

Rules Resources

Interested in learning more? Here are some great resources about the racing rules that will help you be more confident near other boats on the race course:



The Racing Rules of Sailing 2017-2020

This waterproof edition of the US Sailing rulebook contains the text of all the rules discussed in this guide (plus much more!). A must-have reference for racing sailors through the end of 2020.

Understanding the Racing Rules of Sailing Through 2020

Author Dave Perry answers all of the most frequently asked questions about the racing rules. Includes complete text of all the rules plus many references to US appeals and WWS cases.



2017-2020 Racing Rules App (For iOS and Android)

Ideal for sailors who want instant access to the official rules. This 2017-2020 edition offers content and explanations from Dave Perry's book (above). Available as a member benefit.

Dave Perry's 100 Best Racing Rules Quizzes

Learn the racing rules in a fun way, using scenarios you often find on the race course. This fifth edition covers the 2017-2020 rules and includes an advanced rules quiz section plus advice on how to be successful in the protest room.



To purchase any of these resources visit: store.ussailing.org



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2017-2020



Sailor's Guide to the Racing Rules

Helpful information to make racing more understandable!

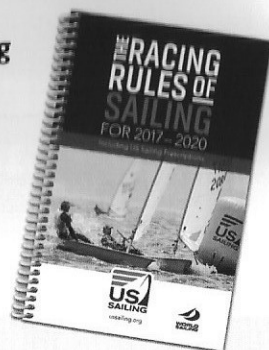


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Rules and principles

The Racing Rules of Sailing

The basic purpose of the racing rules is to ensure safety and fair competition. The rulebook is written by World Sailing (WS) and governs racing around the world. Here's the cover of the current US Sailing edition.



Other important rules

Besides the rulebook, there are several documents that contain rules a racing boat must follow:

Notice of race – This document (required for every event) has info that sailors need to plan for the regatta.

Sailing instructions – These are written directions that describe how a regatta will be conducted; they must be available to all sailors before the racing begins.

Class rules – Each sailboat class has its own particular set of rules about what is legal for that class.

Rule compliance and enforcement

In sailboat racing, the rules are enforced by sailors themselves. A fundamental principle of sportsmanship is that when you break a rule you must promptly take a penalty. By participating in a race, each competitor agrees to be governed by the rules.

Sportsmanship and the Rules
Rule 3 Acceptance of the Rules



There aren't any referees or umpires in most sailboat races, so you sailors have to 'police' the rules yourselves!

This booklet is a summary of the racing rules, but it does not replace the rulebook. For exact rule language, look in the rulebook for the rule #s that are listed below each paragraph.

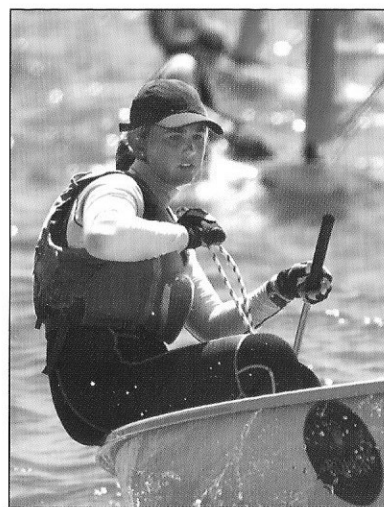
Fair sailing, good manners, sportsmanship

Racing sailors must compete in accordance with recognized principles of fair play. They must not commit any conduct that is a breach of good manners, a breach of good sportsmanship or unethical behavior. Rule 2 Fair Sailing, Rule 69 Misconduct

Sail green

Sailors are encouraged to minimize their impact on the environment. There is a specific rule that prohibits putting trash in the water.

Environmental Responsibility, Rule 55 Trash Disposal



Safety first!

Safety is a very important part of the racing rules:

Help sailors in danger – Each boat and sailor must give all possible help to any person or boat in danger, even if that boat is not racing.

Rule 1.1 Helping Those in Danger

Deciding to race – Each boat must take responsibility for her decision to participate in a race or continue racing.

