

How to Operate a Freshwater Fishing Boat

Fishing from a boat provides the opportunity to fish in deeper waters and to reach areas of the lake impossible to reach when fishing from shore. Operating a fishing boat, however, requires knowing the characteristics of your boat and...

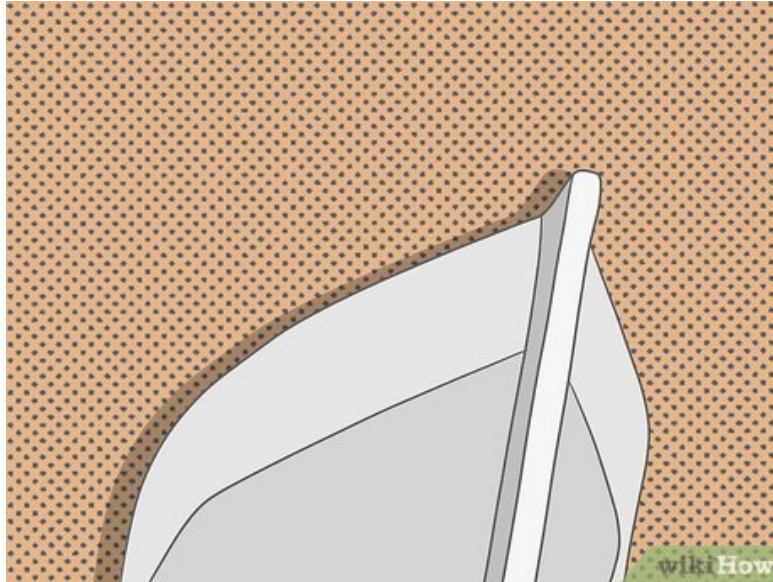
Method 1 of 2:

Operating Your Boat on the Water

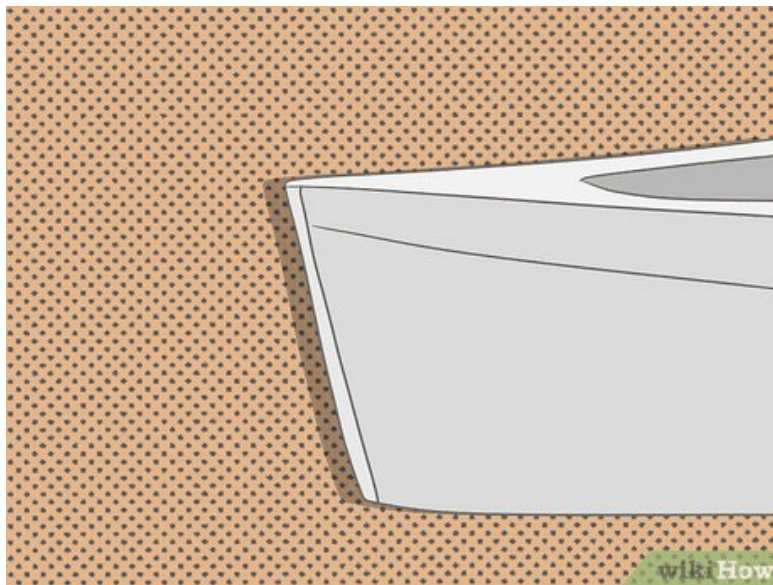


Know the parts of your boat. Although knowing the terminology is only a small part of boating, knowing and understanding the terms for the parts of your boat shows you as a thoughtful boater, concerned with the operation of his or her watercraft.

