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dictionary

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Language



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boat·swain also **bo's'n** or **bos'n** or **bo·sun** 🗣️ (bō sən)

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n.
A warrant officer or petty officer in charge of a ship's rigging, anchors, cables, and deck crew.

[Middle English *botswein* : *bot*, boat; see [BOAT](#) + *swein*, mate; see [SWAIN](#).]

Usage Note: The word *boatswain* is pronounced as a single word with two syllables (bō sən). People with sea legs have a long tradition of spelling the word as *bosun*, *bo's'n*, and *bos'n* to reflect the salty pronunciation. This of course has not prevented landlubbers from using the incorrect two-word pronunciation (bōt swān'). Many other nautical words have similarly tricky shipboard pronunciations, including *bowline*, pronounced (bō līn); *forecastle*, pronounced (fōk səl) and sometimes spelled *fo'c's'le*; *gunwale*, pronounced (gūn əl) and also sometimes spelled *gunnel*; *mainsail*, pronounced (mān səl); and *topgallant*, pronounced (tə-gāl ənt). With the exception of *gunwale*, however, all of these terms can be correctly pronounced as if they were two words.

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