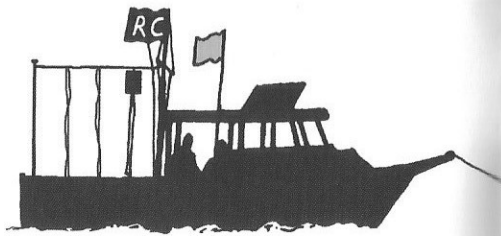
Rule 4 Decision to Race

Life-saving equipment – Every boat must carry adequate life-saving equipment for all persons on board, and each competitor is individually responsible for wearing a personal flotation device that is adequate for the conditions. Rule 1.2 Life-Saving Equipment

Signals and marks



The race committee

The race committee runs the races in accordance with the rules. They set the course, display starting signals, record finish positions and do many other things to make each race safe and fair.



Starting sequence and signals

Most race committees use the following signals for starting races:

Minutes before starting signal	Visual signal	Sound signal	Means
5	Class flag e.g. 	One	Warning signal
4	Flag P (usually) 	One	Preparatory signal
1	Preparatory flag removed	One long	One minute
0	Class flag removed	One	Starting signal

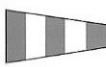
Rule 26 Starting Races



Individual Recall (Flag X, 1 sound) One or more boats were over the starting line early and must go back to restart.



General Recall (First Substitute, 2 sounds) The RC can't identify all boats over the line early, so the fleet is recalled for a new start.



Postponement (Answering Pennant, 2 sounds) Races not started are postponed until later in the day or the next day.



Abandonment (Flag N, 3 sounds) The race is abandoned.

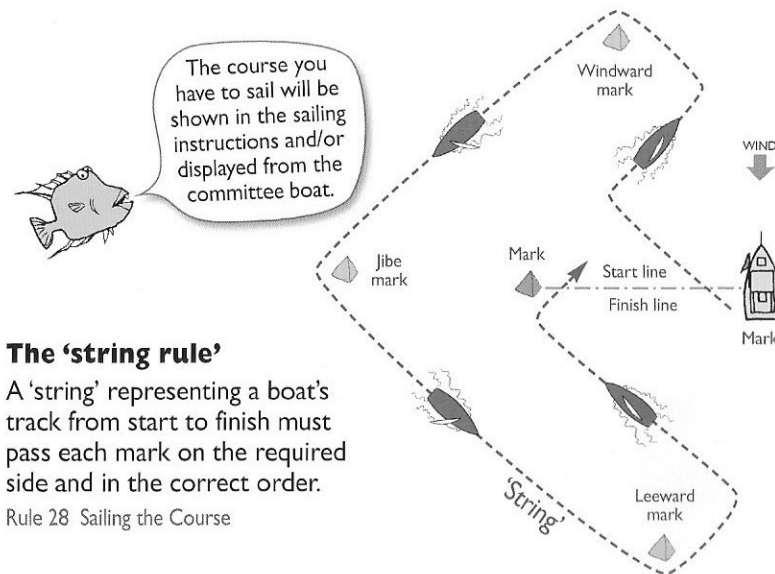
Rule 29 Recalls, Race Signals



Marks

A mark is any object that you are required to pass on a specified side. Typical marks are the starting and finishing marks and all the buoys you must round to sail the course. If you touch a mark while racing you must take a penalty (see page 17).

Definition: *Mark*, Rule 31 Touching a Mark



The 'string rule'

A 'string' representing a boat's track from start to finish must pass each mark on the required side and in the correct order.

Rule 28 Sailing the Course

Scoring

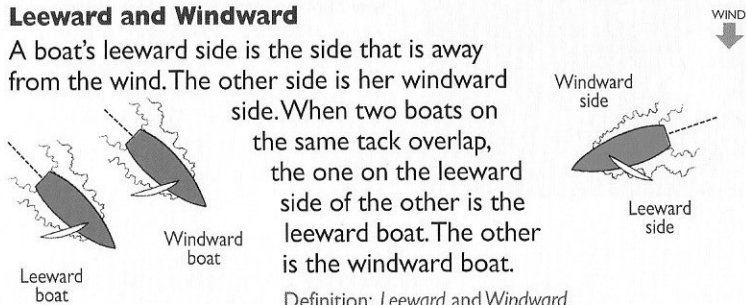
Most regattas are scored using the 'Low Point System.' For each race a boat gets the score equal to her finish position. All the races are added together (except a boat can discard her worst race), and the lowest score wins. Rule 90.3 Scoring, Appendix A Scoring

Definitions

The rulebook includes a section called 'Definitions,' which defines terms that are used throughout the rules. Here are four key ones.