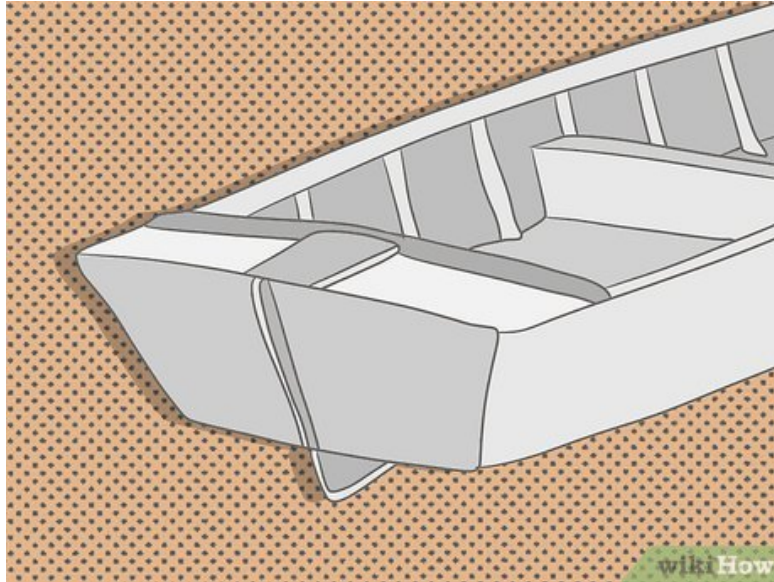
1. The hull is the outer skin of your boat. Most fishing boats have 1 of 3 types of hulls: a V-hull, where the boat tapers to a single point at the front; a tri-hull, where the front comes to 3 points with curves between the points; and a flat-bottomed hull, where the front and back are both squared off. Jon boats are the most common flat-bottomed hull boat, while bass boats are often tri-hull boats but may also be flat-bottom or V-hull boats.



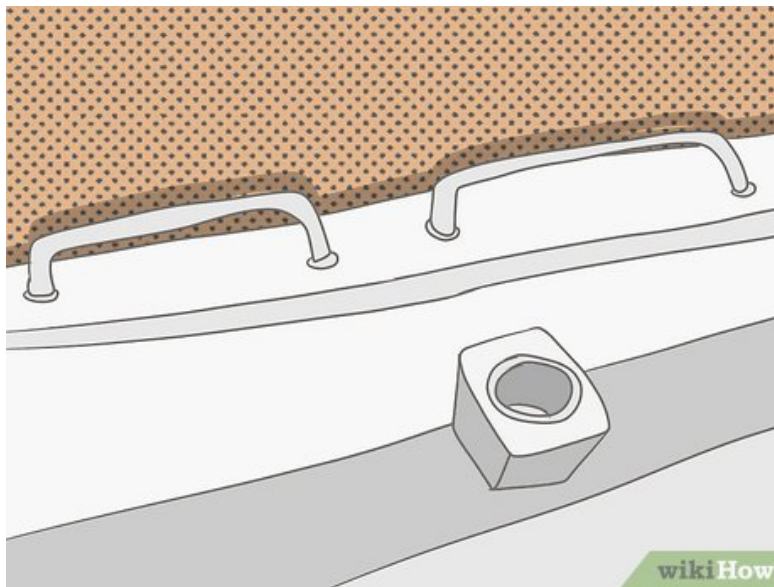
2. The bow is the front of your boat. At lower speeds, it is the part of the boat that cuts through the water, while at higher speeds, it lifts out of the water, causing the boat to go "on plane."



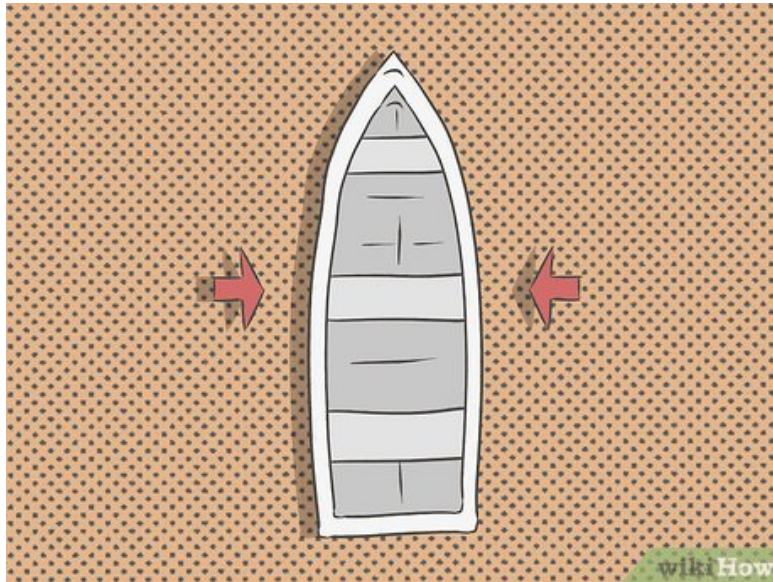
3. The stern is the rear of your boat. On boats other than kayaks or canoes, it is squared off perpendicular to the boat's sides. It is where the boat's main motor is mounted. The material forming the stern is called the "transom;" this word is sometimes used interchangeably with "stern."



