

Don't:

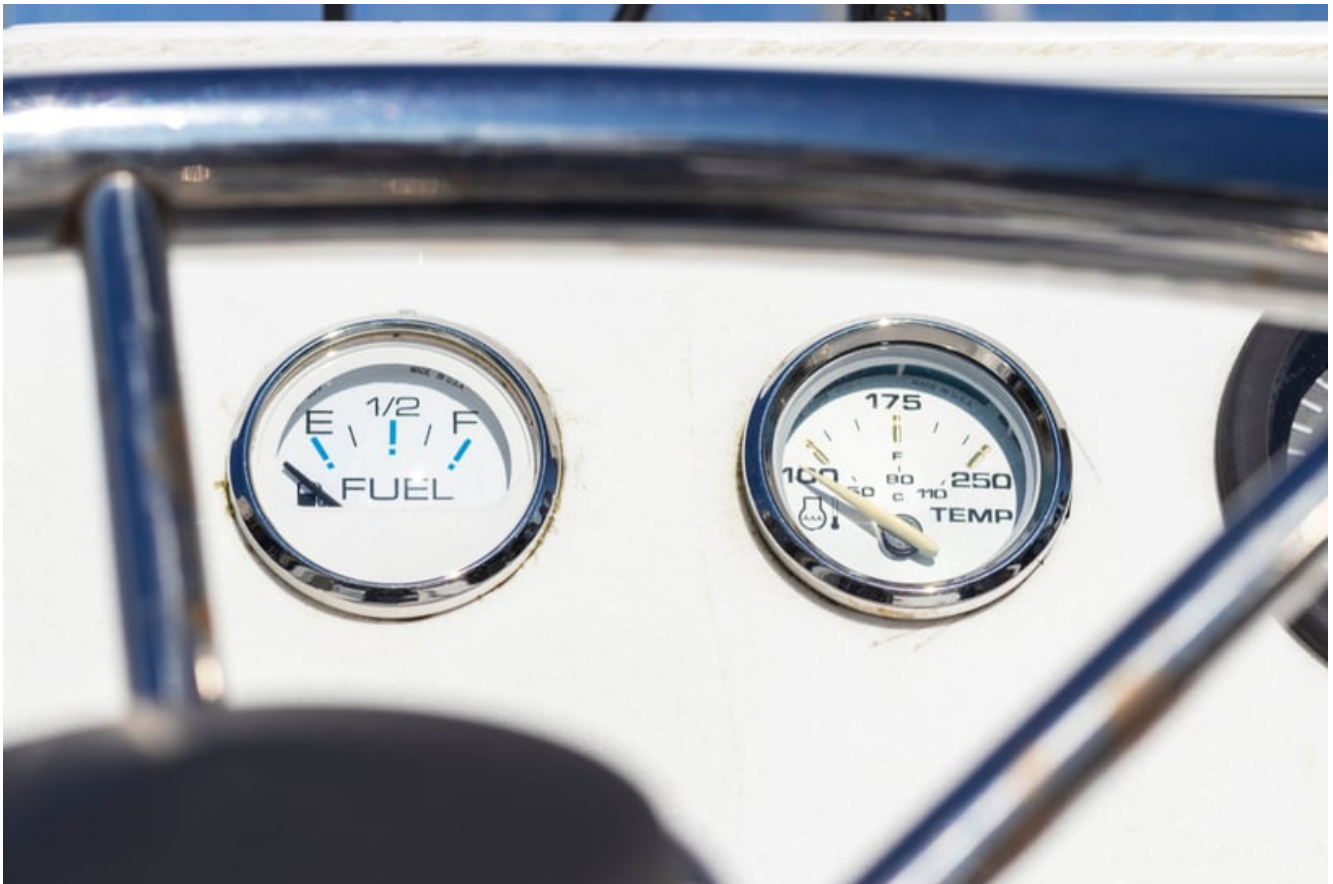
- Cut in line. You wouldn't do it at the grocery store, so don't do it when boating!
- Tie your boat up too tightly. You should be able to slide a credit card between the dock and your boat.
- Forget to use lines (ropes) at the front and back of your boat to keep it from moving around.



Fueling

If you're running low on fuel, it's time to head to the gas dock. When refueling your boat, keep all below in mind:

- Turn off all electronics on your boat, including your radio, before fueling.
- Don't smoke while refueling.
- If you're using a portable fuel tank, ensure it's on a stable surface and not near open flames or anything that could spark, like the battery.
- Make sure the fill cap is secure before starting to fuel.
- Wipe up any spilled fuel immediately.
- Don't choke the handle or leave your boat unattended while fueling.



VHF Radio Conduct

Your **VHF radio** is a crucial piece of boating equipment, and it should be used properly. You should also brush up on your **boating terminology** if you're a first-time cruiser. You'll want to familiarize yourself with some of the more frequently used words and phrases, specifically in case of an emergency.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when using your VHF radio:

- Only use your VHF radio for emergency purposes. Keep the lines clear for others who may need it.
- When using the radio, remain calm and speak clearly.
- Get permission before using someone else's channel.
- Don't interrupt a conversation that's already taking place.
- Always identify yourself when using the radio by stating your call sign or boat name.



