

### Private Instruction: Close Quarter Maneuvers

#### ***Tips & Tricks from a professional – a lifetime of learning in a weekend!***

No matter how long the journey, the last 50' can be hard on nerves and relationships. While beginners are usually bewildered by how a boat moves – although equipped with a steering wheel, it's nothing like a car. Even advanced students come to SeaSkills to learn. Why? Because once you learn a few basics about how a boat moves, you are practicing with purpose instead of trial and error.

#### **About SeaSkills**

Peter Pisciotta is a US Coast Guard licensed 100 ton master and has operated SeaSkills Personal School of Seamanship for five years. He



*Capt. Peter Pisciotta off Point Conception* specializes in teaching close quarter maneuvers and offshore seamanship skills, often accompanying clients on deliveries as they transition into a cruising lifestyle. He is a frequent presenter at West Marine Trawler Fests and Cruising World Safety at Sea seminars, and is a speaker's bureau member for BoatUS and Cruising World magazine. SeaSkills is a member of the Safe Boating Council and is recommended by the National Association of Boating Law Administrators, the governing body for state boating license standards. Peter is a past professional captain having commanded an 85' charter vessel where he and a crew of five hosted up to 75 guests for half day San Francisco Bay excursions.

#### **What you'll learn:**

The benefit of private instruction is you can learn at your pace, on your boat, in your waters. You'll learn to manage the prevailing winds and currents you face every day. Topics include:

- Docking in a slip
- Coming alongside a fuel dock, guest dock, etc.
- Docking between obstructions
- Wind lock – what it means
- Managing winds and currents
- Spring lines – the poor man's bow thruster
- Single-handed techniques
- Approaching a dock with strong winds blowing on/off the dock
- Emergency procedures
- Undocking
- Back & Fill
- Backing in a straight line
- And more tips and tricks the professionals use!

### **Teaching Philosophy**

Have you ever driven in an unfamiliar town and someone in the passenger seat gives directions: you get there, but you don't remember how? Likewise, most instructors teach docking by telling students exactly how to do it right – *“begin your turn as you pass Crazy Horse, slow down as you approach Rapid Fire, ....”* While that seems like a logical way to teach, it's a slow way to learn because someone else is doing the thinking for you.

What does work is setting a foundation of tools and learning when to apply them. Close quarter maneuvers is best learned by doing, and making mistakes is an important element. The hard part of teaching is creating a safe, controlled environment where students can make safe mistakes. As you build confidence, difficulty is increased. The learning curve is steep but comfortable. And you do things you thought only seasoned professionals could do.

### **Beginner to Advanced**

There are many excellent helmspersons and instructors, but none who have devoted time and research into the learning process. Once you understand the fundamentals, you will be able to dock anywhere, not just your home berth because you will have to necessary tools. The hard part is transferring knowledge: teaching, adapting to different learning styles.

Capt. Peter Pisciotta of SeaSkills has taught hundreds of students how to dock – from absolute beginners to seasoned professionals. He has taught groups of ASA certified sailing instructors, other US Coast Guard licensed captains, and conducted seamanship skills training for law enforcement agencies.

SeaSkills is the resource professionals turn to when they need “help with their short game” (even Tiger Woods has a coach). But it's Peter's amiable enthusiasm that really helps novices, and especially women, develop the tools needed to build a tool box.

### **All-women's training**

It's a fact: Women are better novice helmspersons than men. Why? Because women are more sensitive to minor movements. Women naturally take instruction well, and finally, women are more cautious. If women have one hurdle to learning, it can be lack of confidence. Female students often say: *“Peter, you really have your hands full with me. I will be your worst student ever.”* But they consistently perform and have a great time in the process.

### **½ Day Lessons**

SeaSkills is based in San Francisco CA so local boaters have the benefit of cost effective ½ day lessons. For some intermediate or advanced helmspersons, a single lesson gives them all the tips and tricks they need. For others, a series of lessons – once a week for several weeks in a row work best. It depends on prior experience, boat and how challenging your local conditions are.