4. The gunwales (pronounced and sometimes spelled "gunnels") are the upper parts of your boat's sides.



5. The port side of your boat is the left side, and the starboard side is the right side.



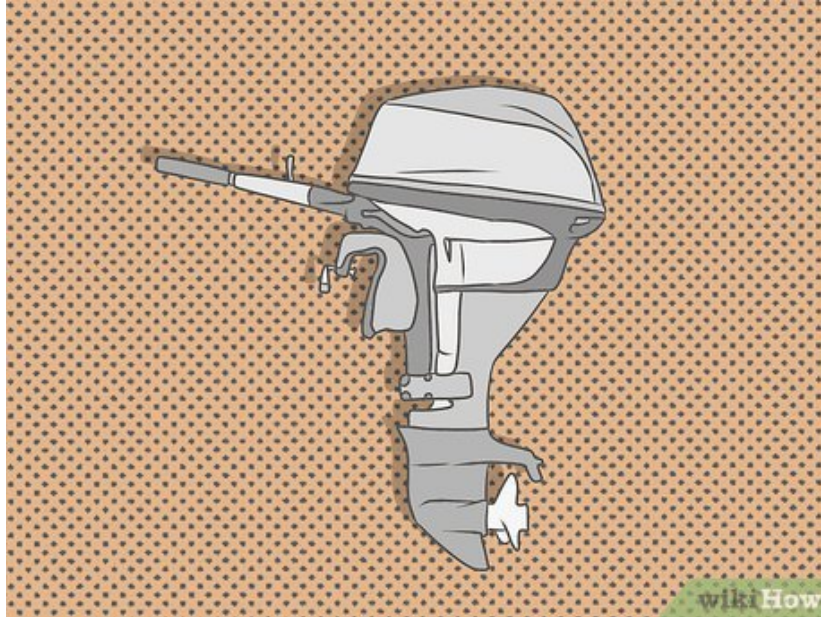
2.



Know how to steer your boat. How you steer your boat depends on how you power it and how powerful the propulsion unit is.

1. If fishing from a rowboat, you propel yourself forward by stroking both oars equally and turn by stroking the oar on the side opposite the direction you want to turn harder: to turn the bow left, stroke the starboard oar harder; to turn the bow right, stroke the port oar harder.
2. Steering a boat powered by an outboard motor depends on how powerful the motor is. Motors of 20 horsepower or less are usually steered with a tiller (collapsible handle), attached to the motor; to steer the boat, point the tiller in the opposite direction from that which you want to point the bow. To steer to port, point the tiller to the right, which turns the propeller to port; to steer to starboard, point the tiller to the left, which turns the propeller to starboard. Larger motors are usually steered from a cockpit with a steering wheel similar to that on a car; turn the wheel in the direction in which you want to point the bow. (Fishing boats with inboard-outboard motors are also steered with a steering wheel unit.)

3. Some outboard-motor equipped boats are steered with a control stick placed near the front or middle seat, allowing the operator greater forward visibility. Moving the stick forward steers the boat in one direction and pulling it back steers it in the other. Stick steering is typically found in boats powered by outboard motors of 50 horsepower or less; some manufacturers rate their controls for use up to 70 horsepower.
4. Fishing boats equipped with stern-mounted electric trolling motors are usually steered by tiller, although some units feature dual-propeller units that mount on the propulsion unit of a larger outboard or inboard-outboard motor. Some boats, notably bass boats, are equipped with bow-mounted trolling motors steered with a foot control pedal. Some control pedals steer by pushing either the top or the bottom of the pedal to steer the boat in a given direction, while others steer by pushing the left side of the pedal to turn the bow to port and the right side to turn to starboard.