Leeward and Windward

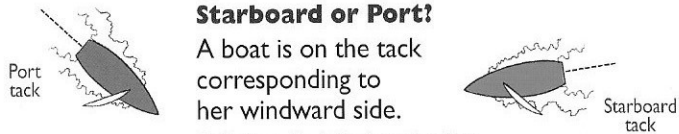
A boat's leeward side is the side that is away from the wind. The other side is her windward side. When two boats on the same tack overlap, the one on the leeward side of the other is the leeward boat. The other is the windward boat.



Definition: *Leeward and Windward*

Starboard or Port?

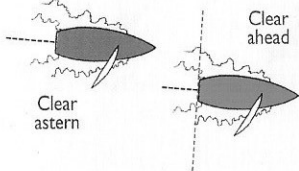
A boat is on the tack corresponding to her windward side.



Definition: *Tack, Starboard or Port*

Clear Astern and Clear Ahead

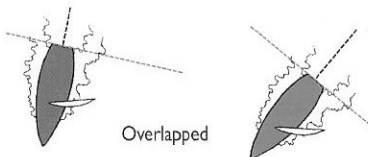
A boat is clear astern of another when she is behind a line drawn abeam from the stern of the other boat. The other boat is clear ahead.



Definition: *Clear Astern and Clear Ahead; Overlap*

Overlapped

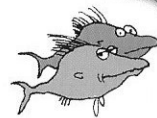
Two boats are overlapped when neither boat is clear astern of the other.



Right-of-way rules

There are four basic right-of-way rules. Whenever two boats are sailing near each other, one of them has the right of way and the other must keep clear.

The racing rules are written for situations with 2 boats. For 3 or more boats, just apply the rules to each pair.



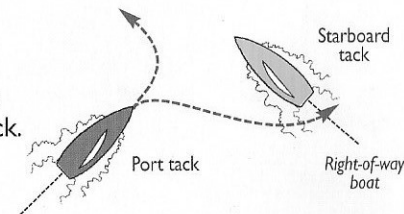
Keep Clear

A boat keeps clear of a right-of-way boat if the right-of-way boat can sail her course with no need to take avoiding action. Definition: *Keep Clear*

When boats are on Opposite Tacks

A boat on port tack must keep clear of a boat on starboard tack.

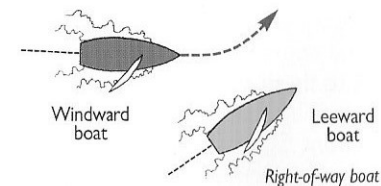
Rule 10 On Opposite Tacks



When boats are on the Same Tack, Overlapped

A windward boat must keep clear of a leeward boat.

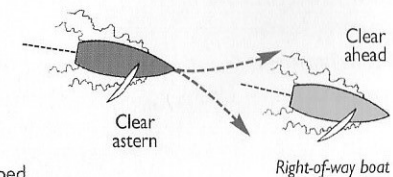
Rule 11 On The Same Tack, Overlapped



When boats are on the Same Tack, Not Overlapped

A boat clear astern must keep clear of a boat clear ahead.

Rule 12 On The Same Tack, Not Overlapped



Right-of-way rules

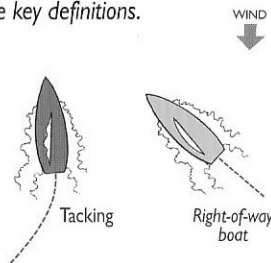
Here is the fourth basic right-of-way rule, plus two more key definitions.

When one or both boats are

Tacking

A boat that is tacking shall keep clear of other boats. When this rule applies, the other three right-of-way rules do not.

