



Murder Among The Mateys



Pirate Words and Phrases

Pirate Basics

Here are 5 words or phrases that no pirate can live without.

- Ahoy!** - "Hello!"
- Avast!** - Stop and give attention. It can be used in a sense of surprise, "Whoa! Get a load of that!" which today makes it more of a "Check it out" or "No way!" or "Get off!"
- Aye!** - "Why yes, I agree most heartily with everything you just said or did."
- Aye aye!** - "I'll get right on that sir, as soon as my break is over."
- Arrr!** - This one is often confused with arrrgh, which is of course the sound you make when you sit on a belaying pin. "Arrr!" can mean, variously, "yes," "I agree," "I'm happy," "I'm enjoying this beer," "My team is going to win it all," "I saw that television show, it sucked!" and "That was a clever remark you or I just made." And those are just a few of the myriad possibilities of Arrr!

Advanced Pirate Lingo

Once you've mastered the basics (see above), here is a glossary to help build your pirate vocabulary and fit in at The Salty Sea Dog.

A

- aft** - At, in, toward, or close to the stern of a ship.
- ahoy** - An interjection used to hail a ship or a person or to attract attention. (see above)
- American Main** - The eastern coastal lands of North America.
- Arrr!** - An exclamation. (see above)
- avast** - A command meaning stop or desist. (see above)
- aye (or ay)** - Yes; an affirmation. (see above)

B

- bilge** - (1) The lowest part inside the ship, within the hull itself which is the first place to show signs of leakage. The bilge is often dank and musty, and considered the most filthy, dead space of a ship. (2) Nonsense, or foolish talk.

bilged on her anchor - A ship holed or pierced by its own anchor.

bilge rat - (1) A rat living in the bilge of a ship. It is considered the lowliest creature by pirates, but many pirates take to eating the animals to survive. (2) An insulting name given by a pirate.





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- black spot** - A black smudge on a piece of paper used by pirates as a threat. A black spot is often accompanied by a written message specifying the threat. Most often a black spot represents a death threat.
- Blimey!** - An exclamation of surprise.
- blow the man down** - To kill someone.
- booty** - Treasure.
- bounty** - Reward or payment, usually from a government, for the capture of a criminal, specifically a pirate.
- bring a spring upon her cable** - To come around in a different direction.
- broadside** - a general term for the vantage on another ship of absolute perpendicular to the direction it is going. To get along broadside a ship was to take it at a very vulnerable angle. This is of course, the largest dimension of a ship and is easiest to attack with larger arms. A "Broadside" has come to indicate a hit with a cannon or similar attack right in the main part of the ship.
- bucko** - A familiar term meaning friend.

C

- carouser** - One who drinks wassail and engages in festivity, especially riotous drinking.
- case shot** - A collection of small projectiles put in cases to fire from a cannon; a canister-shot.
- Cat o' nine tails (or cat)** - a whip with nine lashes used for flogging. "A taste of the cat" might refer to a full flogging, or just a single blow to "smarten up" a recalcitrant hand.
- Chain Shot** - Two cannonballs chained together and aimed high in order to destroy masts and rigging.
- chantey (also chanty, shantey or shanty)** - A song sung by sailors to the rhythm of their movements while working.
- chase** - A ship being pursued. ie: "The chase is making full sail, sir" translates to "The ship we're after is going as fast as she can."
- chase guns** - cannon situated at the bow of a ship, used during pursuit.
- clap of thunder** - A strong, alcoholic drink.
- clipper** - A fast moving ship.
- code of conduct** - A set of rules which govern pirates behavior on a vessel.
- coffer** - A chest in which treasure is usually kept.
- cog** - A small warship.
- come about** - to bring the ship full way around in the wind. Used in general while sailing into the wind, but also used to indicate a swing back into the enemy in combat.
- crack Jennys tea cup** - To spend the night in a house of ill repute.
- cutlass** - A short, heavy sword with a curved blade used by pirates and sailors. The sword has only one cutting edge and may or may not have a useful point.





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D

dance the hempen jig - To hang.

Davy Jones' Locker - A fictional place at the bottom of the ocean. In short, a term meaning death. Davy Jones was said to sink every ship he ever over took, and thus, the watery grave that awaited all who were sunk by him was given his name. To die at sea is to go to Davy Jones' Locker.

deadlights - (1) Strong shutters or plates fastened over a ship's porthole or cabin window in stormy weather. (2) Thick windows set in a ship's side or deck. (3) Eyes. ie: "Use yer deadlights, matey!"

dead men tell no tales - Standard pirate excuse for leaving no survivors.

doubloon - A Spanish gold coin.

draft - The depth of a vessel's keel below the water line, especially when loaded; the minimum water depth necessary to float a ship.

draught (also draft) - (1) The amount taken in by a single act of drinking. (2) The drawing of a liquid, as from a cask or keg.

