

Pirate Lingo

The following information was originally published on the 7th Sea website. It has been reformatted for your convenience.

Pirately Words

We gave you some basics in the Players' Guide. Are you ready for some advanced lessons?

Abaft: point nearer the stern of a ship than another

About: to change tack

Acts of Pardon/Acts of Grace: a letter of marque for a "reformed" pirate, thus making him a privateer

Bachelor's Wife: a mistress

Barque: three-masted sailing vessel, square-rigged on mainmast and fore and aft rigged on mizzen

Barquentine: vessel resembling a barque, but square-rigged on foremast only

Bilged on her anchor: a ship pierced by her own anchor

Boom: a spar used to extend the foot of a sail

Bowline: rope made fast to the leech or side of a sail to pull it forward

Bowse: to haul with a tackle to produce extra rightness

Bowspirit: spirit projecting from the bow of a ship

Brail: to furl a sail by pulling it in towards the mast

Brig: originally a abbreviation of "brigantine," but later a two-masted, square-rigged vessel

Brigantine: a two-masted vessel, square-rigged on foremast and fore and aft rigged on mainmast

Bring to: check the movement of a ship by arranging the sails

in such a way that they counteract each other and keep her stationary

Brought a spring upon her cable: a ship coming about in a different direction

Brulot: Montaigne word for a fireship (q.v.)

Buffer: chief bosun's mate who is in charge of discipline

Bumboat: a boat privately selling goods or provisions to sailors on ships in harbors

Cable: a large rope

Capstan: vertical rotating cylinder used for winding up anchor and other cable

Careen: to cause a vessel to keel over on its side to clean or repair its bottom

Chain shot: cannon balls fastened together with chain

Chase guns: cannon on the bow of a ship

Clap in irons: to be put manacles and chains

Clap of Thunder: powerful drink

Clap on: to add a temporary feature

Clipper: a fast sailing ship

Coaming: the raised edge around a hatch

Crack Jenny's Tea Cup: To spend the night in a house of ill repute

Crimp: a person who is tricked or press ganged (q.v.) into serving on a crew

Cutter: small, decked vessel with one mast

Davits: a small piece of timber used as a crane



Draft: the minimum water depth necessary to float a ship

Driver: large sail suspended from the mizzen gaff

Fathom: depth measurement of six feet

Fireship: a ship loaded with gunpowder and explosives, set on fire and sent to drift into enemy ports.

Fluke: broad part of an anchor

Frigate: three-masted, fully rigged ship heavily armed with 24 to 38 pound guns

Furl: to wrap or roll a sail close to the yard, stay or mast to which it belongs

Gaff: spar which holds upper edge of a four-sided fore and aft sail

Go on the account: to embark on a piratical cruise

Ground: the bottom of the sea

Halliards: rope or tackle for hoisting a spar holding a sail

Haul wind: to direct a ship's course as nearly as possible in the direction from which the wind is coming

Heave to: an order to stop

Heave down: to turn a vessel on its side for cleaning

Hogshead: a large cask used to transport beer or wine

Holystone: a piece of sandstone used to scrub the decks

Jack o' Coins: the paymaster

Jack o' Cups: the first mate

Jack o' Staves: the first lieutenant

Jack o' Swords: the bosun

Jack: a flag or a sailor; showing how sailors would refer to their ship's colors as one of the crew

Job: triangular sail

Killick: the anchor

Lady of Expansive Sensibility: a Jenny

Lanyard: any rope that ties something off

League: three miles

Lee: side away from the wind

Let go and haul: order on tacking square-rigged ship given when the bow has just passed across the wind

List: lean to one side

Loaded to the Gunwhales: drunk

Lugger: two-masted sailing vessel with a lug-sail rig

Mainmast: the ship's principal mast

Matelot: (pronounced "matlow") another term for a sailor

Messdeck lawyer: a know-it-all

Midshipman: non-commissioned rank below lieutenant

Mizzen: aftermost mast in a three-masted vessel

Nipper: short length of rope used to bind anchor cable

Nipperkin: a small drink

Old coat: a veteran sailor (see "stripey")

Patarero: a muzzle-loading mortar that fires scattering shot, stones, spikes old nails, broken glass, etc.

