

Topic Page: [boat](#)

Definition: **boat 1** from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate(R) Dictionary*

 [pronunciation](#)

(bef. 12c) **1 a** : a small vessel for travel on water **b** : ship **2** : a boat-shaped container, utensil, or device [a gravy ~ [a laboratory ~]

boat·ful \-bōt fŭl n

boat·like \-bōt līk adj — **in the same boat** : in the same situation or predicament

Summary Article: **boat**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

small, open nautical vessel propelled by sail, oar, pole, paddle, or motor. The use of the term *boat* for larger vessels, although common, is somewhat improper, but the line between boats and ships is not easy to draw. A number of special types of boat are generally referred to by their individual names rather than by the generic term, e.g., the canoe, the kayak (Eskimo decked canoe), and the umiak (Eskimo open boat). Simple dugouts, made from hollowed-out logs, have been known since prehistoric times to all peoples dwelling on waterways. The ancient Egyptians used boats made of acacia wood and held together with pegs. Modern wooden boats are built in four ways: with fore-and-aft planks laid with their edges flush (carvel-built); with fore-and-aft planks laid with overlapping edges (clinker-built); with inner and outer layers of planks running diagonally in opposite directions; and with planking consisting of large sheets of plywood. Many boats, however, are now made of molded fiberglass or of aluminum. Primitive boats in many parts of the world are stabilized by an outrigger—a parallel float attached by projecting arms. The varieties of boats in modern use are almost infinite. The Chinese junk, with high poop and overhanging bow, is large enough to be classified as a ship; the junk, together with the sampan (a wide, flat-bottomed skiff, often having a mat-covered cabin with living quarters), is a familiar sight in the rivers and coastal waters of East Asia. The lateen-rigged dhow, in which energetic Arab merchants of the Middle Ages plied their trade along all the shores of S Asia and E Africa, is still in use today. A familiar local craft on the Mediterranean is the flat-bottomed, canoe-like, pole-driven gondola of the Venetian canals. A typical Mediterranean vessel of ancient times was the galley, usually propelled by oars. Because the northern seas were stormier, the Viking boats, which the Norsemen were building by the 5th cent. A.D., were more seaworthy; they were believed to be the first clinker-built boats. Deckless or half-decked, with elevated bow and stern, these early boats took the Norsemen to all the coasts of Europe and across the Atlantic. The later rugged whaleboat was developed from the Viking type of construction and came to be used for numerous purposes. The fishing boats of the North and Baltic seas, also built on Viking principles, are roughly similar to whaleboats. Another important fishing boat is the dory, a small, versatile, flat-bottomed craft easily transported on shipboard and used in the entire N Atlantic.

For bibliography, see separate articles on various types of boats.

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