Anchoring

If you plan to spend time swimming, **fishing**, or just relaxing on the boat, you'll need to **anchor it**. When anchoring, boaters should be mindful of other boats and people in the area and not drop their anchors on top of someone else's.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when anchoring:

- The general rule is to drop your anchor at a depth equal to seven times the depth of the water (or seven times the length of your boat's rope or chain when it hits the ocean, sea, or lakes floor). Think "rope needs rode" when anchoring. You should have enough rode so that if the boat swings in the current, the anchor won't drag.
- Firmly secure your anchor before swimming or leaving your boat unattended.
- Be careful not to swing your boat into another vessel when dropping or raising your anchor.
- If you're anchoring in a crowded area, leave enough room for other boaters. A good rule of thumb is to leave at least two boat lengths between you and the other boater



Respect the Bubble

While boating, you're bound to encounter other boaters, whether anchored near them or passing by them on the water. Be respectful of other boaters' space and give them the same courtesy you would want.

Some things to keep in mind include:

- Don't play your music too loudly. Like when driving a car, boaters should be considerate of others around them and not blast their music.
- If you're swimming near another boat, make sure the people on the craft know your presence.
- When fishing, be mindful of where you cast your line, so you don't accidentally hook someone else's line or boat.



Guests

If you have guests on board, you must ensure they are comfortable and familiar with boating safety rules. This includes going over the basics, such as putting on a life jacket, using emergency signals, where to locate the fire extinguisher, etc.

Be considerate of your guests when boating. For example, if you're boating in rough waters, let your guests know so they can prepare themselves (i.e., by sitting down and holding on). It's also a good idea to keep Dramamine or other motion sickness pills and sick bags on board for sea sickness.



Pets

We have a few guidelines if you're planning on bringing your furry (or scaly) first mates along for the ride.

- First and foremost, ensure your pet is okay with being on a boat. Not all animals do well on boats, so gradually introducing them to boating is essential to see how they react.
- When boating with pets, bring along enough food and water. Also, make sure there's plenty of shade.
- Pets should always wear a life jacket when on a boat, even if they're good swimmers.
- Keep your pet away from the edge of the boat. Getting them back on board may be challenging if your pet falls in.
- Never leave your pet unattended on a boat.
- **Pick. Up. Your. Dog's. Poop.** This one should be pretty self-explanatory, but make sure to clean up after your pet when boating. No one wants to step in or smell a steaming pile of dog poop, least of all the people on the boat next to you.



Keep It Green

No one likes littering boaters, so ensure you dispose of your trash properly. Most marinas will have designated areas for waste, but if you're boating in a remote location, take your trash with you when you leave.

In addition to disposing of your own trash, you can also do your part to help keep the waterways clean by picking up any trash you see floating around. Not only will this help keep the area clean, but it'll also score you some good boating karma!



These rules help keep the waterways clean and friendly and makes boating a more pleasant experience for everyone. The guidelines also help ensure safety while boating. In addition, boaters familiar with and adhering to boating etiquette will have a fun, trouble-free time out on the water!

Now that we've covered all the do's and don'ts of boating etiquette it's time to head out to the water. Remember, the most convenient and efficient way to book a **marina dock slip or mooring** is through **Dockwa.com!**

Be sure to check out our other blog posts to get an inside look at our favorite destinations, marinas, and tips for first-time boaters. Join the conversation on Flipboard, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

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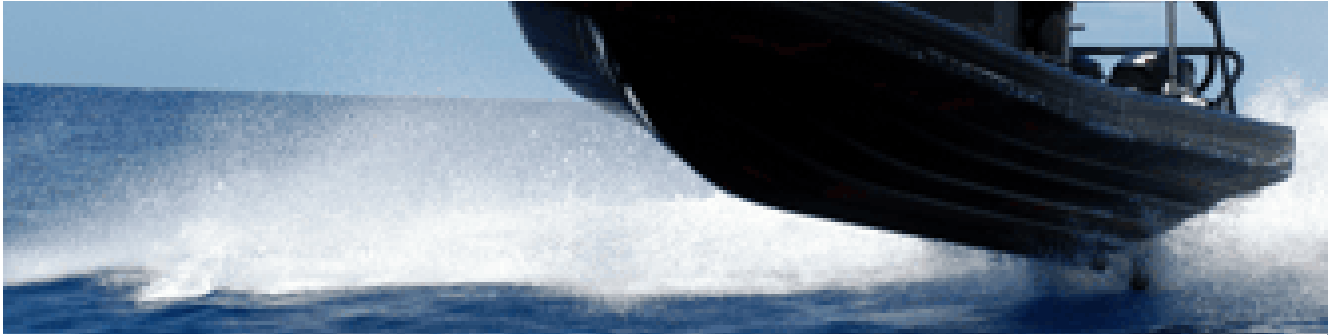
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