17 Questions to Ask About Boat Docking
Before you Hire an Instructor

Chapter 3B – Diagram 5

BoatingWithDawsons.com
Not Docking Lessons—Proven Docking Lessons

My intent for this e-book is to give you the essential information you need, so you don’t waste your money or end up receiving bad docking instruction. I want to eliminate your boat docking stress, fear and embarrassment, and replace them with confidence.

Every week, I hear of boaters who have tried different lessons, but still can’t dock their boats very well. I hear horror stories from family members about not liking the shouting and yelling and the falling in the harbour, when they can’t jump the distance from the boat to the dock to tie the line.

There is so much more to docking, than just docking.

Ultimately, I don’t think you want to maneuver your boat into your slip or alongside your dock hoping you don’t screw up. I think you want to be able to confidently, smoothly and safely maneuver your boat into your slip or alongside your dock, without the need for yelling, swearing, jumping, boat hooks, bionics, dock helpers, guesswork or embarrassment. I believe docking instructors and/or docking books should be able to achieve this.

I strongly encourage you to use the information in this booklet to help you get proven docking lessons that will work for you, so that docking will become second nature and make your boating much more enjoyable.

Sincerely,
Doug Dawson
Don’t Panic

I won’t get technical.

You DON’T need to understand the technical stuff like “centrifugal force”, “asymmetrical thrust” or fore & aft propulsive force”

You DO need to be able to handle and dock your boat easily and confidently in all situations.
1. Is Docking Difficult?

NO. Docking is EASY when you know how.

Docking can be EASY or DIFFICULT
It’s Your Choice!

With the right instruction, you can confidently and safely bring your boat into your slip or alongside your dock AND secure it to the dock in any conditions without yelling, swearing, jumping, boat hooks, bionics, dock helpers, guesswork or embarrassment.

In your car, if you didn’t know how, or weren’t sure you could stop at a stop sign or red light, you could end up in the middle of the intersection with disastrous results. If you didn’t know your turning radius or how to turn a corner at an intersection, you could end up on the shoulder or sidewalk injuring or killing pedestrians. There isn’t room for guesswork or lack of knowledge. You have to take lessons and know how to handle your car.

Similarly with your boat; you need to know how it handles, so you can safely and confidently bring it into a slip or dock and secure it. No guesswork.

Commercial Shipping Companies from around the world, enroll their employees in Georgian College in Owen Sound, Ontario Canada. They have the best marine simulator to teach the skills required to operate their ships. The instructor can control the conditions that he throws at the student, who has to respond appropriately. If the student makes a mistake, like colliding with a dock or hitting a shoal or running aground or running into a seawall, the simulator is forgiving. It just shuts down.

In real life aboard a ship hundreds of feet long, they have to be able to do it right every time. There is no room for mistakes or guesswork. They have to learn what the ship can do and how to handle it in all conditions and weather.
You don’t have to be a trained ship’s Captain to handle your pleasurecraft, but you do have to know how to handle your boat, the way it was designed and engineered to be handled in order to dock properly.

When you watch a slick infomercial for a new kitchen gadget, they can prepare several recipes in just a few minutes. But, in your kitchen, it is difficult to recreate what you witnessed them do on TV. Why? They learned ahead of time; how much of each ingredient worked best, what size to cut the food so it looks easy, how long to run the machine, how many rotations etc. etc. to get the best results. And, they practiced a lot. You could recreate their results by following their instructions and practicing a lot too.

Doug Dawson’s Docking Lessons are recipes that you can follow for a successful outcome. They include diagrams and pictures of when, where and how to hang fenders, which line to use for each docking scenario, where your First Mate stands with the lines depending on your boat’s configuration, how to adjust your approach in all wind conditions, when to go beyond and back, how to make a piling your friend, bow first and stern first docking, gas dock shuffle, FLIPP Line™ “Step-Off” and “Stay-Aboard” procedures, non-verbal communication and much, much more. The lessons are complete and easy to follow.

2. **What is the Biggest Docking Mistake?**

The biggest docking mistake made by boaters, instructors and writers, is assuming that all boats dock the same way. I don’t know how many times boaters have told me that their friend is teaching them to dock, but what works on their friends boat doesn’t work on theirs. That’s because they have different drive systems.

