



Seattle Mountaineers Sailing Program

Boating Etiquette and Being Good Crew

Mountaineers Skippers are volunteers who donate their time, knowledge and vessels to the Mountaineers sailing programs. The following information is a compilation of suggestions provided by Skippers. The information is designed to provide you with the norms of proper etiquette and how to be good crew.

The Skipper

The Skipper is always in charge. You are a guest on their vessel, and they are responsible for the safety of the vessel and crew. Most Skippers are quite relaxed but sometime things happen suddenly requiring sudden action. Instantly, they can become very formal and firm. If/when this happens, the crews' responsibility is to **stop talking, pay attention and follow directions**. This is paramount for the safety of the vessel and individuals onboard. Do not take the actions or words of the Skipper personally. Their job is to keep you safe.

Crew can help Skippers by keeping watch. For instance:

- If something looks wrong, ask about it. "Is that line really supposed to be trailing in the water"?
- Don't hesitate to point out an object that might cause danger (another boat in close proximity, such as logs in the water, crab pots, or paddle boaters). The proper way to communicate is, "Do you see that crab pot at 2 o'clock?"
- Look out for other vessels that could be on a collision course. Ask the Skipper, "Do you see the power boat on your left at about 4 o'clock?"

Each Skipper does things differently. It is your job as crew to observe and ask how fenders are attached, at what height and where they are attached. How does your Skipper coil lines? Where are items such as winch handles stored? What parts of the boat does the Skipper want you to use for leverage? Lifelines? Stanchions? Toe rails?

If you don't know or understand something . . . ASK!

Some Skippers live aboard. They are inviting you into their home. Please act accordingly. Even if the Skipper is not a live aboard, the boat represents a significant commitment of time, money and effort, so please respect the boats as if they were your home.

Timeliness/No-Shows

Many Skippers have a “no-show / no-go-again” policy. Stuff happens, but you need to call the Skipper **EARLY** if you can't make it. Space on a boat is limited so if you cancel at the last minute, chances are the spot will not be filled.

It is rude not to call if you are a no-show or are running late. Instead, this courtesy ensures the Skipper is not holding up the rest of the crew while waiting for you and are no longer wondering if you are coming. Get the Skippers CELL number prior to each trip so you can properly communicate.

- Be on time.
- Understand terminology:
 - “Meet at the top of the dock at 9:30am” means you should be standing at the top of the dock with your gear at 9:30am. It also means you have already visited the restroom.
 - “Leaving the dock at 10:45am” means the boat will pull away from the dock, with or without you, at 10:45am. This means you need to adjust your time to MEET or ARRIVE earlier than 10:45am to help stow your gear, get instructions, and help get the boat ready.
 - “Returning at 3pm” means that the boat will arrive back at the dock around 3pm. It does not mean that 3pm is when you leave the dock and get in your vehicle. Plan on spending at least 30-40 minutes, after the boat returns to the dock, helping to ‘put the boat away.’
 - “It’s ok to arrive early” really means . . . “if you want to arrive 15 or so minutes early that fine.” Please do not arrive more than 30 minutes early as often times the Skipper is doing things necessary for you to enjoy a great day on the water.

Boat Location, Dock Access, Skipper Contact Information

Make sure you have the contact information for the Skipper, including cell phone and e-mail.

Know where the boat is located including the marina, the section within the marina and the slip. For instance, Everett Marina has a North and South dock. Going to the wrong location will hold back the rest of the crew.

Know where to park as most marinas have restricted parking and public parking. NOTE: When there is a race going on, public parking spots will fill very quickly. Plan accordingly and arrive early.

Remember in the section above that talks about “when to arrive?” Most marinas restrict access to the docks. This means the Skipper might have to walk up to the top of the dock to greet crew. If the Skipper said, “Meet at the top of the dock at 9am,” you should arrive at 8:55am so the Skipper does not have to walk back up to the top of the dock to let in stragglers.

Shoes

Wear non-marking non-skid shoes. You are not required to have expensive boat shoes, and many white soled sport shoes such as Sketchers are fine. Not all non-marking are white, but in deference to the Skipper do not show up in black soled shoes even if they are non-marking. Also, do not wear hiking boots, high heels, leather soles or hard bottomed shoes as they are slick on the fiberglass.

Clothing

“There is no such thing as bad weather – only bad clothing.”

The best way to ensure you are wearing the proper gear is to watch what the skipper wears. If the vessel is leaving the dock and you see the Skipper put on a fleece top followed by a jacket, gloves and hat you should be doing the same. The typical scenario for new sailors goes something like this: New crew are wearing T-shirts and shorts in the marina while getting the boat ready. The crew is hot! They have been climbing around the boat taking off canvas, running lines, stowing gear, putting on lifejackets, and jumping onboard as the boat leaves the dock. The crew talks about how warm it is! As soon as the nose of the boat pops around the breaker, new crew dive below to get more clothes. The sweat on their bodies is now acting like an air conditioner as the wind hits the body. They are cold!! Unfortunately, this is exactly when the Skipper needs crew stowing lines and fenders and getting the sails ready to raise. Watch the Skipper.

Gear

- Bring gear in small soft sided bags. Hard sided bags can damage the soft teak wood found on most boats.
- Ask the Skipper where you should stow your gear. Do not leave it for the Skipper to stow.
- Layers are best for adapting to changing weather. Base layer, shirt, fleece, and a jacket that can block the wind.
- Keep additional clothing in reserve for when the weather turns.
- Wind/water resistant outer gear.
- It gets very cold on the water at night, even during the summer. Be prepared to be in the sun and shorts then converting to long pants, fleece and jackets at night.