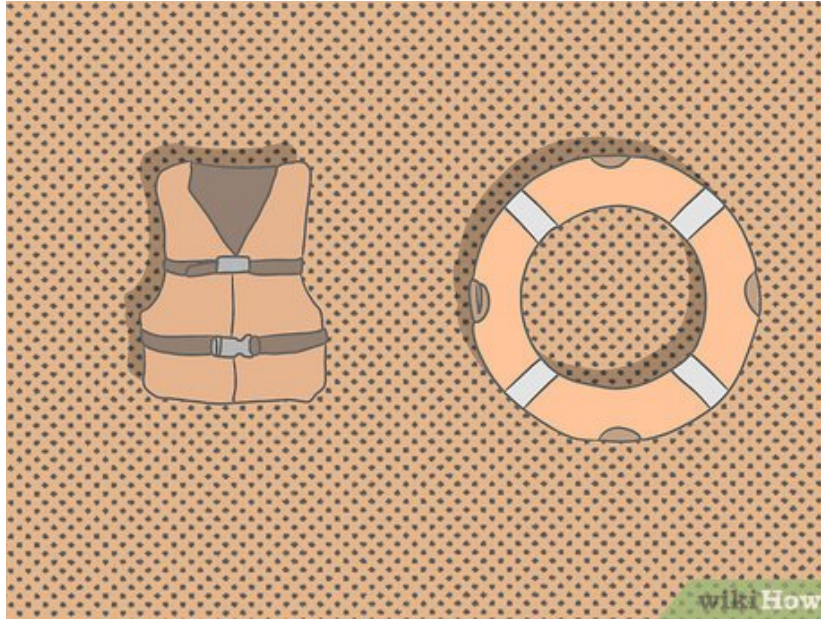


3.

Know how to use your motor's gearshift and throttle. The presence and position of the gearshift and throttle depend on the size of the motor.

1. The smallest motors have no gearshift; most, however, have a gearshift with forward, neutral, and reverse positions, often oriented so that you pull the gearshift lever forward to go forward and push it back to go in reverse. The throttle control is a sliding lever mounted on the front of the motor; sliding the lever to the right makes the motor go faster.
2. Larger outboard motors, and inboard-outboard motors, use lever controls mounted on the gunwale adjacent to the cockpit to control whether the motor runs in forward, neutral, or reverse and how fast it runs.
3. Electric trolling motors may either have set speeds or variable speed controls. All but the smallest tiller-controlled units have forward and reverse, while bow-mounted motors often rely on turning the motor opposite the boat to move it in reverse.
4. Be aware that putting a motor in neutral or stopping an electric motor will not stop the boat. It will instead continue drifting forward at gradually decreasing speed. You can shorten the drift by briefly running the motor in reverse.

4.



Carry all appropriate safety equipment, in good working condition. Important equipment to have aboard includes the following:

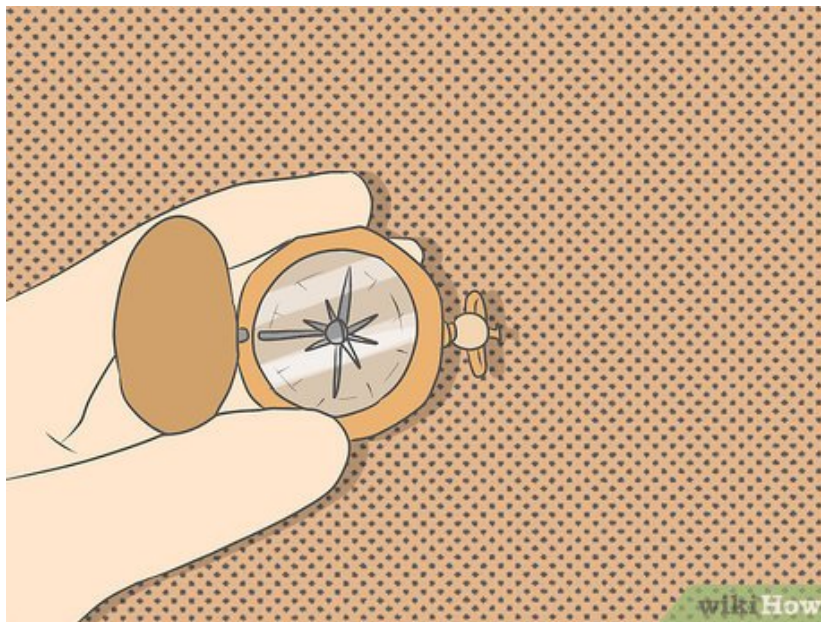
1. Life jackets/personal flotation devices. Most jurisdictions require a life jacket or PFD be available for each person aboard the boat, and children below a certain threshold age should be wearing theirs. It's a good idea to wear yours at all time regardless of your age.
2. Kill switch. This device connects to your motor and your belt; if you're thrown from the boat, it kills the engine so the boat won't continue on the water under power. This can save the lives of other boaters, and yours as well, as boats have been known to turn on their owners.
3. Fire extinguisher. Keep this near enough to the motor to put it out if it catches fire.
4. Rope. In addition to anchor line (described under "Anchoring Your Boat"), you should have rope for tying your boat to the dock and to serve as tow rope, either if you get stranded or to assist a fellow boater.
5. Signaling devices. These include an air horn or whistle, distress flag, and flares.
6. Weather radio. Having a radio on board to alert you to weather changes can be helpful, particularly if you're more focused on catching fish than watching the skies.

