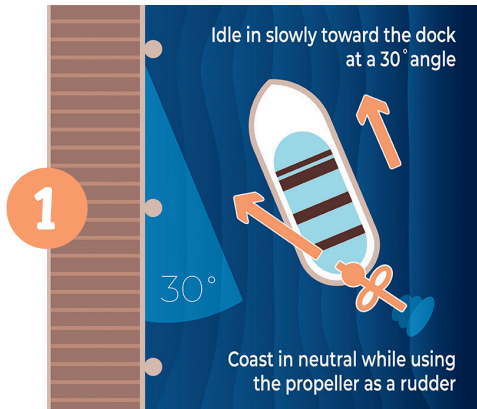


Boat Docking 101

Slow down and pause to get ready

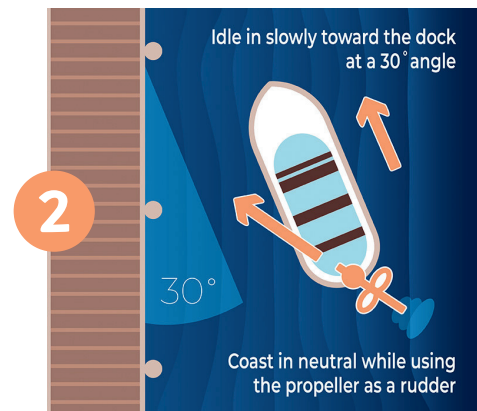


Before approaching a dock, stop 50 yards or so out to affix docking lines fore and aft and position fenders on the side of the boat that will be against the dock.

Approach any dock with just enough headway for steerage, shifting between idle-speed in forward and coasting in neutral to minimize momentum. There's always the chance you'll bump the dock; minimal speed means minimal damage.

Remember, a sterndrive, inboard/outboard or inboard that is coasting ahead in neutral can still be steered using the lower unit as a rudder.

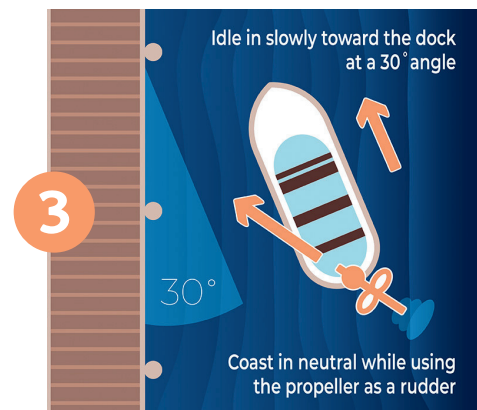
When possible, approach upwind at an angle



It's always best to have any breeze slowing, not increasing, your headway. So whenever possible, maneuver your bow at least partially into a prevailing wind.

Approach a floater or other parallel dock at an angle of 30 to 40 degrees, idling toward the center of the space you plan to occupy and shifting in and out of forward to keep speed to a minimum. As your bow nears the dock, shift to neutral and coast as you steer AWAY from the dock to "flare" your approach. Then, spin the helm TOWARD the dock and apply GENTLE reverse to pull the stern in.

Leave the engine running and secure lines



Docking is NOT a "cut and coast" maneuver. Reverse engine thrust is used to stop headway and assist with final positioning, as detailed in this graphic.

To tie a clean knot, wrap the rope once around the cleat base. Cross over the top in a figure-eight pattern. Finish with a loop (called a locking hitch) over one horn to secure it. Keep it snug—no extra wraps needed.

*Our full blog post, "How to Dock a Boat at Smith Mountain Lake" includes additional tips, plus a link to an instructional video from local boating experts Jerry Hale and Eric Cheney. **[Read it here!](#)***