E

fathom - A unit of length equal to six feet, used principally in the measurement and specification of marine depths.

fire in the hole - A warning issued before a cannon is fired.

fire ship - A ship loaded with powder and tar then set afire and set adrift against enemy ships to destroy them.

flogging - The act of beating a person severely with a rod or whip, especially the cat or the punishment of being beaten.

G

gally - A low, flat vessel propelled partly, or wholly by oars.

gangplank - A board or ramp used as a removable footway between a ship and a pier.

gangway - (1) A passage along either side of a ships upper deck. (2) A gangplank. (3) An interjection used to clear a passage through a crowded area.

gibbet (cage) - Chains in which the corpses of pirates are hung and displayed in order to discourage piracy.

to go on account - A pleasant term used by pirates to describe the act of turning pirate. The basic idea was that a pirate was more "free lance" and thus was, more or less, going into business for himself.

grog (see also spirits) - An alcoholic liquor, especially rum diluted with water. **grog blossom** - A redness on the nose or face of persons who drink ardent spirits to excess.

gun - A cannon.

gunwalls - The sides of the top deck which act as a railing around the deck, and have openings where heavy arms or guns are positioned.





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H

- hands** - The crew of a ship; sailors.
- handsomely** - Quickly or carefully; in a shipshape style.
- hang the jib** - To pout or frown.
- hearties** - A term of familiar address and fellowship among sailors.
- heave to** - An interjection meaning to come to a halt.
- hempen halter** - The hangmans noose.
- ho** - Used to express surprise or joy, to attract attention to something sighted, or to urge onward as in Land ho! or Westward ho!
- hogshhead** - (1) A large cask used mainly for the shipment of wines and spirits. (2) A unit of measurement equal to approximately one hundred gallons.
- hornswaggle** - To cheat.

J

- jack** - A flag, especially one flown at the bow of a ship to indicate her nationality.
- Jack Ketch** - The hangman. To dance with Jack Ketch is to hang.
- Jack Tar , or tar** - A sailor.
- Jolly Roger** - A pirate flag depicting a skull-and-crossbones. It was an invitation to surrender, with the implication that those who surrendered would be treated well. A red flag indicated "no quarter."

K

- keelhaul** - To punish someone by dragging them under a ship, across the keel, until near-death or death. Both pirates and the Royal Navy were fond of this practice.
- killick** - A small anchor, especially one made of a stone in a wooden frame.

L

- lad** - A way to address a younger male.
- landlubber or just lubber** - A person unfamiliar with the sea or seamanship. The term doesn't derive from "land lover," but rather from the root of lubber, meaning clumsy or uncoordinated. Thus, a landlubber is one who is awkward at sea for familiarity with the land. The term is used to insult the abilities of one at sea.
- lass** - A way to address a younger female.
- loaded to the gunwalls** - To be drunk.

- long clothes** - A style of clothing best suited to land. A pirate, or any sailor, doesn't have the luxury of wearing anything loose that might get in the way while climbing up riggings. Landsmen, by contrast, could adorn themselves with baggy pants, coats, and stockings.





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- lookout** - A person posted to keep watch on the horizon for other ships or signs of land.
- loot** - Stolen goods; money.
- lugger** - A two-masted sailing vessel with a lugsail rig.
- lugsail** - A quadrilateral sail that lacks a boom, has the foot larger than the head, and is bent to a yard hanging obliquely on the mast.

M

- maroon** - To abandon a person on a deserted coast or island with little in the way of supplies. It is a fairly common punishment for violation of a pirate ship's articles, or offending her crew because the victims death cannot be directly connected to his former brethren.
- marooned** - To be stranded, particularly on a desert isle.
- matey** - A piratical way to address someone in a cheerful, if not necessarily friendly, fashion.
- me** - My.
- measured fer yer chains** - To be outfitted for a gibbet cage.
- mutiny** - To rise against authority, especially the captain of a ship.

N

- Nelsons folly** - Rum.
- no prey, no pay** - A common pirate law meaning a crew received no wages, but rather shared whatever loot was taken.