5.



Cell phone. Although thought of more for less important communication, you can use a cell phone to call for help in an emergency.

6.



Know where you are on the water and where you're going. Learn to find landmarks on shore to identify your position on the water and observe the positions of other boats on the water relative to you to avoid colliding with one of them or running aground.

7.



Maintain a safe speed at all times. Although some boats are capable of riding "on plane," do so only on open, calm water when no other boats are in the vicinity of the wake you'll create by going that fast. In rough water conditions, go only as fast as necessary to get off the water without getting into a more dangerous predicament.

1. Never go so fast as to cause your hull to porpoise and slap the water. This is called cavitation, and it is often a prelude to losing control of your boat, particularly during a turn.

8.



Watch the weather. Storms can come up suddenly on the water, so pay attention to sudden changes in temperature, cloudiness, or wind direction.

1. It's a good idea to have foul weather gear aboard in case you can't get off the water before a storm hits, such as a waterproof rain parka with elastic cuffs.

9.



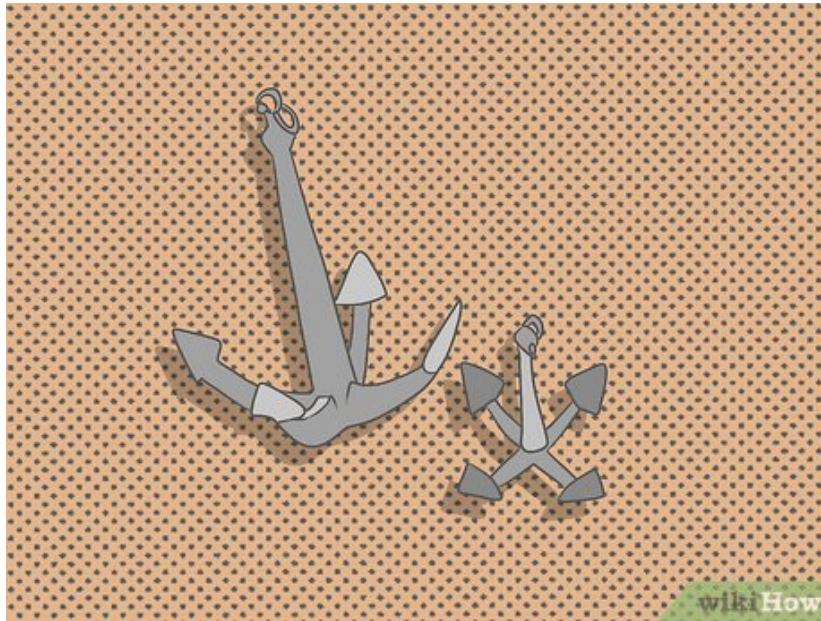
Follow all rules and regulations for operating your boat. The jurisdiction (state, province, or territory) in which you live and operate your fishing boat has established rules and regulations for the operation of boats on its waters. Knowing and following these regulations is sound practice for running your fishing boat.