*Let me explain....*
Boat manufacturers build and design their boats with specific motors to handle specific ways. They spend millions of dollars in research and development to design a boat that will handle the way they want it to.

**Boat Docking is EASY** once you know how yours was designed to dock and perfect the right techniques that apply to your drive system. Then, once you learn and practice these techniques, docking and close quarters maneuvering will be easy for you.

**Boat Docking can be DIFFICULT,**
if you get the wrong instruction or don’t understand how your boat is supposed to handle. You can practice as much as you want but, if you are not doing it correctly, all the practice in the world won’t make it right.

**Boat Docking can be very STRESSFUL,**
if you don’t have an understanding of what to do and how to do it—especially in front of an audience.

**Boat Docking can be CHALLENGING,**
if you are using the wrong techniques for your boat and drive system. The boat won’t go where you want it to go, no matter what.

**Boat Docking can be EMBARRASING,**
elevating you quickly to becoming the harbour entertainment or even worse, ending up damaging your boat, and/or the dock and/or other boats, and/or injuring a family member if you aren’t docking correctly.

*Doug Dawson’s proven step-by-step Docking Lessons explain how to dock each different drive system. There are approximately 30 pages in the six Introductory Lessons and approximately 250 pages in the six Advanced Lessons.*
3. **What is the Definition of “Docking”?**

The dictionary definition is just “maneuvering a boat into a slip or alongside a dock”.

But, pleasure boaters don’t have a large crew, and shouldn’t require dock helpers to pull the boat in and secure it, once it is off the dock—especially in wind or current.

What happens if there isn’t dock crew? When you are coming into a marina after hours in the rain with a strong wind, you have to know how to dock your boat and secure it without any help.

*Doug’s definition of docking is… “Confidently and safely maneuvering a boat into a slip or alongside a dock AND securing it to any dock configuration in any weather conditions without yelling, swearing, jumping, boat hooks, bionics, dock helpers, guesswork or embarrassment”. Doug’s lessons are written to help you do just this.*

4. **Are all Docking Lessons the Same?**

**Absolutely not.** Each drive system is different; therefore, different handling and docking techniques are required for each.

Outboards and Sterndrives are located behind the transom; whereas, inboards are under the boat positioning the thrust further forward. When the wheel is turned, Outboards and Sterndrives turn directing the propeller’s thrust, while inboards steer with a rudder deflecting the propellers thrust in forward only.

Single engine boats have the motor centered on the transom, but twin engines are located left and right of center.

Assuming that all six drive systems handle and dock the same way is another docking fallacy.

Trying to apply the same handling or docking instructions to all six drive systems will not work.
Doug Dawson’s Docking Lessons are written with specific instructions for each drive system with non-technical explanations of how and why. Each lesson has a section on “What ifs”, so that you know what to do if things don’t go exactly to plan.

Boats with different drive systems handle differently, so beware of the person who tells you the same instruction applies to all boats.

5. Does Practice Make Perfect?

Learning from someone who doesn’t know how to dock a boat will result in you learning how to not dock a boat. Practicing wrong instruction will result in you being very good at not being able to dock a boat.

Learn from a boat docking pro and you’ll learn how to dock like a pro. Practice right instruction and you’ll get better and better. In this case, practice does make perfect.

Docking is as Easy as 1, 2, 3

1. Get the right instruction
2. Learn from the right instruction
3. Practice the right instruction

Doug Dawson’s Boat Docking Lessons cover open water exercises showing you how your boat was designed to handle, then step-by-step docking instructions including securing the boat to the dock simply and easily with a “step-off” or “stay-aboard” procedure. No panic, no jumping, no yelling.
6. **Is Hands-on Training Better than Book Training?**

An instructor on board with you can easily assess your knowledge and handling skills, and teach at your pace correcting any errors along the way; so that you don’t practice an incorrect procedure. The downside is the cost per hour of instruction and the scarcity of qualified instructors.

A well written book lesson is easily understood especially with diagrams and pictures and step-by-step instructions; so that it is like having an instructor on board covering everything you need to know for each docking scenario—when and what to do with the shift(s), throttle(s), wheel, fenders, lines etc.

