



SURFING

Useful Terms & Phrases



**E he'e nalu kākou!/
E pae pū kākou!**
We go surf!

backwash

nalu miki, kai he'e

E akahēle i ka nalu miki. 'A'ohe nao 'ai i ka pāpa'a!
(Watch out for the backwash. It makes for a terrible situation!)

bad day, as for surfing

lā maika'i 'ole

'A'ole kēia he lā he'e nalu maika'i nou.²
(This is not a good day for you to surf.)

barreled, covered, shacked

holo i loko o ka nalu e po'i iho ana (riding in a wave that is curling over),
ho'ēkepue (to crouch, to hide, as inside a wave)

Ua holo 'o ia i loko o ka hahale nalu nui e po'i iho ana. He koa ka mea hele ho'okahi i 'O'opuloa.
(She rode in a huge barrel. Only a warrior dares to go alone to 'O'opuloa [said of a venture fit only for the brave].³)

barreling wave

'ale kāwaha, hahale nalu, halehale po'ipū

Ua ho'ēkepue 'o ia i loko o ka 'ale kāwaha e po'i iho ana.
(She crouched and hid in a barreling wave.)

big, high, towering, as a wave

halehale (also means cavernous)

Halehale ka nalu.
(The waves are huge, like houses.)

brainless

hāwa'e 'i'o 'ole

He hāwa'e 'i'o 'ole 'o ia.
(He is a sea urchin without meat;⁴ brainless.)

bummer; disappointment, frustration

hoka

Hoka! Wahi a ka lohe, he nalu nui ko 'ane'i. Ahu ka pala naio.⁵
(Bummer! I heard there would be big waves here. But that was a pile of pinworm-infested poop residue.)

calm, settled, as surf

akaku'u

Ua akaku'u iki mai nei ka ha'i a ka nalu.⁶
(The surf has calmed down a bit.)⁷

choppy	hānupanupa	Hānupanupa ke kai. <i>(The sea is choppy.)</i>
cool , as in excellent; streamlined, sleek	mio	Auē ka mio ē o ua nalu lā! <i>(Wow, that was a cool wave!)</i>
crowd gathered to watch an event , like spectators	‘aha māka‘ika‘i	‘Uā ka pihe o ka ‘aha māka‘ika‘i. <i>(The crowd of spectators made an uproar.)</i>
destroyed, overwhelmed; tumbled, capsized; washing machine, cockroach down the toilet	luma‘i‘ia	Auē! Ua luma‘i‘ia iho nei ‘o ia. Aloha ‘ino! <i>(Oh no! He just got destroyed. Poor thing!)</i>
drop in (probably a more contemporary concept as waves were traditionally ridden together)	kau ma mua ma ka nalu ho‘okahi	Ua kau ‘o ia ma mua o‘u ma ka nalu ho‘okahi. <i>(He dropped in on me.)</i>
drown	piholo	‘Ane‘ane piholo kēia. <i>(I almost drowned.)</i>
dry , as reef at low tide	‘a‘aka	‘A‘aka ke kohola ma ‘ō. <i>(It’s dry reef over there.)</i>
duckdive	hō‘alu, lu‘u aku a aea mai	Ua pau ku‘u aho i ka hō‘alu ‘ana. A ‘o ‘oe? <i>(I’m exhausted from duckdiving. And you?)</i>
expert, hero	kā‘e‘a‘e‘a	He kā‘e‘a‘e‘a pulu ‘ole kēlā he‘e nalu. ⁸ <i>(That is an expert surfer who does not get wet.)</i>
good day , as for surfing	lā maika‘i	He lā he‘e nalu maika‘i kēia nou. <i>(This is a good day for you to surf.)</i>
good selection , as in choosing waves	koho pono	Ua koho pono ‘o ia i ka nalu. ‘Ā ‘oia! <i>(He made a good wave selection. That’s how!)</i>
graceful, smooth , as in a surfer surfing	he‘e wahine	<i>He‘e wahine ‘o Kamaka.</i> <i>(Kamaka surfs gracefully.)</i>
greedy , like a wave hog	‘ānunu	Mai ‘ānunu i ka nalu. E ka‘ana like mai nō, me a‘u ho‘okahi wale nō ho‘i! <i>(Don’t be a wave hog. Share, but only with me!)</i>
high tide	kai piha	Āhea e piha ai ke kai? <i>(When is high tide?)</i>
home break	‘āina nalu, nalu kama‘āina, nalu o ka ‘āina	‘O ku‘u ‘āina nalu kēia. <i>(This is my home break.)</i>
keiki (children’s) break	kūlana nalu no kamali‘i	He wahi kūlana nalu no kamali‘i, no ka wahine a me kākānaka makua maka‘u wale. ⁹ <i>(There’s a break for small children and for women and men who are afraid.)</i>
kick , as a bodysurfer	ke‘ehi	Ke‘ehi ka wāwae a ikaika i ka nalu. <i>(The feet kick hard onto the wave.)¹⁰</i>