1. Most jurisdictions require fishing boats over a certain length to be registered and display a license number and stickers identifying the jurisdiction in which the boat is registered. Jurisdictions that require boats to be steam-cleaned before operating on waters used as sources of drinking water also require those boats to bear a sticker identifying the boat as having been steam-cleaned.
2. Some jurisdictions prohibit the use of outboard motors in certain waters or restrict boats to "no wake" operation at slow speeds to prevent shoreline erosion.
3. Major rivers and large lakes may employ navigational buoys or beacons to identify which waters are deep enough for safe boat operation. Keep your boat correctly positioned with respect to these markers.

Method 2 of 2:

Anchoring Your Boat

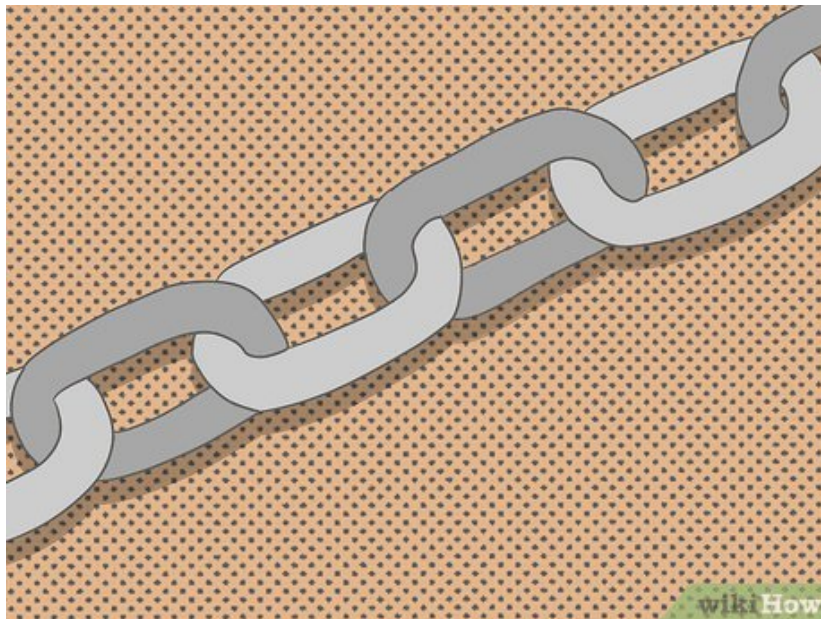
1.



Choose the right kind of anchor. Anchors are available in several types. Those commonly used for fishing boats include the following:

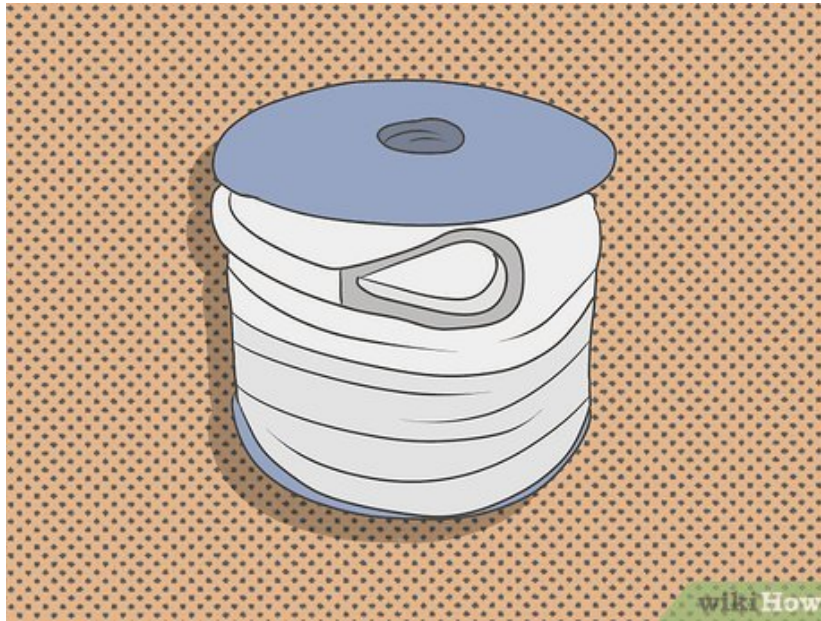
1. Plow-style: This anchor is so named because it resembles a farming plow and gets its holding power from plowing into sediment on the lake or river bottom.
2. Danforth: This anchor has 2 thick, pointed flukes that dig into the bottom to give it its holding power. (Because of its design, the Danforth is also known as a fluke anchor.)
3. Mushroom: This anchor features a round, heavy bottom with a continuous lip and is so named because it resembles a large mushroom. Its holding power comes primarily from how its weight is distributed. It is best suited for smaller boats and not suited for anchoring in choppy water.

