



5E **LIMITHRON'S GUIDE TO NAVAL COMBAT**

5th Edition Supplement

A simple and engaging ruleset for naval encounters with character action stations, ship customization options, maps, tokens & printable stat cards

LIMITHRON'S GUIDE TO NAVAL COMBAT



Credits

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The following sources have provided inspiration:

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PATREON *Limithron*

Foreword

This supplement is intended as a jumping off point for making ship to ship combat in 5e fun, exciting, fast, and most of all *engaging*. No ones want to just sit there while one player commands the ship, but at the same time getting bogged down in sailing rules can be cumbersome and boring. Spellcasters should be able to affect naval combat, but the barbarian shouldn't be able to sink a ship with their axe without a *lot* of effort. And if the bard wants to swing across to the enemy ship and launch a full-on assault on the enemy captain's *feelings*, well, then I think he "can certainly try".

After years of playing pirate miniature games and video games, and several more years running my own RPG campaign, *Tales from the Caribbean*, I think I've finally cracked the code. With ships, it's really easy to be too complicated. Too many dice, too many ship stats and hit points, too many rules about wind and speed, complicated boarding rules... no thank you! The ships in the guide aren't any more complicated than skeletons. Well, enormous skeletons with 100 passengers, movement that depends on the wind, and attacks that deal over 80 damage a turn. But, yeah, skeletons.

So let your players blow stuff up and steal some booty. Let them capture five huge ships and learn first hand why that's a bad idea. Make them fear for their lives by chasing them with overpowered pirate hunting vessels. Create your own enchanted Man of War with wings for sails and fire breath attacks. *You are the captain now.*

Yo, Ho, Ho and Happy Sailing,

Luke Stratton

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Naval Combat Rules

Appendix A: Ships

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Introduction

This supplement is designed to provide an easy to learn, adaptable rules set for ship to ship combat in 5th edition. While these rules and ship stats are designed with gunpowder and cannons in mind, they can easily be adapted to any fantasy setting by rebranding or modifying attacks.

THE BASICS

- Ships are based on monster stat blocks. They have their own CR number to aid the DM in balancing encounters.
- HP and damage are scaled down for speed and simplicity by a factor of 1:5.
- Combat is on a hex grid (1 hex = 50ft).
- Wind matters, but it's simple and optional.
- Ships *may* turn, and typically they *must* move at least 1 space.
- Initiative is rolled each round, but only ships and solo creatures roll. Passengers act on their ship's initiative.
- Each ship has a **Captain**. That captain assigns **Action Points** for their ship at the top of each round.
- Most actions require the ship to make an ability or skill check; characters can choose **Action Stations** on their turn to help with these checks.
- Customizing ships is easy and fun!

Ship Statistics

Ship statistics are adapted from 5e monsters, but they have been mutated to be more applicable for inanimate vehicles. Some stats, like Constitution, represent a ship's physical construction, while others represent the crew's skill (like Charisma).

Strength. The potency of a ship's attacks. This could represent the size of its siege weapons or the precise aim of a well trained crew. *Uses: damage roll modifier.*

Dexterity. How maneuverable a ship. Smaller ships are more dexterous. *Uses: initiative modifier, "Coming About" action.*

Constitution. Construction quality and fortitude of a ship. *Uses: hit point calculation.*

Charisma. Represents the quality of the crew and their leadership. Henceforth referred to as **Skill**. *Uses: To Hit, "Full Sail" action.*

AC. Represents the resilience of the ship's hull or its small size and agility.

Speed. The number of 50ft spaces the ship can move a turn with favorable winds. Also the maximum number of 50 mile spaces a ship can travel a day. See the section on "Wind and Movement."

Hit Points and Formula. The amount of damage a ship can take before it is **Derelict**. This number is scaled down by a factor 1:5 when compared to creature-scale encounters. See the section on "Dice and Scaling".

Crew. The minimum number of crew needed to operate the ship without being **Stressed**. Crew numbers are not tracked for the purposes of ship combat but can be used for boarding, Mob Combat, and roleplaying.