Rule 13 While Tacking



In heavy air and waves, a boat needs more space to maneuver than in light air and flat water.

Room

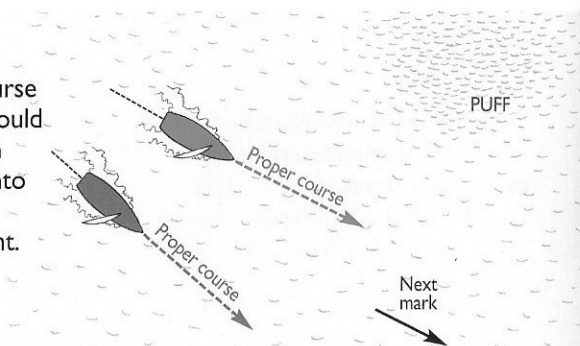
The space a boat needs in the existing wind and sea conditions, while maneuvering promptly in a seamanlike way.

Definition: Room

Proper Course

A boat's proper course is the course she would sail to finish as soon as possible, taking into account factors like the wind and current. There is no proper course before the starting signal.

Definition: Proper Course



The Red boat sails high to get a puff. The Blue boat sails low for the current. Two boats right next to each other can have different proper courses. A boat's proper course may not aim directly at the next mark.

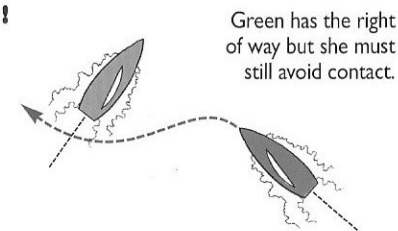
Limitations

Even when a boat has the right of way, there are limitations on what she can do.

Sailing is not a contact sport!

Every boat must avoid hitting other boats whenever that is reasonably possible. This applies both to boats that must keep clear and to right-of-way boats.

Rule 14 Avoiding Contact

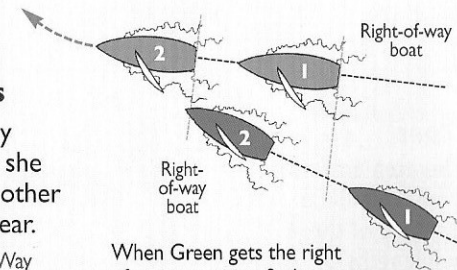


Green has the right of way but she must still avoid contact.

When the right of way changes hands

When a boat suddenly gains the right of way, she must initially give the other boat room to keep clear.

Rule 15 Acquiring Right of Way



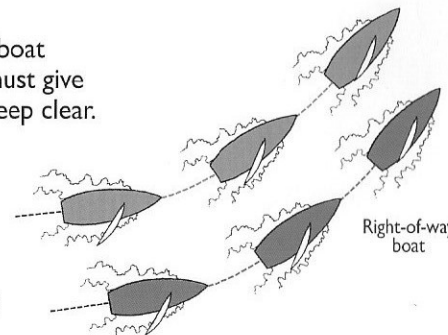
When Green gets the right of way at position 2, she must give Blue a chance to keep clear.

Changing Course

Whenever a right-of-way boat changes her course, she must give the other boat room to keep clear.

Rule 16 Changing Course

Green has the right of way, so whenever she changes her compass heading she must give Blue an 'avenue of escape.'

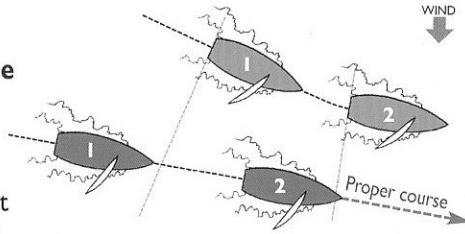


Here is a fourth limitation on the right-of-way boat, plus another definition.

When you can't sail above your proper course

When a boat gets a leeward overlap from clear astern and within two hull lengths of another boat, she must not sail above her proper course while the boats remain overlapped on the same tack and within that distance.