P

- Pieces of Eight** - Spanish silver coins worth one peso or eight "reales.," sometimes literally cut into eight pieces, each worth one real.
- pillage** - To rob of goods by force, especially in time of war; plunder.
- piracy** - Robbery committed at sea.
- pirate** - One who robs at sea or plunders the land from the sea without commission from a sovereign nation; the opposite of a privateer.
- plunder** - To take booty; rob.
- poop deck** - The highest deck at the stern of a large ship, usually above the captains quarters.
- port** - (1) A seaport. (2) The left side of the ship when you are facing toward her prow.
- pressgang** - A company of men commissioned to force men into service such as on a vessel, specifically a pirate ship.
- Privateer** - a privateer is a sailor with a letter of marque from a government. This letter "allows" the sailor to plunder any ship of a given enemy nation. Technically a privateer was a self-employed soldier paid only by what he plundered from an enemy. In this, a privateer was supposed to be above being tried for piracy. A privateer is theoretically a law-abiding combatant, and entitled to be treated as an honorable prisoner if captured. Most often, privateers were a higher class of criminal, though many turned plain pirate before all was said and done.





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R

- red ensign** - A British flag.
- rope's end** - Another term for flogging. ie: "Ye'll meet the rope's end for that, me bucko!"
- rum** - An intoxicating beverage, specifically an alcoholic liquor distilled from fermented molasses or sugar cane.
- run a rig** - To play a trick.
- run a shot across the bow** - A command to fire a warning shot.

S

- Sail ho!** - An exclamation meaning another ship is in view. The sail, of course, is the first part of a ship visible over the horizon.
- scallywag** - A villainous or mischievous person.
- scourge of the seven seas** - A pirate known for his extremely violent and brutal nature.
- scurvy** - (1) A disease caused by deficiency of vitamin C often affecting sailors. (2) Mean and contemptible; a derogatory adjective suitable for use in a loud voice, as in "Ye scurvy dogs!"
- Sea Legs** - The ability to adjust one's balance to the motion of a ship, especially in rough seas. After walking on a ship for long periods of time, sailors became accustomed to the rocking of the ship in the water. Early in a voyage a sailor was said to be lacking his "sea legs" when the ship motion was still foreign to him. After a cruise, a sailor would often have trouble regaining his "land legs" and would swagger on land.
- Shiver me timbers!** - An expression of surprise or strong emotion.
- Sink me!** - An expression of surprise.
- six pounders** - Cannons.
- skysail** - A small square sail above the royal in a square-rigged vessel.
- sloop** - A single-masted, fore-and-aft-rigged sailing boat with a short standing bowsprit or none at all and a single headsail set from the forestay. This boat was much favored by the pirates because of its shallow draught and maneuverability.
- smartly** - Quickly. "Smartly there, men!" or "Hurry up!"
- spirits** - An alcoholic beverage, especially distilled liquor.
- splice the main brace** - To have a drink or perhaps several drinks.
- spyglass** - A telescope.
- squiffy** - Somewhat intoxicated; tipsy.
- starboard** - The right side of the ship when you are facing toward her prow.
- stern** - The rear part of a ship.
- strike colors** - To lower, specifically a ships flag as a signal of surrender.
- swab** - (1) To clean, specifically the deck of a ship. (2) A disrespectful term for a seaman. ie: "Man that gun, ye cowardly swabs!"





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swing the lead - The lead was a weight at the bottom of a line that gave sailors a way to measure depth when near land. To Swing the Lead was considered a simple job, and thus came to represent one who is avoiding work or taking the easy work over the hard. In today's terms, one who swings the lead is a slacker.

T

take a caulk - To take a nap. On deck of a ship, between planks, was a thick caulk of black tar and rope to keep water from between decks. This term came about either because sailors who slept on deck ended up with black lines across their backs or simply because sailors laying down on deck were as horizontal as the caulk of the deck itself.

W

walk the plank - Perhaps more famous than historically practiced, walking the plank is the act of being forced off a ship by pirates as punishment or torture. The victim, usually blindfolded or with bound hands or both, is forced to walk along a plank laid over the ship's side and fall into the water below. The concept first appeared in nineteenth century fiction, long after the great days of piracy. History suggests that this might have happened once that can be vaguely documented, but it is etched in the image of the pirates for its dastardly content.

weigh anchor - To haul the anchor up; more generally, to leave port.

wench - A young woman or peasant girl, sometimes a prostitute.

Y

yard - A long tapering spar slung to a mast to support and spread the head of a square sail, lugsail, or lateen.

yardarm - The main arm across the mast which holds up the sail; Either end of a yard of a square sail. The yardarm is a vulnerable target in combat, and is also a favorite place from which to hang prisoners or enemies.

ye - You.

Yellow Jack - A yellow flag flown to indicate the presence of an illness, often yellow fever, aboard a ship. Often the flag is used to trick pirates into avoiding potential targets.

yo-ho-ho - An exclamation associated with pirates.

