[**Averjoe**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11130-averjoe/)

* Bilge Rat
* 
* 
* Member
* 3 posts

([IP: 69.171.205.111](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/modcp/ip-tools/&ip=69.171.205.111)) ·

[Posted January 1, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=findComment&comment=376500) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=reportComment&comment=376500)

I need some historical information, and the knowledgeable people here seem to be the ones to ask. I need to know what would be the minimum crew needed to sail and fight with a 10 gun Bermuda sloop. Also, info on the specific make-up of the crew members would be very useful.

Thanks

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=edit)

[**Dutchman**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/6150-dutchman/)

* Has anyone seen my cousin?
* 
* 
* Admin
* 1,773 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:tidewater virginia

([IP: 165.176.50.253](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/modcp/ip-tools/&ip=165.176.50.253)) · · 

[Posted January 1, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=findComment&comment=376503) (edited) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=reportComment&comment=376503)

i'll start.

what sort of crew are we talking, merchant, navy or pirate?

crew size depends on the size of the ship and type of guns, not just # of guns. a ten gunner on carriages if done properly would need four crew per gun and a monkey. as opposed to ten rail guns which would only need one or two. Then the captain, the navigator, the bosun ,the surgeon, the cook, the master at arms, the carpenter, the sail master, stivadors, midshipmen, forecrew, top crew, a steward . . . . . .

reality. . . .

navy, as above if fully crewed and probably some i forgot

merchant- figure minimal crew needed and just a cuple guns worth of dedicated gunners if they are running, they are only going to use one side of battery at a time more than likely.

pirate- fill her with crew till she sinks, but still rough to say. BB was reported to have 400 under his command at one point in the fleet, but had around 20 at ocracoke on a bermuda sloop that was probably in the 50 to 70 foot range.

do an online search for A Seamans Grammar by Capt. John Smith- there is a downloadable version that will have a lot of crew specific info that should help you out.

what ya workin on?

**Edited January 1, 2010 by bbcddutchman**

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=editComment&comment=376503)
* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/#elControls_376503_menu)

[**Averjoe**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11130-averjoe/)

* Bilge Rat
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* 
* Member
* 3 posts

([IP: 69.171.205.111](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/modcp/ip-tools/&ip=69.171.205.111)) · · 

[Posted January 1, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=findComment&comment=376510) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=reportComment&comment=376510)

Thanks for the reply 

I'm working on a pirate RPG. My players will be a pirate crew, but I wanted to keep the total number of crew as low as possible and still make for a ship that could sail and fight at full effectiveness. I'm downloading "A Seamans Grammar as I type. It should indeed be useful.

Game is set circa the early 1700s. I'm not really going for full realism, but I would like to have some level a verisimilitude. I figure the boat to be a Bermuda or Jamaican sloop, somewhere in the 70 foot range and carrying 8-10 six-pounders. Still toying with the idea of making it a brig-sloop. I never realized the dizzying array of types of vessels operating in the Caribbean at the time until I started doing a little research. 

Tomorrow I am going to a local library to pick up a copy of *Pirates: terror on the high seas in the Caribbean and South China Sea* by David Cordingly that was referenced in this [thread](http://pyracy.com/index.php?showtopic=14638&view=&hl=sloop&fromsearch=1) and hopefully it will also help. However, I figured that there would be someone here that could give me a more informed answer to my question than I could likely work out on my own.

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=editComment&comment=376510)
* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/#elControls_376510_menu)

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* 
* 
* Admin
* 5,083 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

([IP: 64.241.37.140](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/modcp/ip-tools/&ip=64.241.37.140)) · · 

[Posted January 2, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=findComment&comment=376515) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=reportComment&comment=376515)

For tactical pirate and privateer info as well as an outstanding reference list, I highly recommend the book *The Sea Rover's Practise: Pirate Tactics and Techniques, 1630-1730* by Benerson Little. The first couple of chapters are a bit wordy and know-it-allish, but once he starts getting into the tactical info, it really picks up. The appendices alone would be worth your time.

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=editComment&comment=376515)
* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/#elControls_376515_menu)

[**Daniel**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/352-daniel/)

* Pyrate Captain
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* Member
* 652 posts
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* Location:McLean, VA
* Interests:History, pirates, fiction, writing, writing historical fiction about pirates, jokes, games, law.

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[Posted January 6, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=findComment&comment=376788) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=reportComment&comment=376788)

"Minimum" is a tricky word here. Captain England once captured a sloop off West Africa that had only two men on board. I'm guessing that was just an anchor watch, and the rest of the crew were on shore. When Ned Low's men released George Roberts, he sailed a sloop with just himself and two boys, but he would never have done that willingly, and they would have been utterly exhausted after a very short time. 13 to 18 men would have been a more typical crew for an 8-gun merchant vessel, judging by England's other captures.

As for fighting, again, theoretically any number can fight. You need a bare minimum of three men to man a gun: one man to each tackle and a gunner to do the priming and handle the linstock. A fourth man to do the loading is far preferable, and is enough for the four-pounder guns typical on a sloop. Assuming that your ten-gun sloop has five guns on each broadside (most ten-gun sloops would not have mounted a bow or stern chaser), you need 15 men to fire the complete broadside, very clumsily and inefficiently. 20 could make a creditable show of it. If the sloop has only four guns to a broadside, with the other two mounted as chase guns, then you can fire your whole broadside with a minimum of 12 men, but 16 would be ideal. In practice, many merchant vessels didn't have enough men (or ammo!) to work even one complete broadside.