Gloves

Lines on a sailboat carry a tremendous amount of tension. If a line slides through your bare hands, it can burn and/or blister your hands. Some Skippers wear gloves all the time, others only when they are racing. Sailing gloves are available at boating stores but biking, weightlifting or plain leather gloves also work. Please do not assume Skippers have extra gloves for crew.

Misc.

- Hat with chinstrap or clip. Sunglasses with strap or crotchie.
- Sun block.

- Motion sickness pills if you are susceptible to motion sickness.
- Life Jacket. Most Skippers do not have enough extra lifejackets for all the crew. Some Skippers require life jackets be worn all the time and others do not.

Food/Beverages

It is a long-standing tradition in the marine world that the Skipper brings the boat and the crew brings the food. Each Skipper will have their own expectations about food and beverages on board. Some will have crew eat their own food while underway, others expect crew to bring food to share, while others will raft-up with other boats and enjoy larger potluck festivities. Some Skippers share adult beverages while sailing, others at lunch and others only allow drinking when the boat has returned to the dock. Don't assume . . . ask first.

Food on a moving object is quite different than a picnic table. Bring something for everyone to eat/drink. In the times of COVID, consider bringing items that are individually wrapped. Consider the following:

- Items that are already prepared and assembled. If attending a longer trip or overnight, the Skipper will guide the crew on provisions.
- Store food in compact, well-sealed containers. Non-skid containers with flat bottoms are best.
- If the food item requires silverware, it's probably not appropriate.
- Keep it simple with small sized portions that can be eaten with fingers.
- Bring your own paper plates, plastic cups and napkins.
- If bringing wine, ask the Skipper if red wine is allowed or not. Red wine INSTANTLY stains fiberglass.

Below are some common items that work well when underway:

- Hummus, veggies, pita bread slices
- Nuts (consider allergies)
- Chips/crackers/pre-cut cheese
- Strawberries with stems removed or frozen grapes
- Pinwheel sandwich rounds
- Trail mix (consider allergies to nuts)
- Wraps
- Granola/Protein Bars
- Cookies

- Potstickers
- Veggie/meat/cheese/tomato kabobs

Expect to leave any leftover food and beverages onboard unless the Skipper asks you to take it with you.

Smoking/Drugs

Many boats have a non-smoking policy, others have an outside the cabin and downwind policy. Ask what the policy is before signing up for the trip.

DO NOT BRING ILLEGAL DRUGS OR RECREATIONAL CHEMICALS. DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT. The Coast Guard has a Zero Tolerance policy on drugs and they have the legal right to seize a vessel for even a very small amount of drugs. This includes marijuana. While legal in the state of Washington, marijuana is still considered an illegal substance by the Federal government. Remember that the Skipper will be the one at fault and could go to jail and/or lose their vessel even if they did not know about the drugs.

Medical Issues

Tell the Skipper about medical issues and medications prior to the sail. Mobility issues can usually be accommodated and helps the Skipper assign spots. Life threatening medical conditions are scary if no one knows what's going on or what to do. Tell the Skipper so they have a safety plan in place. Also, do not be offended if a Skipper "passes" on having you on crew if the medical condition is one they do not feel they can safely accommodate. There are lots of boats to choose from.

Head (Toilet)

- Always visit the public restroom before getting onboard. Some Skippers build in a "restroom break" immediately prior to leaving the dock. If you need to take advantage of this, ask if anyone else wants to go up to the public facility so that ONE group visits the restroom then the Skipper is not waiting for stragglers.
- Ask how the head works before using it.
- If there are plastic bags hanging next to the head or close by then chances are the Skipper has a "if you did not eat it - it does not go in the head" policy.
- Some Skippers have a "no toilet paper" in the head policy.
- ***Never put personal sanitary products (sanitary napkins, pads, etc.) in the head as they will plug it.***

Safety Briefing

Mountaineers Skippers will conduct a safety briefing prior to leaving the dock. PAY ATTENTION. You should know the location of:

- Lifesling
- Fire Extinguishers
- Lifejackets
- VHF radio and how to turn the radio on
- Flares
- Flashlights
- Knife
- First Aid Kits
- Emergency safety card and VHF radio instructions

Underway

- When addressing the Skipper, turn your entire head towards the Skipper and speak. Skippers cannot hear crew who are facing forward into the wind when talking.
- Be supportive of other crew and learning styles, even if you're the best sailor on the boat.
- Refrain from bringing work or personal drama onboard. We're out there to get away, enjoy nature, have fun and learn!
- Ask questions.
- The Skipper who owns the boat is ultimately in charge. If they are instructing other crew, do not correct them or talk over them unless the boat is in danger. If you are in disagreement about information the Skipper provides, you can ask, "I'm curious as to why you suggested we tack instead of gybe?"
- Learn the nomenclature.

End of the Trip

It is expected that crew will help get the boat cleaned up and put away. Skippers will give you instructions but if you do not know what to do ASK the Skipper what you can do to help. Typical items include:

- Coil the end of dock lines on the dock.
- Fold or pack the sails.
- Move halyards to proper attachment points.

- Put instrument covers on.
- Put on sail, helm and winch covers.
- Put winch handles away.
- Check that you have all your personal belongs including water bottles that may be in the sink or items that fell out of your bag while underway.
- Offer to carry trash up with you. Most marinas have compost, recycle and trash in the parking lots.
- One item Skippers usually take care of on their own is the power cord. Please ask first.

Thank the Skipper for their time and use of their boat. You do not have to say, "I had a really great time I would really want to go on your boat again so please call if you have extra room." If you had a great time and don't want to go out again just say, "Thank you." If you had a crummy time, please say, "Thank you." If you really really want to go out again, then definitely communicate this to the Skipper.

We hope this information is useful and you enjoy your time on the water!

The Seattle Mountaineers Skippers