Rule 17 On the Same Tack; Proper Course

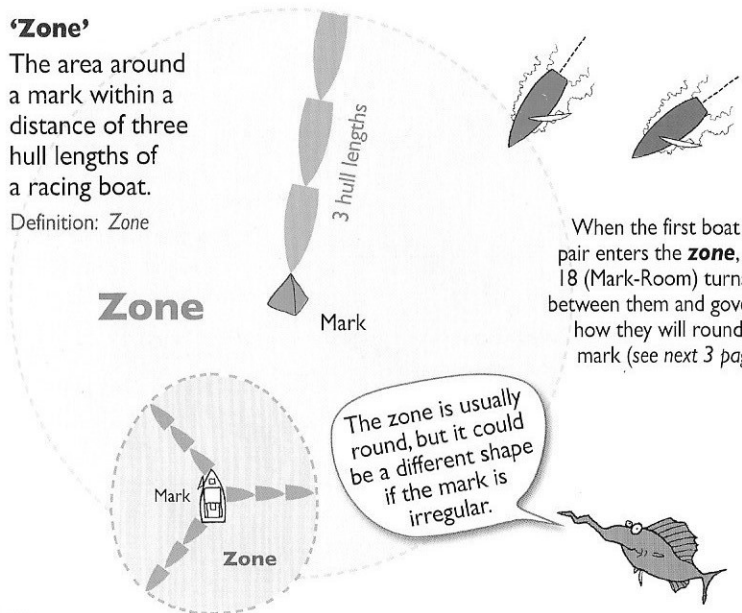


Green came from clear astern, so she can't sail above her proper course at position 2. However, Green still has the right of way, so Blue must keep clear.

'Zone'

The area around a mark within a distance of three hull lengths of a racing boat.

Definition: Zone



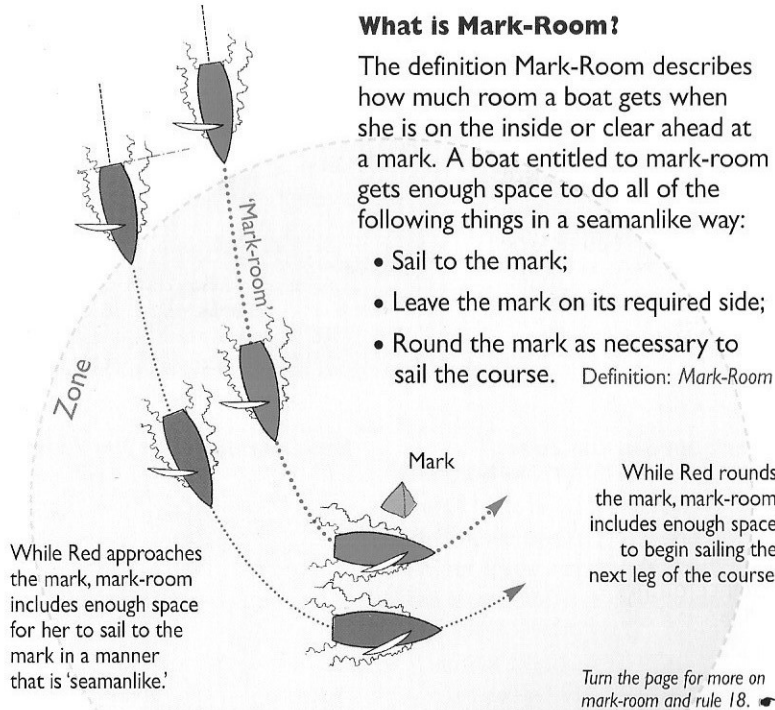
When the first boat of a pair enters the **zone**, rule 18 (Mark-Room) turns on between them and governs how they will round the mark (see next 3 pages).

Rules at marks

What is Mark-Room?

The definition Mark-Room describes how much room a boat gets when she is on the inside or clear ahead at a mark. A boat entitled to mark-room gets enough space to do all of the following things in a seamanlike way:

- Sail to the mark;
- Leave the mark on its required side;
- Round the mark as necessary to sail the course. Definition: *Mark-Room*



Turn the page for more on mark-room and rule 18. ➔