The great benefit to an e-Lesson is that you can download, print and learn at your own speed, repeating as often as required without a hefty hourly fee.

Doug Dawson is a 5th generation boat industry professional. He knows the design characteristics of all the boats and drive systems, has driven, tested and handled every type of boat and drive system and he has the ability to teach others. Doug’s lessons are written; so that they are easily understood with diagrams, pictures and step-by-step instructions without a lot of technical jargon. Doug learned at the wheel of all boat types from his father who learned from his father, who learned from his father. 5 Generations of experience and knowledge speaks volumes.

7. **Does My Boat Insurance Cover a Hired Instructor on Board My Boat?**

Since 911, because of the exorbitant cost of insurance for individual boat instructors, many don’t carry any insurance assuming that your boat insurance will cover them.
However, you need to talk to your insurance agent to confirm. Most companies we’ve talked to, do not cover a paid instructor on board your boat. Insurance companies consider any kind of remuneration including a bottle, a meal, contra etc. as payment.

My advice would be to check with your insurance company before hiring anyone who is uninsured. Ask if your insurance policy would cover a paid on-board instructor in a circumstance where he screws up, or you screw up, and the boat or someone is injured.

If you find an instructor who does have insurance, ask for a copy of the policy and take it to your insurance agent for review and advice.

8. **How Many Hours of Instruction Do I Need?**

It varies from person to person depending on their previous docking experience, their dexterity, receptiveness and the accuracy of the instructors. If the instruction is wrong, it could take you forever.

*Most boaters are able to learn Doug’s Introductory Docking over a few weekends and master over the balance of the summer. Most boaters are ready for Advanced Docking later in the summer, which includes backing into your slip in all wind conditions, docking in piling slips, backing into a gas dock and dozens of other neat maneuvers. All are compiled to take the fear and worry out of docking.*

9. **How Important Are Fenders?**

**Extremely important.** You need to know

- where to hang them,
- at what height to hang them
- how to tie them
- whether to hang them vertically or horizontally
17 Docking Questions to Ask Before Hiring a Power Boat Docking Instructor

- when to have no fenders
- how to utilize them for “bump & go”

Using fenders incorrectly can result in damage to your boat, someone else’s boat or the dock.

Doug Dawson’s Boat Docking Lessons teach you the how, what, where and why, of fenders, for each docking scenario. Each includes fender positioning in the diagrams and pictures. Also included is how to adjust your docking procedure and fender height relative to dock height for each of dozens of docking scenarios, that you could encounter on a cruising holiday.

10. Are Instructions the same for Twin Sterndrives & Twin Outboards?

There are many similarities as well as several differences for the Captain at the helm, and for the First Mate. Twin Outboards quite often block your view of the dock when backing into a slip. On a Twin Sterndrive, your First Mate can stand on the swim platform for easier tying of the sternline to a low floating dock and step off safely. The platform also offers some protection to your sterndrives when backing in; whereas, the outboards are totally unprotected above and below the water when backing in. Fender positioning and lines are different with and without a platform. For the First Mate, it is also more difficult to climb out of the cockpit of an outboard, than to step off a platform of a sterndrive to a floating dock.

Doug Dawson’ Docking Lessons have different instructions for Sterndrives and Outboards with step-by-step instructions for the First Mate with and without a platform, bow in or stern into a slip with “step-off” procedure or “stay-aboard” procedure depending on dock height and configuration.
11. **Does a Twin Inboard handle the same as a Twin Sterndrive?**

No. On a Twin Sterndrive, the thrust of the propellers located behind the transom, is aimed by the re-angling of the Sterndrive with the steering wheel. On a Twin Inboard, the thrust from under the boat is directed straight back or straight forward. It is deflected by the rudder for steering.

On most Twin Sterndrive boats, you don’t get a tight pivot by shifting one shift in forward and one in reverse; whereas, on a Twin Inboard, you do. This makes a big difference in close quarters maneuvering and when trying to dock in a wind.

Twin Sterndrives respond much better using the right combination of wheel and shifts “Arc Method”. Twin Inboards perform much better when you only use the shifts, not the wheel.