Max Crew. The maximum number of crew and passengers this ship can carry comfortably on long voyages. Most ships can carry double this number on short voyages such as raids or refugee operations.

Cargo. The number of cargo "slots" the ship has, ranging from 0-6. Cargo might have different value in different ports.

SIZE

Ships have their own scale separate from creatures. *Uses: hit point calculation, ramming.*

SHIP SIZES

Size	Space	Hit Die	Example Ships
Tiny	<30ft	d4	Rowboat, canoe
Small	<50ft	d6	Longboat
Medium	<75	d8	Sloop
Large	<100ft	d10	Brigantine
Huge	<125ft	d12	Man of War
Gargantuan	>125ft	d20	Ship of the Line

Dice and Scaling

The dice rolls and statistics in this supplement are **scaled by a factor of 1:5** when compared to creature scale combat. For example, a ship that has 10hp and deals 1d6 damage would have 50hp if attacked by a creature, and it would deal 1d6 x 5 damage. Any damage dealt to ships by creatures should be rounded down to the nearest 5, or you can track exact ship hit points by multiplying their base value by five. A *fireball* spell could hypothetically sink a rowboat or canoe in one shot, but a 1st Rate Ship of the Line could have 1,000hp!

Skill and Ability Test Difficulty

The default difficulty for skill and ability checks during ship combat is **DC12**. Checks are rolled by the acting Captain unless another character is at a corresponding Action Station. The DM can **modify the DC based on conditions** like rough seas, weather, surprise, terrain, or a crew that is inexperienced, wounded, or frightened.

Movement and Position

Ship combat is played on a 1" hex grid where **each hex represents 50ft** from center to center. Most ships will take up 1 to 3 hexes. They should be orientated with the center of the ship on the center of a hex with the bow and stern crossing perpendicular edges. Generally, a ship's bow will only face one of 6 different hex directions, though the DM may allow "half-turns" in certain instances like boarding or navigating terrain. All turns are 60 degree rotations (one hex face) from the center of the ship.

MOVING A SHIP

- A ship may move up to its full movement each turn after adjusting for the wind.
- All ships **must move at least 1"** (exceptions: In Irons, Anchored)
- A ship must move **directly forward** to the space in front of its bow.
- A ship may **rotate twice** (rotate one hex face or 60°) at any point before, during, or after its movement, but **no ship may turn more than once per space**.
- Ships that are **In Irons** may not move forward but may still rotate once.
- Ships that are **Anchored** cannot move or turn.

Wind and Movement

The wind direction is an important part of sailing. Some groups might find using rules for wind cumbersome, while others might find a thrill in the extra element of strategy it add, especially when a spell caster may be able to alter conditions. Use the following option rules if you want to use wind in your encounters.

WIND DIRECTION

d6	Flat Top Hexes	Pointy Top Hexes
1	North	Northeast
2	Northeast	East
3	Southeast	Southeast
4	South	Southwest
5	Southwest	West
6	Northwest	Northwest

POINTS OF SAIL

Ship sailing speeds depend on the angle of the wind. A ship's **point of sail** is determined at the **start of its turn** and does not change during its turn. If a ship starts its turn With the Wind and then turns Close to the Wind, it still gets its full movement that turn.

POINTS OF SAIL

Point of Sail	Ship Speed
With the wind	Full speed
Close to the wind	Half speed rounded down (min. 1")
In Irons	Speed 0" (can still turn once)



*Example: If the wind is coming from 1 (North), this ship is **In Irons** and cannot move (but may still turn once). If the wind is coming from 2 or 6, it is sailing **Close to the wind** and may only move half of its normal speed; at 3, 4, and 5 it would be **With the Wind** and can move its full movement.*

RAMMING

A ship may attempt to **Ram** another ship. At the beginning of the turn, the captain may spend all of the ship's Action Points to declare a ram. On the ship's turn, if it **ends its movement with any of its forward three sides touching another ship** it may attempt to ram. Both ships **roll a die equal to their base hit die**. The ramming ship **adds +1 to its roll for each space it traveled this turn**. The winning ship deals damage to the losing ship as though it had just dealt a **critical hit with its primary attack**.