2.



Attach a length of galvanized chain to the anchor. Use a length of 3 to 6 feet (0.9 to 1.8 m). The chain will stand up to wear and tear caused by rock, sand, mud, or brush better than a fiber line.

3.



Connect the chain to a sufficient amount of nylon anchor line. This line will stretch and contract as waves lift and lower the boat while it's anchored, absorbing the shock. You'll need to purchase enough line so that you can pay out 5 to 7 times the depth of the water you're fishing in plus the distance from the anchor cleat to the water's surface. If you're fishing in 18 feet (5.4 m) of water and the anchor cleat is 2 feet (0.6 m) above the surface, you'll need to pay out from 100 to 140 feet (30 to 42 m) of anchor line to cover the 20 feet (6 m) from the cleat to the lake or river bottom.

1. The best way to store the anchor line until needed is on a windlass near where you normally sit when fishing or operating the boat with guides to keep the line between the bow cleat and windlass next to the gunwale. Some windlasses feature a hand crank with a quick release feature for lowering the anchor.

4.



Look for as sheltered a place to anchor as you can find. The ideal place should be away from other boats, out of the wind, and away from current.

5.



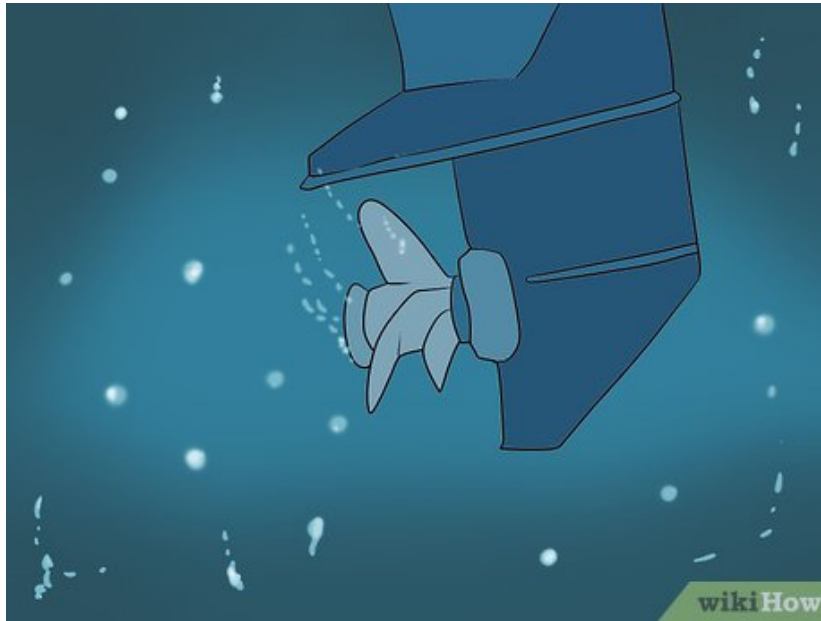
Determine the depth to and type of bottom. A depth sounder can help you find how deep the water is and also help determine whether the bottom is sandy, muddy, or rocky, coupled with your observation of the nearest shoreline.

6.



Point the bow of your boat into the wind or current.

7.



Shift your motor into neutral when you reach the place you want to drop anchor.

8.



Drop anchor slowly once the boat stops moving forward.

9.



Set the engine to idle reverse and back down on the anchor to ensure it is set.

1. Once you have set the anchor, find landmarks to establish your position and check these periodically to make sure your boat isn't drifting.
2. Some anglers use both a bow and a stern anchor. If you choose to do this, always set the bow anchor first, and never use the stern anchor alone; if you do, you risk swamping and capsizing your boat.

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