The docking instructions for each of these drive systems are very, very different.

*Doug Dawson’s Docking Lessons are quite different for Twin Sterndrives and Twin Inboards and are proven over decades and thousands of boaters. They are definitely not interchangeable.*

12. **Does a bow thruster make docking easier?**

Only on a single engine trawler or houseboat. All other boats are designed to be docked with their motors. Bow thrusters are not necessary if you learn to dock properly. Bow thrusters are designed to swing the bow the last 2’ – 3’ against the wind, because they are only powered by a small electric motor. Too many boaters become dependent on their bow thruster and use them as a main docking motor.
Using a thruster to do the work of your main engine(s) will result in burn out. The poor little thing wasn’t meant for heavy work, only to assist the motors in the last 2’ – 3’.

**Dawson Dawson’s Lessons do not require the use of a bow thruster. You can dock perfectly without one, when you drive the way the boat was designed to be handled.**

13. **What is a FLIPP Line™?**

A FLIPP Line™ is a temporary line used to simplify docking, giving the First Mate a much safer docking procedure. A FLIPP Line™ can be used to create a pivot point at the bow, amidships or at the stern.

Using the FLIPP Line™ “Stay-Aboard” Procedure or the “Step-Off” Procedure is so easy for the Captain and First Mate eliminating the fear and worry when docking.

Couples with young children especially love this method of docking, because they don’t have to leave a youngster alone in the cockpit, while tending the bow line. One parent can stay with the child and dock at the same time.

This temporary line is not to be confused with a docking line. It is removed once all dock lines are secure.

*Doug Dawson’s Introductory Docking Lessons cover the how, when and where of the FLIPP Line™ in detail over several pages with diagrams and explanations and step-by-step procedures for the Captain and the First Mate. The FLIPP Line™ has been used on all types and sizes of boats and it works every time. Everyone taught by Doug is amazed at how easy it is and they now look forward to docking, instead of fearing it.*
14. **Why is a Single Inboard and a Single Sterndrive so different?**

Docking boats with these two drives is totally different. What works for one won’t work for the other. A Single Inboard comes with 2 control levers—one for throttle and one for shift. A Single Sterndrive is operated with a combined single lever for both throttle and shift. When backing up, the Sterndrive goes wherever you tell it; whereas, 90% of the time, your Inboard only backs up to port.

Be sure to get the correct e-Lesson for your drive system.

*Doug Dawson’s Docking Lessons have totally different instructions for Single Inboards and Single Sterndrives. Because they are so different, the lessons are not interchangeable.*

15. **Why doesn’t a Twin Sterndrive with one dead motor, dock like a Single Sterndrive?**

There may be a time when you will have to dock your Twin Sterndrive with one motor. It will become quite difficult, especially if the dead motor is the one with the power steering pump.

You can’t simply use the same techniques as a Single Sterndrive because Twin Sterndrives are mounted to the right and left of centre. If you are only using one of them, it is obviously not in the centre like a Single Sterndrive; therefore, it won’t handle the same way.

*Doug Dawson’s Advanced Docking Lessons cover docking with one dead motor, in great detail with step-by-step instructions and diagrams for each twin drive system with open water exercises as well as docking instructions.*
16. Are all Instructors the Same?

Absolutely not! Mastering the handling and techniques of one or two drive systems does not qualify a person to instruct on all the other drive systems. Assuming this, is a huge mistake made by a person lacking experience and knowledge.

The Instructor—good or bad?

A golf pro can teach you the techniques required to play golf. By following his instructions, you can learn to play a good or great game of golf. The more you practice, the better you get. If you get the wrong instruction, you may never play a good game of golf.

Likewise, a boat docking pro can teach you the techniques required to dock your particular boat and drive system. Then, the more you practice these instructions, the better you get. If your docking instructor doesn’t have all the skills required, you may never learn to dock no matter how often you practice.

Practice only makes perfect, when you practice the right instructions.

17. How do you find a good instructor?

Good docking instructors are hard to find. Check with your fellow boaters for recommendations. You can also check magazines and the internet for a boat handling school near you. Some of your Power Squadron friends may have a contact. The Squadron covers some of the basics of boat docking, but there is no on-the-water training or demonstrations.

