

## Capsize!

What is the one ‘ize’ word of more than one syllable in the English language that should never be spelled ‘ise’? This is it! According to [Pam Peters](#) it is not from the French/English suffix *-ise/-ize* (from the Greek root *-izein* meaning ‘make or do’) but rather from the Spanish verb *cabezar* (meaning ‘sink by the head’); and we ought not to mess with the Spanish. But I digress.

Often today we hear the (sensible) advice that (all) knots should be carefully woven, dressed and packed (set, or drawn tight) before use. [Ashley](#) knew the exceptions. He wrote: “*There are very few knots, possibly less than a dozen, that may be drawn up properly merely by pulling or jerking at the two ends...* The more elaborate the knot, the more deliberately must it be worked (into shape).” He warned that a careless pull (while tying) could cause a tangle or a capsize (*ABOK* # 80, 81). Generally capsize of a finished knot is to be avoided, as it can be followed by slip and spill of the knot. But sometimes, rarely, it is used to form the desired knot.

This article is about those rare cases where a knot is deliberately dressed in one form before being capsized into another. We shall see that it applies in particular to the most useful asymmetric structure in knotting: the nub of the Sheet Bend.

Without doubt the most useful of these cases (and the foundation for most others) is the so-called Short End Bend (*ABOK* #1473, 2562), which is a way to tie a Sheet Bend when one end is very short. The stub must not be too short to form the bight or U-turn in the Sheet Bend nub after capsize. Depending on cordage properties, about 5 line diameters is the minimum. The likelihood of a spill is higher with a short tail. The direction of passage of the stub through the noose determines whether a *cis* (direct or right-handed) or *trans* (oblique or left-handed) Sheet Bend will result. When tied around a parcel or roll, Ashley calls the same trick a Lock Knot (*ABOK* #1990). The method has been adapted in crafts as diverse as angling (*ABOK* #335) and bookbinding (*ABOK* #177).

It is a hitch that is capsized into a bend; or a hitch around its own stand (a noose), capsized into a bend involving its own stand (a fixed eye knot). As the nub of a Bowline Knot (a fixed eye) is a Sheet Bend structure, the same trick can be applied (eg *ABOK* #1014). Ashley described a series of variants as Crabber’s Eye and Flagstaff Knots (*ABOK* # 1987-1989). After the obligatory capsize, the nubs are Sheet Bends. The loading is peculiar in some cases (like a tail-loaded Inuit or Quallunat Bowline), which is not generally recommended, but passable with low loads.

In several cases, Ashley showed the trick with additional turns, as a ‘Jam/Jamming’ hitch-bend (*ABOK* #1471), or noose-fixed eye (*ABOK* #1991, 1992). In such cases it may be necessary to pull on several parts to obtain the desired capsize; which will always be more difficult with additional turns or with a larger or stiffer substrate. It is difficult to tie a Double Sheet Bend by capsize, and even a Short End Bend may not capsize with a stiff substrate.

If the capsize fails, the knot remains as a hitch or noose; and the friction may be insufficient for the intended use. In some uses (depending on the amount and directions of load) there is a danger that the knot may capsize back into an undesired form. The Oysterman’s Stopper Knot (*ABOK* #526) can be formed this way, without capsize.

