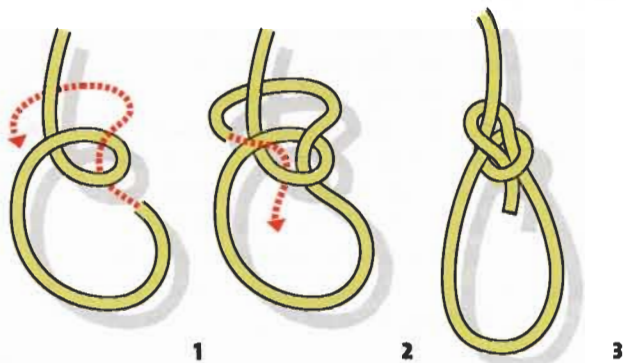


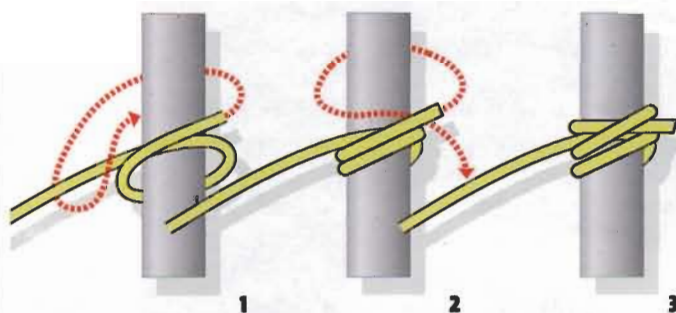
Fit to Be Tied: Knots You Need

I watched a small cabin cruiser depart a crowded guest dock on a busy Saturday afternoon. As it exited the turning basin, a fender fell into the water. The pilot missed retrieval on the first try, and by the second attempt wind, current and wakes had pushed his boat into risky territory. Suddenly, a fleet of kayaks appeared from behind a blind corner, transforming a tense situation into a dangerous one. Unable to safely turn, the craft crashed hard into a nearby dock, breaking an electrical riser and doing minor gelcoat

BOWLINE



ROLLING HITCH



damage — all because of one poorly tied knot. (Well, actually a hitch.)

Knots can be intimidating. There are Bible-size tomes with nothing but knots and more knots. How is the average recreational boater supposed to know which knot to use?

Faced with thousands of years' worth of marlinspike choices, the allure of knot-replacement contraptions like fender attachment devices is understandable.

But there is hope: Learning a few simple knots (technically, a bend and two hitches) will fulfill most recreational boaters' fastening needs.

Knots should share three simple characteristics: They should be easy to tie, easy to untie (even after tensioning) and predictably secure.

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My personal short list of must-have, do-all knots includes the bowline, rolling hitch and cleat hitch.

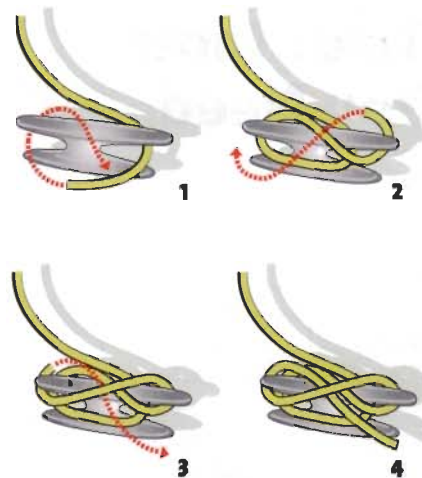
Notably omitted from my list are two seaman's favorites: the clove hitch, because it can work loose, and the square knot, which becomes impossible to untie after tensioning.

The first must-have — the bowline — is more than just a knot; it's a rite of passage, a transition from landlubber to seaman. A bowline does nothing more

than place a loop in the end of a line, which is useful in a variety of situations. Though there are better knots for connecting two lengths of line, two bowlines interlocked will suffice.

A rolling hitch is a wonderful knot because it securely attaches to the midpoint of a rail, post, stanchion, anchor rode or even another line. Attach fenders to stanchions or rails, and adjust by simply grabbing the knot and sliding it. And you can form an

CLEAT HITCH



anchor snubber by attaching a heavy dock line to the chain rode with a rolling hitch.

Cleat hitches are sometimes overtied — especially by new seamen — with too many wraps, too many locking half hitches, or the long tail wound up around the cleat. While probably secure (though no more secure than a proper cleat hitch), they become difficult to untie. When casting off, nothing is worse than fussing with the last line while the boat drifts. Stow extra line with a Flemish coil — it looks great and is quickly undone.

Coiled lines are easy to stow without getting tangled. There are several ways to coil lines, but I use the method shown here because its fast, secure, and leaves a long tail so the line can be tied to a rail or carried easily. When coiling a dock line, start with the loop end and coil the bitter end up to it. Nothing looks more shipshape than a series of lines neatly stowed.

Learn a few basic knots, and use them. They are fast, secure and replace single-purpose gadgets that take up space and get buried in lockers. Knowing the right knot demystifies tying up, gives a good first impression and provides peace of mind — which, in my book, is good seamanship. ❁

Peter Pisciotta holds a USCG 100-Ton license, is a delivery captain and operates the SeaSkills Personal School of Seamanship. Call 877-SEA-SKILLS or e-mail him at peter@seaskills.com.

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