Example. A brigantine (7d10+14 hp) rams into a sloop (6d8+6 hp). The brigantine travels 3 spaces before making contact. It will roll 1d10+3 versus the sloop's 1d8. If the brigantine wins it will deal critical hit damage (2d10+3) to the sloop.

If for some reason the ramming ship cannot get to a space adjacent to another ship, it does not ram and its Action Points are lost.

ANCHORING A SHIP

A ship that is **Anchored** cannot move or turn, and has a max speed of 0. In an emergency the crew can **Cut and Run**.

Drop Anchor. Cost: All of a ship's action points. The crew lowers the anchor(s) and the ship's speed is reduced to 0.

Weighing Anchor. Cost: All of a ship's action points. The crew raises the ship's anchor(s). The ship's max speed is deduced to half for this turn.

Cut and Run. (Cost: 0 Action Points) The ship is no longer anchored, but will drift until new anchors are acquired! The ship's max speed is reduced to half for this turn.

The Order of Combat

Like creature combat, ship combat is organized into turns and rounds. Initiative is rolled for each ship, and the creatures on that ship all act on their ship's turn. Independent creatures like sea monsters or characters that are not on a ship roll their own initiative.

Sailing is slow, and weapons take time to reload, but these rules are designed to be fast and fun. For the purposes of rules and action economy, **a round of combat represents 6 seconds** in the game world, though 30 seconds to 1 minute is a more thematic representation.

Combat Round Step by Step

1. **Captain Phase.** Captains choose their ship's actions, and they may roll to *Push the Crew*.
2. **Initiative.** Declare any Lookouts. Lookouts (or Captains) roll initiative.
3. **Take turns.** Each ship takes a turn in initiative order. On a ship's turn, characters may go in any order they see fit. Each may choose an Action Station based on the Captains chosen actions, and they may choose a different station each turn. They may also choose another action like casting a spell. Ships and characters may Ready actions to trigger anytime before the ship's next turn.
4. **Begin the next round.** Repeat the steps until the combat is over.

Captain's Phase

During this phase, each ship's Captain decides what actions the ship will take. Each ship has a set number of Action Points and the Captain can spend any of these to assign actions for the characters and crew on board to carry out later in the turn. Any actions not carried out by the other characters will be rolled by the Captain.

PUSH THE CREW

During a time of need the Captain may decide to push the crew to their limits. If the Captain makes a successful Intimidation or Persuasion check, the ship gains one extra action point this turn but loses one action point next turn. A Captain cannot Push the Crew if they succeed in doing so the previous round.

Initiative Phase

Initiative is rerolled each round of combat. After all Captains have decided their ships' actions for the turn, each ship rolls a d20 and adds its DEX modifier. This roll is made by the Captain unless the ship has a Lookout. See the section on "Action Stations".

A Ship's Turn

On a ship's turn, the Pilot or Captain may **move a distance up to the ship's speed** and make **two rotations**. The characters **may take any actions that the Captain chose** at the beginning of the round, plus any other actions like the Bosun's Raise Morale ability or casting a spell. After the characters have gone, the Captain rolls for any actions the characters didn't take. These actions may be taken before, after, or at any point along the ship's movement. Characters may also **Ready** actions (i.e. wait for a target to be in range.)

ARC OF FIRE



In the age of gunpowder weapons, most ships carried the majority of their arsenal along the side of the ship, requiring the vessel to maneuver to the sides for most cannons to have a shot, requiring them to turn to hit a target they were chasing. **Broadside** refers to this area. Other attacks, like the 1st Rate's *Chase Guns*, can only fire **Fore & Aft**.