*Wendy's first day at the helm –  
She did great & had fun too!*

### ***Weekend Program***

If you are considering attending a school, why not have the school come to you? You will receive better training than if you traveled to a distant location, and your entire family can benefit. With advanced reservations, Peter will fly to your location, often for \$200 - \$300 in airfare with a Saturday night stay over. Or for West Coast locations between Vancouver BC and San Diego, early morning flights with following-day return flights ensures you over 16 hours of intensive instruction. In addition to docking instruction, a typical program also includes:

- Pre-departure engine room checks
- Anchoring
- Crew overboard recovery
- Optimum engine operation guidelines
- Charting & Navigation
- Rules of the Road

### ***Power or Sail, Single or Twin engines***

Single engine boats are notorious for being difficult to handle in close quarters. They can also be difficult to back up. Proven techniques and teaching tools enable you to visualize what is happening so you can practice with a purpose. After all, there is only a rudder and a propeller beneath the boat – once you understand what capabilities you have, you will be able to think through any docking situation.

Twin engine boats are revered for their ability to “split the gears” and spin the boat in place. An effective tool, but knowing some basic techniques will make you an expert helmsperson. For example, did you know that prop walk is even more effective on twins than singles? (Prop walk is a familiar phenomenon to single engine owners – it’s the effect that makes backing in a straight line seemingly impossible, though there are ways to master that too).



*Setting up Spring Lines on this Grand Banks –  
learn to dock without anyone getting off!*

### ***Frequently Asked Questions:***

#### ***I want to learn how to handle heavy winds – let’s start the lesson in the afternoon.***

I strongly recommend starting lessons around mid-morning when conditions are calm. A few basic tools will enable you to “feel” the boat. The wind masks these effects so you cannot build your tool box which is why calm water is great for at least the first lesson. Even experienced helmspersons are started like this – you cannot learn to play the violin while sitting in with the Philharmonic.

#### ***How much does it cost?***

It depends on how much time we’ll be spending together and how far I’ll need to travel. Fees are generally less than having your boat washed. And much, much less than even a small gel-coat repair. Call to discuss – a few questions to determine your needs and you’ll get you an immediate quote.

### ***I don't have a boat, can you teach me on yours?***

No, SeaSkills no longer has a training vessel. Despite never having an insurance claim, insurance fees skyrocketed so it became cost prohibitive. And most clients want to learn on the boat they will be doing most of their boating on.

### ***How big of a boat will you teach on?***

Up to about 100' The largest boat Peter has personally captained was an 85' ½ day excursion boat on San Francisco Bay where he commanded a crew of 5 serving up to 70 passengers, frequently docked over a dozen times a day in very tight quarters. These techniques work – once you learn them, they are fully transferable to almost any sized recreational vessel – power or sail, single or twin.

### ***Do you teach sailing?***

SeaSkills will teach docking a sailboat and will teach offshore seamanship skills, but there are several sailing schools that offer skilled instruction and charter fleets so these are typically better choices.

### ***My spouse has tried to teach me – I'm hopeless***

Nothing inserts more tension into a relationship than trying to teach one another boat handling. Your partner may be the best helmsperson around, but that doesn't mean s/he can teach. Hire someone who is experienced teaching hundreds of different people.

### ***Do you teach more than one person at a time?***

Absolutely. In fact, in fact, there are interesting dynamics to two or three simultaneous students. When you're watching another student drive, you are able to absorb the entire environment and really understand what went wrong. It's an extremely effective learning tool. If you have a couple friends who also want to learn, team up – you'll be glad you did.

### ***Do you teach couples?***

Absolutely. Docking is stressful for many skippers. Consequently, emotions can sometimes flare and voices get raised (see: "yelling"). We can work on smooth communications and roles for docking. Close quarter maneuvers is a choreographed art – the skipper and crew must communicate before the maneuver, just as Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers did.

### ***What other classes do you offer?***

SeaSkills provides advanced training to quickly acquire skills in weather, electronics, heavy weather tactics, and more. Check [www.SeaSkills.com](http://www.SeaSkills.com) for info on classes like:

- **SeaSkills Offshore Bootcamp.** Four times a year, SeaSkills partners with Offshore Ventures to host up to six individuals on 4-day offshore journeys along the rugged Pacific Coast. If you wonder what its like to cruise, this is for you. It includes an overnight passage.
- **SeaSkills Weekend Workshop.** Offered in several different locations, this combines classroom time with on the water demonstrations. Attendees get a lifetime of experience in a weekend.



*Offshore classes too - Gary at the helm of a Nordhavn off Point Arena – Day 4 of an 8 day nonstop passage from Newport Beach to Seattle*