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If you're looking for your next surfboard, it may seem like the cheapest one is the best since it's more bang for the buck. This is especially the case if it's your first surfboard. The boards look similar enough, how much of a difference could a few inches make?

The answer is a ton. Besides the foam used and the overall shape or outline, your surfboard's dimensions are the biggest factor in how your board will ride. You want to make sure you have a general understanding of surfboard dimensions so that you can pick the best size surfboard for your style, skill level, and wave conditions.

We'll break down what the major dimensions for a surfboard are. We'll look at how they affect wave riding and what sizes are best for what. By the end of this, you'll know exactly what kind of board your next board should be.

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What Goes Into Surfboard Dimensions

The main dimensions you'll see in a surfboard are its length, width, thickness, and volume. Obviously, the more of each of these there are, the easier your board will be to paddle and stand up on. But, it may also make your board so large it's completely unrideable. So, it's important to know how each affects the way your board rides.

All of these dimensions work together to affect how your board rides. If you want a high volume board, your board will have to be longer. Though you could just make a thicker board, that board would ride much differently than other boards its length. None of these dimensions can be drastically changed without changing the others. If a board only drastically changes one of these dimensions, it won't ride very well and will inhibit you from ripping your hardest.

Length

Length is the easiest dimension to understand. Length will also dictate all of the other dimensions.

The more length the higher volume your board will be and most likely the surfboard will be thicker and wider.

Though a shorter board could still have a high volume, this causes all kinds of weird things to happen with the board. These kinds of boards usually don't ride how you would expect.



Length most noticeably affects your ability to paddle and turn. The longer your board, the easier will paddle. If you get a 9 foot log, it will go much faster than a 6 foot shortboard. This is just due to the amount of momentum each is able to build and how well the board can plane on the water.

When it comes to turning your board, the shorter board will be much easier to throw around. Going back to our example, changing direction on the 6 foot surfboard is far easier than a log.

Shorter surfboards are also easier to ride when the waves become steeper. Since there is less length, there is less board in front of you that can nose dive in the water and through you off. This is why surfers prefer shorter boards in more critical surf.

When looking for surfboards, you want to decide what you need more: paddle power or maneuverability. That answer will determine how long your board should be in a general sense of longer or shorter.

Width

A surfboard's width will determine how stable the board feels under your feet. The number you see for width describes how wide your surfboard is at its widest point.

The downside of having a really wide board is that it becomes very hard to turn. It can feel like standing on a table which is a good thing if you are just learning how to surf. But if you are becoming more and more experienced, you may find that you want to get a narrower board.

One other thing to mention about width has to do with outlines. The more leaf-like the outline, the easier it is to have a wide base but still be able to turn. However, these outlines are slower on the wave face. Boards with straight rails that maintain a similar width through the whole surfboard will go much faster.

Thickness



Thickness is the thickness of your rails and not necessarily the thickness of the entire board.

If your deck has a concave or rounded deck, it may be thinner or thicker than the stated thickness.

Thickness really affects the buoyancy of your board. With thicker rails, your board will have more volume and float better. With thinner rails, surfboards won't sit as high on the water.

It may seem like it's always better to have thick rails then if it keeps your surfboard buoyant. Thicker rails are hard to engage in the water when you turn. This can make it hard to keep control if you are going fast or are surfing larger, powerful surf. Thinner rails can more easily bite into the face of the wave giving you more control.

Volume

Volume is a pretty new metric for measuring dimension and is measured in liters even though everything else in surfing doesn't use the metric system. When boards were primarily hand shaped, no one knew how many liters were in a given board. With the rise of shapers using CDC machines to help them shape, surfboard makers can now keep track of volume, though it can be imperfect at best.

Volume directly tells you how much float your surfboard has. More volume equals more float. If your board has less volume, it will definitely be harder to learn on since it will be less stable and feel like it's sinking.

Volume is a great way to figure out how to find the perfect surfboards for your ability and weight. If you look at a [surfboard volume calculator](#), it will tell you the best volume board that you should be riding.

Volume is a great tool to figure out which surfboards you should be riding for your weight. You don't want your board to sit too high on the water because it's too big. Nor do you want your surfboard to sink from your weight. Knowing volumes will help you pick a board that will help you rip harder.

One thing to note about volume is that it is more critical to know when looking at shortboards. Longboards have huge volumes and you'll never find a longboard at your ideal shortboard volume. The boards are not meant to be surfed in the same way so the way volume affects their riding ability is different.

Though not as scientific, where the volume is placed is important for knowing how surfboards will work. If there is more volume and foam towards the nose or under where your chest goes, you will be able to paddle that board more easily, even if it is an overall smaller board. If the volume is somewhere else it may affect how the board reacts on the face of the wave.



Other Dimensions to Be Aware of

Bottoms

There is a lot going on in the bottom of a surfboard. Concave, double concave, rocker. Most of these have to do with how water will move under your board. Water likes to fill concaves giving your board lift on the wave face.

Tails

The shape of your tail has a huge effect on how your surfboard rides. The narrower your board's tail, the faster you will be able to ride and the more connection you will feel to the wave. The wider your tail is, the easier you will be able to turn. Tail shapes like swallow tails split the difference and try to give you the best of both worlds.



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Category: Surfing • By Milano Walker • March 20, 2021



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