That is why

What is the difference between a school and a shoal of fish?

A shoal is any group of fish that stay together. A school is a shoal swimming in step, same speed, same direction.

A Shoal vs school

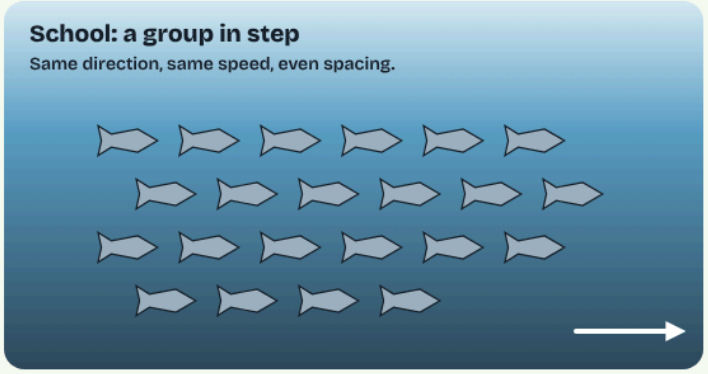
Shoal: a loose group

Fish stay together but each faces its own way.



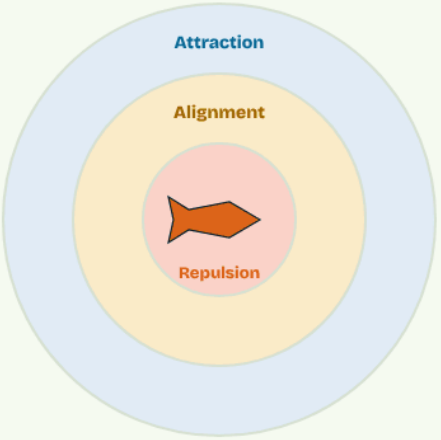
School: a group in step

Same direction, same speed, even spacing.



Every school is a shoal, but not every shoal is a school.

B Three simple rules



1. **Too close? Move away.**
2. **Nearby? Match their direction.**
3. **Too far? Move closer.**

No fish is in charge. Each one follows these rules, using its eyes and its lateral line, which feels movement in the water.

C Why fish do it

1 Safety in numbers

Many eyes spot danger, and a moving crowd confuses hunters.

2 Food and mates

More fish searching find food faster, and partners are near.

3 Easier swimming

Schooling can save up to about 20% of swimming energy.

About a quarter of fish species shoal all their lives, and half for part of their lives. Herring schools may hold billions of fish.

A shoal is a crowd. A school is a crowd that moves as one.

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Diagram: https://thatiswhy.com/diagrams/why-fish-swim-in-schools/ · Full guide: https://thatiswhy.com/why-a-group-of-fish-is-called-a-school/