SHIP ACTIONS

Action	Point Cost	Description	Action Station
Attack (Broadside)	1	Attack with primary attack at a target in the ship's Broadside arc.	Gunner
Attack (Fore/Aft)	2	Attack with secondary attack: roll one die rank lower (ie. d4 instead of d6, d6 instead of d8, etc.)	Gunner
Repair	All	Recover hit points equal to primary attack damage or remove the Derelict condition.	Carpenter
Full Sail	2	Move one extra space this turn.	Rigger
Come About	*	Rotate one extra rotation this turn. Cost is ship dependent (default 2).	Pilot
Ram	All	Ram if any forward faces of its main hex touch another ship. Roll 1 hit die plus distance traveled vs. opponents hit die. Winner deals a critical hit.	-
Drop Anchor	All	Speed 0 and Anchored .	-
Weigh Anchor	All	Speed 1/2 and no longer Anchored .	-
Cut and Run	0	Speed 1/2, no longer Anchored , but will drift when stopped.	-
Change Ammo Type	0	Change ammo (round shot, chain shot, grape shot, etc.) See Appendix B.	-

Character Actions

Each turn, a character may spend their action to claim any of the available **Action Stations** detailed below. All are optional and can be chosen each round. Any actions that are not covered by a PC are rolled for by the Captain using the ship's stats but without any Sailing Dice.

SAILING DICE

Most Actions Stations allow each character to add a d4 **Sailing Die** to one of the ship's checks.

ACTION STATIONS

CAPTAIN

Limit 1/ship, required

Each ship must have an assigned Captain. If a ship doesn't have a PC captain the DM can let one act as Captain. At the beginning of the round, the captain **chooses actions for each of the ship's action points**. Being the captain takes a character's action. Captains that choose the attack action only need to decide how many points to allocate when choosing the action. The weapons used and their targets may be chosen on the ship's turn.

Push the Crew. During a time of need the Captain may to push the crew to their limits. As a bonus action, the Captain may attempt an Intimidation or Persuasion check. On a success, the ship gains one extra action point this turn but loses one action point next turn. A Captain may not attempt to push the crew two turns in a row.

PILOT

Limit 1/ship

The Pilot moves the ship's token, and makes the roll if the ship is attempting to **Come About** using the ship's **DEX** and adding their Sailing Die. The Pilot also makes any checks required to navigate terrain or obstacles.

LOOKOUT

Limit 1/ship

Before initiative is rolled each round, any character may spend their action to become the Lookout. The Lookout **rolls initiative for the ship**, and they **may add or subtract their Sailing Die** from the result. In addition, **any ship with a Lookout has +1 AC**.

BOSUN

Limit 1/ship

This station may be claimed at any time, including before initiative has been rolled.

Raise Morale. May make an *Intimidation* or *Persuasion* skill check to choose one of the following: give all of the ship's attacks and skill check rolls +1 this turn, or temporarily remove the **Stressed** condition from the ship for one turn.

GUNNER

Limit 1 per attack

The gunners choose weapons and targets, and roll any attacks using the ship's **Skill**, adding their Sailing Die to the first attack roll. If there is more than one gunner, they take turns rolling attacks until there are no attacks left.

CARPENTER

No Limit

The Carpenter rolls to **Repair** the ship using the ship's **Skill**, adding their Sailing Die to the result. If there are multiple Carpenters, choose one to make the roll, but each may add their Sailing Die to the total.

RIGGER

No Limit

The Rigger rolls to go **Full Sail** using the ship's **Skill**, adding their Sailing Die to the result. If there are multiple Riggers, choose one to make the roll, but each may add their Sailing Die to the total.



OTHER ACTIONS

Characters may take other actions like casting a spell, attacking another creature, swinging from the rigging, diving from a ship, etc.

Leveling Up Sailing Abilities

While characters can choose any action station, it can be fun to have characters “level up” and gain experience at certain stations. Here are some ideas for exploring this concept:

- Increase the value of a Sailing Die (d6, d8, etc.)
- Adding modifiers to Sailing Dice (+1, +2)
- Exploding Sailing Dice (reroll and add when rolling the max value)
- Giving Advantage to sailing die rolls
- Covering two action stations at once
- Increasing Gunners' damage
- Giving the Bosun a larger bonus
- Giving an experienced Captain a Sailing Die that they can include in any roll

New Conditions

STRESSED

A ship is **Stressed** when it has **less than half** of its starting hit points. A ship is also Stressed if it has less than the required crew. A stressed ship has **Disadvantage on all attacks and skill checks**. The Bosun action station can take the Raise Morale action to attempt to temporarily remove this condition.