Check the instructor’s credentials and call his references. If you have doubts about a docking instructor, you have a secret weapon. “Show Me”. Ask the instructor to dock your boat (or one the same as yours with the same drive system as yours). If he can’t dock it smoothly and confidently and secure it in any weather condition and any dock configuration without excuses, look for another instructor who can. Don’t waste your money and don’t waste your precious time on the water.
A good instructor will:

- Know the design characteristics of all the boats and drive systems
- Know the difference between the handling characteristics of each of the different drive systems and have different instructions for each.
- Know how to drive and handle all drive systems
- Know how to dock all drive systems
- Know how to teach others with clear easy-to-understand instruction
- Leave you with step-by-step instructions, so you can practice what you’ve been taught.
- Share his exemplary credentials and testimonials to backup his docking skills.
- Give you a copy of his insurance coverage

Doug Dawson was born into a family marina where he learned all drive systems and how to handle them at a very young age from his father, who learned from his father, who learned from his father—who learned from his father—5 generations boating experience! The family marina sold, serviced and stored all types of boats giving Doug an opportunity to learn the design and characteristics of each boat as well as the different handling techniques. He has sold thousands of boats and taught buyers to drive and dock their boats over many decades. He has reviewed hundreds of boats for Canadian Yachting Magazine and Power Boating Canada Magazine for over 20 years and has driven them all.

Doug’s Boat Docking Lessons are:

- Downloadable pdf file—no shipping delays
- Easily printed and inserted into a binder.
- Easy-to-understand
• **Step-by-step instructions** with diagrams and pictures

• **Individual advanced lessons that stand on their own**, so you can pick the lesson that suits your particular docking challenge and take it with you if you don’t want to take the whole book.

Beware the Instructor who believes all drive systems dock the same way.

A **Good Docking Instructor** may teach you how to maneuver your boat into a slip or alongside a dock.

A **Great Docking Instructor** teaches you how to confidently and safely maneuver your boat into a slip and alongside a dock in all dock configurations and weather conditions without any yelling, swearing, jumping, bionics, boat hooks, dock helpers, guesswork or embarrassment.

**Dawsons Don’t Want You to settle for just GOOD.**

**Go for GREAT!**
Testimonials

"I dock my boat in an area with very strong currents and shifting winds. While I am getting better with practice after reading the introductory book, I am looking forward to learning more from the advanced copy.

Hope I didn't bore you, but wanted to say thanks and let you know that what you are doing is saving not only boats, but also lives.

Keep up the good work! Boating knowledge allows you to live and fish another day and to come home safely to your loved ones. Your work is important! Thanks again and tight lines."
—Bill Pollok, VA

"I received your boat docking e-Lesson on Twin Outboards. Great information. I have been a boater since 2002 owning a 26' Center Console--twin outboards. I wish I had found your website earlier as I have learned some great tips from the e-Lesson."
—Alan R, MA

"I just wanted to let you know how helpful your boat docking e-lesson has been to me in docking my 22 foot bowrider with single sterndrive. Since digesting your lesson and doing the open water practice you recommended, my docking has improved 1000%!"
—John, Atlanta, GA
"Many thanks! I just moved from a single I/O to a Twin I/O and seem to be getting worse each time I back into the dock. I could never figure out when to use one or two drives, when to turn the drives vs using one or the other, etc. This makes so much sense to me and I’ll be trying it the rest of the season. Thanks again!"
—Allan Darr, PA

"My docking has improved greatly thanks to your boat docking e-Lesson. I couldn't get it in the last three feet. Now, each time we come back to the dock, it is easier and I have no trouble bringing in the stern those last three feet. Thank you."
—Lee, PA

"I can’t wait to get out on the water and work on it. I’m sure it’ll make an amazing difference. That one little tidbit, though I’ve not even tried it out yet, will undoubtedly save me lots of aggravation, lots of discomfort, and lead to a far safer, more controlled, more predictable, and more successful set of boat docking procedures. The rest of the information you’ve given me is gravy."
—Bill R, SC

Have more questions about docking?

Let’s Talk

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