Pinnace: small two-masted vessel; eight-oared ship's boat

Press Gang: a group of sailors who "recruit" for their ship using violence and intimidation

Privateer: a pirate officially sanctioned by a national power

Quarter: 1) part of the side of the ship nearest the stern 2) mercy shown to an opponent

Reef: to shorten sail by rolling up the bottom section and securing it by tying short lines attached to the sail



Rigging: general name for ropes, chains, and wires which hold masts, spars and yards in place and control movement of the ship

Royal: to sail against topgallant

Salmagundi: a dish of chopped meat, eggs, anchovies, onions and anything else the cook can throw in; a piratical delicacy

Scuppers: holes pierced in deck near bulwarks to allow surplus water to drain off

Sheet: line running from the bottom aft corner of sail by which it can be adjusted to the wind

Shrouds: standing rigging stretched from the side of a ship to support the mast

Skysail: sail above the royal

Sloop: sailing vessel with fore and aft rigged single mast

Smacksman: sailor on a cutter or ketch-rigged sailing vessel

Snow: two-masted merchant vessel, rigged as a brig with the addition of a trysail mast

Son of a Biscuit Eater: not so much a sailor term, but a derogatory term indicating a bastard son of a sailor

Sprogs: raw, untrained recruits

Squiffy: a buffoon

Squadron: a group of ten or less warships

Square-rigged: rig consisting of four-cornered sails hung from yards

Stanchion: upright support

Stargazer: a sail set above moonsail

Start: to hit with a rope's end or cane

Stay: standing rigging fore and aft and supporting a mast

Strike the Colors: to haul down a ship's flag as a signal of surrender

Strike: to lower or hit

Stripey: long-service able seaman (named for the many stripes on his sleeves, indicating an "old coat")

Sweet trade: the career of piracy

Tack: lower, forward corner of fore and aft sail; in square-rigged ships, line controlling forward lower corner of sail; ship's course in relation to the wind

Tackle: ropes and blocks

Top: platform at masthead of ship for sailors to stand upon

Topgallant: sail above topsail

Topman: sailor who works on the sails

Topmast: mast next above lower mast

Topsail: sail above mainsail

Waister: an incompetent sailor

Weather: side from which wind is blowing

Weigh: to raise

Yard: spar attached to mast to carry a sail

Yawl: four-oared ship's boat or small sailing boat

Advanced Usage

Again, we covered the basics in the *Players' Guide*, but here's some advanced techniques to get your "Pirate-ese" just right.

-tion

The "-tion" found at the end of words like "locomotion" and "promotion" is pronounced "-seeon". So, don't say "locomoshun", but "locomoseeon"; not "promoshun", but "promoseeon".

Missing Letters

There are a few letters you should never pronounce. The first of them is "g". Drop all your "g"'s when you speak and you'll get words like "rowin'", "sailin'" and "fightin'".



Dropping all of your “v”s will get you words like “ne’er”, “e’er” and “o’er”.

Big, Bigger, Big Biggest!

Pirates are dramatic, and their speech is doubly so. Pirates never speak of “a big ship”, they call it a “great, grand ship!” They never say never, they say “No nay ne’er!” Double up on all your adjectives and you’ll be bountifully bombastic with your phrasing.

De-Conjugation

The conjugation is a rather modern invention, one that sailors always seem to be forgetting. Take the verb “to be” for example. Instead of saying “I am”, sailors say, “I be”. Instead of saying “You are”, sailors say, “You be”. Instead of saying, “They are”, sailors say, “They be”. Makes things a lot simpler, doesn’t it?

Using Nautical Terms

Another technique for sounding more “piratey” is to use nautical terms. Here are some examples.

- “Indeed were I taken aback!”: I was surprised.
- “And just as I were forgin’ ahead through the crowd...”:
As I was making my way through the crowd...

Credits

Line Development

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7th Sea System Creation

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