last wave	nalu pau loa, nalu hope loa	Ke kali nei au i ko'u nalu pau loa e pae ai i uka. <i>(I'm waiting for my last wave to ride to shore.)</i>
left/right break	holo hema/'ākau ka pae'ana o ka nalu	Holo hema ka pae'ana o ka nalu 'o 'Aiwohi. <i>('Aiwohi [Publics] is a left break.)¹¹</i>
lend , as in a board; to give something and ask for it back (surfboards are usually lent)	hā'awi papa he'e nalu	Ua hā'awi papa he'e nalu 'o ia i kēia papa. <i>(He lent me this board.)</i>
lineup	kūlana nalu	Pa'apū ke kūlana nalu i ka po'e he'e nalu. <i>(The lineup is crowded with surfers.)</i>
low tide	kai malo'o	He kai malo'o paha kēia? <i>(Is it low tide?)</i>
paddle , as for a wave	halo, ho'ōma	E halo kou mau lima a pae 'oe i ka nalu, a paupauaho ho'i! <i>(Paddle your arms until you're on the wave, and out of breath!)</i>
paddle , as out to the lineup	'au	E 'au aku kāua i ka he'e nalu. <i>(Let's—you and I—paddle out to surf.)</i>
party wave (traditionally, that was most every wave that was surfed)	pae pū	Le'ale'a ka pae pū 'ana ma ka nalu ho'okahi. Ua lawe 'ia mai paha ke kipi? <i>(Party waves are fun. Did anyone bring potato chips?)</i>
pearl dive, submerge the board	'ō'ia	'O ke akamai nō o nei mea he he'e nalu, 'o ka 'ō'ia 'ole 'ia o ka papa e ka nalu. ¹² <i>(Good surfers don't pearl dive.)¹³</i>
poor selection , as in choosing waves	pono koho	Ua pono koho 'o ia i ka nalu. <i>(He made a poor wave selection, just choosing any kind of wave.)</i>
rail , of a board	nīao	<i>E ho'opa'a pono 'ia ka nīao i 'ole e pohā ka lae. (Hold on tight to the rails so you don't crack your forehead.)</i>
rise , as in surf	kū	Ua kū mai ka nalu. <i>(Surf's up.)</i>
set of waves	kaka'i nalu	Eia a'e kekahi kaka'i nalu. E ho'omākaukau! <i>(Here comes a set of waves. Get ready!)</i>
shorebreak	po'ina one	He po'ina one wale nō. <i>(Only get shorebreak.)</i>



