

# Halyard: Releasing to Lower the Sail

Knowing how to undo a knot or a hitch can be as important as knowing how to do one. Releasing the main sail, especially, can be hazardous if not done in a controlled manner. Also, knowing how to release it quickly and efficiently can be critical in an emergency.



**Step 1:**  
When releasing the halyard with the main sail raised, make sure you maintain a firm grip with one hand on the halyard above the cleat while you undo the hitch.



**Step 2:**  
If the line was secured properly, the full wrap remaining on the cleat will take most of the tension while you undo the figure eight. However, you should still maintain your grip on the halyard above the cleat in case it slips.



**Step 3:**  
When you begin to undo the full wrap, the hand above the cleat will begin to take the tension of the line. Be sure to keep a firm hold so that the line does not run through your hands too soon. Use the hand untying the hitch to begin helping to take the additional tension as you undo the full wrap.



**Step 4:**  
Only when the line has been entirely removed from the cleat should you let the halyard run through your hands and the sail drop. If the line was coiled correctly and doesn't foul, this will only take seconds. Dropping the sail quickly can be critical in a sudden squall or other emergency.

(Note: While this is being demonstrated without the crew member wearing gloves, wearing gloves is strongly recommended to prevent rope burns and allow faster release of the halyard.)

The jib halyard is released the same way from the cleat on the starboard side of the mast.

## Knots: *The Nathan Way*