Of course, this is stretching the crew very thin. With a 12-man crew, the minute you take any casualties, or somebody gets scurvy, at least one gun will fall out of action. And the captain may be stuck manning the tiller himself if all his men are busy at the guns. If the rigging gets shot up and needs repairs or a riddled sail has to be replaced, men will have to abandon the guns to go take care of the job. So it pays to have more crew than the bare minimum.

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=editComment&comment=376788)
* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/#elControls_376788_menu)

[**Coastie04**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/27-coastie04/)

* Dread Pyrate
* 
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* Member
* 1,008 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Juneau, AK
* Interests:Nautical history, sailing (especially tall ships and my own 'Sanctioned Mistress'), shooting (of all eras and calibers), and homebrewing.

([IP: 206.174.82.177](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/modcp/ip-tools/&ip=206.174.82.177)) · · 

[Posted January 7, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=findComment&comment=376812) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=reportComment&comment=376812)

My time sailing the 112 foot brig Lady Washington might provide some insight here. Soon after I reported onboard as a new and unproven crew member, we had a bit of a crew shortage. We had the captain, a cook, and three deckhands. And, we were setting/dousing sail up to twice a day for three hour sails. Combine that with some dockside tours and it got rather exhausting. However, out at sea, without any fighting to do, it could have easily been done for a matter of days or weeks...provided there were no major storms either. In other words, back in the day sailing with that few crew would have been feasable, but risky. A full crew on that boat is 12 people. That is without fighting, though there are two 3-pounders and two swivel guns that are used in battle sails, and with the constant sail changing and maneuvering done for the short passenger sails, you could probably relate that to a running battle. However, there is also evidence that when a similar vessel was a man of war, there would be a compliment of 12-18 sailors and up to 50 marines onboard. That would be with many more cannons, I'm sure, but also a very formidable fighting ship of her size. Unarmed coastal schooners during the 19th Century sometimes carried as little crew as the captain, two deckhands, and a ship's boy. So sailing the boat wasn't necessarily the problem. But, if you want an efficient fighting machine, then you would need to stack crew and fighting stores as much as possible. The drawback to this, is that you would need to probably have enough extra able bodies to crew a prize vessel, as your boat would not be able to carry much extra loot once you've captured an enemy.

An additional thought. Many boats used quakers, or fake cannons, in order to appear more powerful than they really were. They wouldn't have to man these 'guns', but an enemy would think that they were real and feel that they were going up against a superior foe. If you could capture a ship without a fight, that was far better than the risk of getting people killed!

Coastie

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=editComment&comment=376812)
* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/#elControls_376812_menu)

[**Averjoe**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/11130-averjoe/)

* Bilge Rat
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* 
* Member
* 3 posts

([IP: 69.171.205.111](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/modcp/ip-tools/&ip=69.171.205.111)) · · 

[Posted January 7, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=findComment&comment=376868) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=reportComment&comment=376868)

Wow, lot's a great information. I believe I've settled on a crew of about fifty men, but I have a better idea now of how that will impact their effectiveness in battle.

Many thanks to you all.

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=editComment&comment=376868)
* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/#elControls_376868_menu)

[**Daniel**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/352-daniel/)

* Pyrate Captain
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* Location:McLean, VA
* Interests:History, pirates, fiction, writing, writing historical fiction about pirates, jokes, games, law.

([IP: 70.242.164.88](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/modcp/ip-tools/&ip=70.242.164.88)) · · 

[Posted January 7, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=findComment&comment=376891) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=reportComment&comment=376891)

 On 1/7/2010 at 1:45 AM, Coastie04 said:

My time sailing the 112 foot brig Lady Washington might provide some insight here. Soon after I reported onboard as a new and unproven crew member, we had a bit of a crew shortage. We had the captain, a cook, and three deckhands.

How did you handle the watches, Coastie? Did the cook or the captain stand a watch? Or did just the three deck hands stand watch, with one of them forming (gulp) a one-man watch?

And wouldn't you have to call both watches on deck every time you tacked? One person at the helm, at least one person hauling braces, one person hauling the tack, and one person hauling the jib sheets? I'd think that would leave people short of sleep.

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=editComment&comment=376891)
* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/#elControls_376891_menu)

[**Coastie04**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/27-coastie04/)

* Dread Pyrate
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* 
* Member
* 1,008 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Juneau, AK
* Interests:Nautical history, sailing (especially tall ships and my own 'Sanctioned Mistress'), shooting (of all eras and calibers), and homebrewing.

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[Posted January 8, 2010](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=findComment&comment=376912) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/16339-minimum-crew-for-a-10-gun-sloop/&do=reportComment&comment=376912)

Well, as we were in port each night when we were short handed, we didn't have watches. We had the captain at the helm, the cook below doing his blessed duties, and three deckhands. The main point is that if it had been necessary, we could have had two person watches (captain standing a watch, and maybe the cook helping out for all hands maneuvering at times) and just called all hands for major maneuvering. And, one person can trim the sails while the other is at the helm. For an ocean voyage, that would have worked, though it would obviously not have been as safe because in rough weather, more crew is needed. I was using that as an extreme example, such as a prize crew or what could have been done in a case of severe disease, heavy losses in battle, etc. For most ocean voyages, there actually isn't that much maneuvering called for. You can go days or even weeks without adjusting the sails. Also, tacking would probably be out of the question; wearing ship (jibing for square riggers) is much easier and safer when short handed. 12 crew could have fought the ship, though poorly and without much ability to deal with losses. More of a merchant trying desperately to defend herself. 50 would have been cramped (at least by today's standards), but there would have been enough room for food, water, and other necessary stores. Plus, there would be extra people for the necessary daily tasks of cleaning, maintaining the boat, maintaining the armarment, and providing a worthy adversary to any reasonably sized opponent.

Coastie