DERELICT

A ship is **Derelict** when it has 0 hit points. Its speed is 0, and it may only spend its Action Points on the **Repair** action.

Drifting. The DM may choose to have a Derelict ship drift one space each turn depending on weather conditions.

Sinking. Every time a Derelict ship takes *additional* damage, it must make a sinking saving throw. Roll a d20. If the roll is 10 or higher, the ship does not sink. Otherwise it fails and the ship sinks into the water. If a Derelict ship is hit with a critical hit, it immediately fails its sinking saving throw.

Repairing. The only action a Derelict ship may take is **Repair**, which must be made at Disadvantage. If the Repair action is successful, the ship loses the Derelict condition and regains 1 hit point (instead of the normal amount recovered by the Repair action).

Boarding & Close Combat

After ships are close enough to engage in close combat or creature scale combat, DMs are encouraged to switch to a 5ft square grid maps. Mass combat and Mob combat rules can be used to deal with the crew, but, like any good story, it's the **heroes and not the extras** that matter!



Appendix A: Ships

SHIP STATS

Vessel	CR	Size	Speed	AC	HD	HP	STR	DEX	CON	CHR	ATK	Damage	Abilities	Crew	Cargo	Actions
Raft	1/8	Tiny	2	16	2	3	+2	+4	-1	+0	1	-		1/2	0	1
Rowboat	1/4	Tiny	2	16	4	6	+1	+5	-1	+2	1	1d4+1	Oars	1/3	0	1
Longboat	1/2	Small	3	15	5	17	+2	+2	+0	+3	1	2d4+2	Oars	2/4	0	1
Sloop	1	Medium	6	12	6	33	+2	+0	+1	+3	2	1d8+2	Weatherly	3/9	2	2
Brigantine	2	Large	5	13	7	52	+3	-2	+2	+3	2	1d10+3		15/30	3	2
Frigate	3	Large	5	14	8	60	+2	-2	+2	+4	3	1d10+2		24/48	4	3
6th Rate Man o' War	4	Large	5	14	9	76	+2	-3	+3	+5	4	1d10+2		24/48	4	4
5th Rate Man o' War	5	Large	5	15	10	85	+3	-3	+3	+6	4	1d10+3		24/48	4	4
4th Rate Ship of the Line	6	Huge	4	15	11	115	+3	-4	+4	+6	5	1d10+3	Sluggish	60/120	4	5
3rd Rate Ship of the Line	7	Huge	4	16	12	126	+4	-4	+4	+7	5	1d10+4	Sluggish	70/150	4	5
2nd Rate Ship of the Line	8	Gargan.	3	17	12	174	+4	-5	+4	+7	5	1d12+4	Sluggish, Heavy Armor	100/300	5	5
1st Rate Ship of the Line	9	Gargan.	3	18	12	186	+5	-6	+5	+7	5	2d6+5	Sluggish, Heavy Armor	150/400	5	5

Ship Abilities

Below are descriptions for abilities listed in the Ship Stats table.

Weatherly. This ship does not decrease its max speed when sailing Close to the Wind.

Oars. This ship may spend half of its action points (rounded down) to travel 2 spaces in any direction. This is in addition to its normal movement and is not affected by wind.

Sluggish. This ship may only rotate once per turn (unless taking the Come About action).

Heavy Armor. This ship has Resistance against attacks that deal 10 damage or less.



CROWD ON EVERY INCH OF SAIL!

Weigh anchor, hoist the mains, and set sail...
rough seas lie head!

Crew up a nimble sloop and tack into the wind.
Load a Man of War with enough cannons to
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5E



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