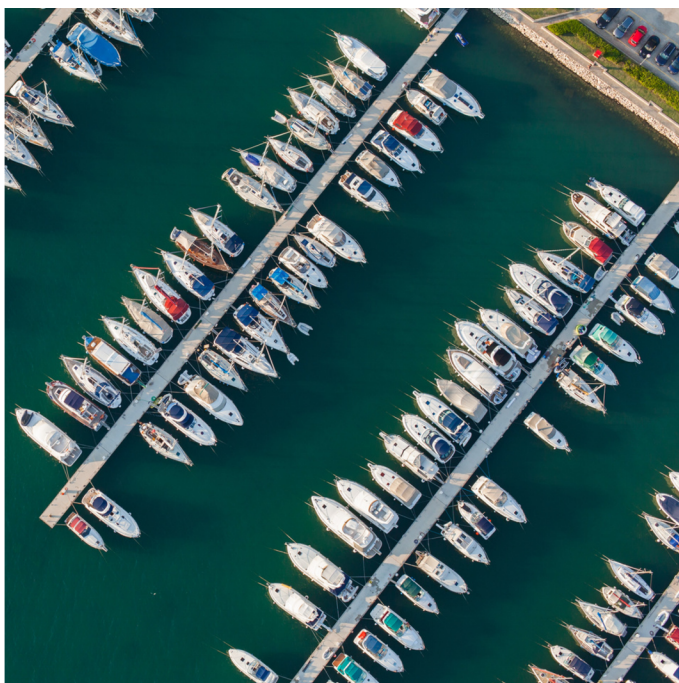


MONTHLY LOG

One of the greatest challenges for boaters is docking. Even though docking represents only a small fraction of your time on the water, the fear of it can prevent some boaters from going out altogether.

Wind, especially with larger boats with more freeboard (the hull height from the waterline to the deck), can be challenging when docking at low speed. We often see that boaters who lack both practice and an understanding of docking theory tend to rely on familiar approaches rather than using the wind to their advantage. This often results in forcing a docking maneuver that isn't ideal for the wind conditions, which can cause them to miss the dock entirely and drift dangerously close to other boats (or worse, crash into other boats or pilings).



STRATEGIES FOR SAFE AND SMOOTH DOCKING IN THE WIND

Below is a guide to docking a powerboat over 30 feet in length and in different wind conditions - assuming current is not a factor. NOTE: this does not take into account bow or stern thrusters. Even if you have thrusters we recommend practicing these techniques both with and without them - since thrusters can become obstructed and fail at times.

General Docking Guidelines:

- 1. Practice, Practice, Practice:** if new to boating, start practicing in mild wind conditions and work your way up to more challenging conditions. And keep in mind that the saying that “often the best decision is whether or not to leave the dock!” By that we mean think ahead and consider the weather conditions for when you’re returning, and if the forecast is too “sketchy” for your skills, then reconsider going out that day.
- 2. Speed and Momentum:** The rule of thumb is “go as fast as you’re willing to hit something.” Typically walking speed (about 1-2 knots) is sufficient. Use intermittent bursts of your throttle to control your momentum (as opposed to maintaining a constant throttle/speed), using forward and reverse gears to make finer adjustments as needed.
- 3. Wind:** The higher your freeboard (the hull height from the waterline to the deck), the more surface area there is to push your boat around. The effect can be more dramatic at slower boat speeds, making control and holding a course more difficult. Thus plan on it by using the wind as an ally to help dock the boat.
- 4. Prop Walk:** some inboard drives can produce “Prop Walk”, which is the prop generating sideways thrust when in reverse at low speeds. Simply, the prop’s rotation can cause the stern to “walk” slightly sideways in reverse. Prop walk is usually a bigger issue for sailboats, but many powerboats such as single-screw trawlers can experience the same effect. While prop walk is not the focus of this article, we’ve included notes if it is a performance consideration for your boat. Many times you can use prop walk to your advantage if you plan your maneuver carefully.

5. **Instruct your crew** on your planned docking maneuver and to never, ever, put any part of their body between the boat and dock when docking. In fact, if your crew cannot safely step (not jump or hang off the boat) onto the dock from the boat - then it's time for Plan B, try again....

Docking Strategies for Different Wind Conditions

For all of these examples, the approach may be slightly different depending on whether you're docking on a port or starboard side slip. Basically, depending on the situation, consider whether the wind will be pushing your boat towards or away from the dock.

1. Wind coming into the slip channel and your boat is to be docked stern-to

Approach the slip channel and steer slightly beyond your target slip. Shift into reverse and use the wind to guide your backing maneuver, aligning the boat with the slip. Gradually turn the helm toward the dock as you reverse. For inboard drives with prop walk, anticipate and counter the prop walk before it becomes an issue.

2. Light wind blowing into the slip channel and your boat is to be docked bow-to

Steering the boat directly into the slip typically works in light winds. Be mindful of your speed with the wind pushing you from behind as you approach. BUT NOTE: it may be preferable to steer the boat up into the wind and then into the slip if the winds are strong or gusty.

3. Wind blowing out of the slip channel and your boat is to be docked stern-to

Begin by backing up from the main channel directly into the slip channel and toward your slip. This method is effective even if your boat has an inboard drive with prop walk. As long as you maintain steady momentum in reverse, the boat should respond and turn properly in this wind direction. If it doesn't (for example, a strong gusty wind may stop the bow from coming around), an alternative approach is listed below.

4. Wind blowing out of the slip channel and your boat is to be docked stern-to

Begin by approaching towards the wind and at a slight angle. Once past your slip, then begin reversing into the slip. The wind will help push your bow and boat onto the dock.

NOTE: For wind blowing out of the slip channel, the following approach might be more effective. The wind will naturally push the bow downwind, making it easier to maneuver into the slip. For inboard drives with prop walk, consider how that may help (or hurt) how the stern behaves when backing into the slip.

5. Wind across the docks and your boat is to be docked stern-to

For boats with stern or outboard drives, reverse from the main channel into the slip channel and then into your slip. However, this technique may not work for inboards with prop walk, as wind pressure on the stern can prevent it from turning upwind. As a general rule, it's much easier to back directly into the wind.

Keep in mind that this scenario does not cover where you exit the channel with the bow facing into the wind. As we always say, starting with the bow pointed into the wind is generally not advisable.

6. The wind blows across the dock and your boat is to be docked bow-to

Steer the boat into the slip, but you also have to deal with the forward momentum of the boat PLUS the wind pushing you. Since you're going to be docking in a downwind direction, you'll need to apply some reverse throttle to stop the boat. And don't underestimate the momentum with the wind behind you - sometimes it's harder to stop than you realize!



By understanding how wind direction influences your boat, you can create an effective plan for entering and exiting the marina that leverages these factors to your advantage. Before proceeding, take a moment to stop outside the marina, observe the conditions, and formulate a strategy. Be prepared to adjust your plan as needed to account for unforeseen factors like marina traffic, last-minute slip changes by the harbor master, shallow areas, or other challenges.

Remember, if things don't go as planned, you can always retreat, exit the marina, and start fresh with a revised approach.