skilled, expert	akamai (smart, clever), mākaukau (competent, proficient, versed, prepared)	Lalilali 'ole ka 'ili o ke akamai. ¹⁴ <i>(The skin of the skilled [surfer] is not soaked.)</i>
smooth and even, of the sea; glassy	alanie	Alanie ke kai. <i>(The sea is smooth and glassy.)</i> ¹⁵
spit out, as a surfer out of a barrel	puhi 'ia	Hō, ua puhi 'ia aku nei 'o ia mai ka 'ale kāwaha mai! <i>(Whoah, she just got spit out of the barrel!)</i>
spray	kāhilihili, makakai	Kāhilihili ke kai a ka he'e nalu. ¹⁶ <i>(The seawater of the surfer sprays.)</i>
superior, greatest	'oi kelakela	'O Ka'ahumanu kekahi o nā 'oi kelakela o ke akamai ma ka pākākā nalu 'ana. ¹⁷ <i>(Ka'ahumanu was one of the greatest canoe surfers.)</i>
to surf	he'e nalu, pae	E he'e nalu kākou. <i>(Let's—3+ people—go surf.)</i>
surf meet	ho'okūkū he'e nalu	E mālama 'ia ana ka ho'okūkū he'e nalu i kēia pule a'e. <i>(The surf meet is going to be held next week.)</i>
swell that doesn't break, a small comber	'ōpu'u	'Ōhū mai he wahi nalu 'ōpu'u. ¹⁸ <i>(A small, non-breaking comber swells up.)</i>
tossed, hurled, dashed; washing machine, cockroach down the toilet	kā 'ia	'O ka po'e akamai o kahi 'ē i ka he'e nalu, a hele i laila, e kā 'ia ana i kēlā wahi nalu. ¹⁹ <i>(Those from other places who are good at surfing and go there, they will be tossed by that wave.)</i>
turn of the tide	kai moku	I ko'u mana'o, he kai moku kēia. <i>(I think the tide is turning.)</i>
unskilled, awkward, clumsy, incompetent; kook	hāwāwā, mā'uka'uka	Hāwāwā ka he'e nalu. ²⁰ <i>(The surfer is unskilled.)</i>
wave	nalu, 'ale	'O ko'u nalu kēia. <i>(This is my wave [can be used to call someone off]).</i> 'O kou nalu kēia. ²¹ <i>(This is your wave.)</i>
whitecaps	'ale kuakea	Ahuwale ka 'ale kuakea o Māeaea. <i>(Can clearly see the whitecaps at Māeaea [Hale'iwa].)</i>

TYPES OF TRADITIONAL HAWAIIAN SURFING

bodyboarding	pae po’o, he’e pūmai’a	E hele kāua i ka pae po’o. (Let’s—you and I—go bodyboarding.)
drop knee/ Jack stance	he’e ho’okahi kuli	Ua walea ’o ia ma ka he’e ho’okahi kuli’ana. (His drop kneeling is effortless.)
bodysurfing	kaha nalu, he’e umauma	E kaha nalu ana ’o Kalani. (Kalani is/will be bodysurfing.)
kneeboard surfing	he’e kukuli	E he’e kukuli ana paha ’oe? (Are you going to kneeboard surf?)
outrigger canoe surfing	pākākā nalu/’ale	E hele nui kākou i Kapuni e pākākā ’ale ai! (Let’s all go to Kapuni [Canoes] to canoe surf!)
river surfing	he’e pu’e wai	Ua kaulana ’o Hilo i ka he’e pu’e wai. (Hilo was famous for river surfing.)
sand sliding	he’e one	Makemake au e a’o i ka he’e one. (I want to learn how to sand slide.)
stand-up board surfing	he’e nalu	Can you teach me how to surf? (Hiki paha iā ’oe ke a’o mai ia’u i ka he’e nalu?)

NOTES from pages 1–4

- 1 Pukui, ‘Ōlelo No’eau #194
- 2 Kuokoa Home Rula 12/4/1908
- 3 Pukui, ‘Ōlelo No’eau #697
- 4 Pukui & Elbert, *Hawaiian Dictionary* (1986), 62
- 5 Pukui, ‘Ōlelo No’eau #15
- 6 Kuokoa 12/30/1865
- 7 See Clark, *Hawaiian Surfing* (2011), 47.
- 8 Pukui & Elbert, *Hawaiian Dictionary*, 109
- 9 Kuokoa 5/14/1870
- 10 See Kuokoa 5/28/1870; Clark, *Hawaiian Surfing*, 235.
- 11 See Kuokoa 5/14/1870.
- 12 *Ka Na’i Aupuni* 9/27/1906
- 13 See Clark, *Hawaiian Surfing*, 331; Kuokoa Home Rula 12/11/1908.
- 14 Emerson, *Unwritten Literature of Hawaii* (1909), 36
- 15 See Kuokoa 8/19/1865; Kamakau, *Tales and Traditions of the People of Old* (1991), 46.
- 16 Pukui & Elbert, *Hawaiian Dictionary*, 112
- 17 See Kuokoa 4/30/1870.
- 18 Andrews, *Dictionary of the Hawaiian Language* (1865), 110
- 19 Kuokoa 5/14/1870
- 20 Pukui, ‘Ōlelo No’eau #504
- 21 Kuokoa 12/30/1865

To learn more about the history, traditions, and language of Hawaiian surfing, see John R. K. Clark’s *Hawaiian Surfing: Traditions from the Past*.

