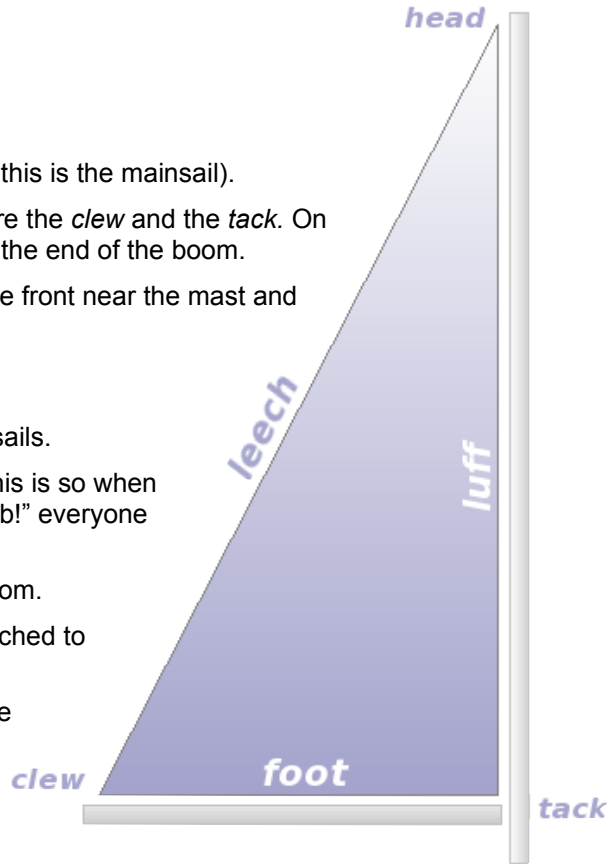
Sails and Rigging

Parts of sails



This diagram shows the parts of a sail on a typical sail (this is the mainsail).

The top corner is called the *head*, the bottom corners are the *clew* and the *tack.* On this sail, the tack is close to the mast and the clew is at the end of the boom.

The sides are called the *foot* at the bottom, the *luff* at the front near the mast and the diagonal *leech* at the back.

Rigging

Rigging is the ropes and wires on a boat involved with sails.

Every 'rope' is named for its function and/or location. This is so when the skipper says "dump the mainsheet and take in the jib!" everyone knows which rope to let go and which one to pull.

A *topping lift* is used to raise or lower a spar, like the boom.

A *halyard* raises or lowers a sail and would thus be attached to the *head* of the sail.

A *sheet* is a rope that controls the angle of the sail to the wind. It is usually attached to the *clew.*

Sail terminology

- *Take in / sheet in* – to tighten or pull on a rope
- *Hard on* – as tight as a sheet or sail will go (e.g. "bring the jib hard on")
- *Let go / ease* - to loosen or let out a rope (e.g. "ease the jib sheet")
- *Dump* – to let go all at once, to ease as far as it will go
- *Luffing* – when a sail flaps at the front edge (i.e. the luff)
- *Working sheet* – a sheet that is tight, because it is holding a sail against the force of the wind
- *Lazy sheet* – a sheet that is loose, because it is doing nothing (no force)

The two types of sails

By and large you'll only have to deal with two kinds of sails : the main and the jib. As you progress you might deal with other kinds of sails including different kinds of jibs and speciality sails like storm sails or spinnakers.

For now we'll concentrate on the main and the jib.

The mainsail is the big sail behind the mast and is obviously very important to how the boat works. The mainsail is controlled by a single mainsheet that usually runs to a series of pulleys in the middle of the cockpit. The pulleys supply the extra force need to move the big mainsail when it is full of wind.

The jib (in front of the mast) is equally important to how a boat sails, especially when it sails into the wind. The jib is controlled by two sheets which run down each side of the boat. When the boat is sailing one of these, the working sheet, will be under load as it holds the force of the wind in the sail. The other, the lazy sheet, will be lying slack – essentially doing nothing. When the boat changes direction the lazy sheet and the working sheet will swap sides. The lazy sheet will hold the sail against the force of the wind and become the working sheet and the working sheet will go slack and become the lazy sheet.

We'll look at this in more detail later.