

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.



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.

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

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

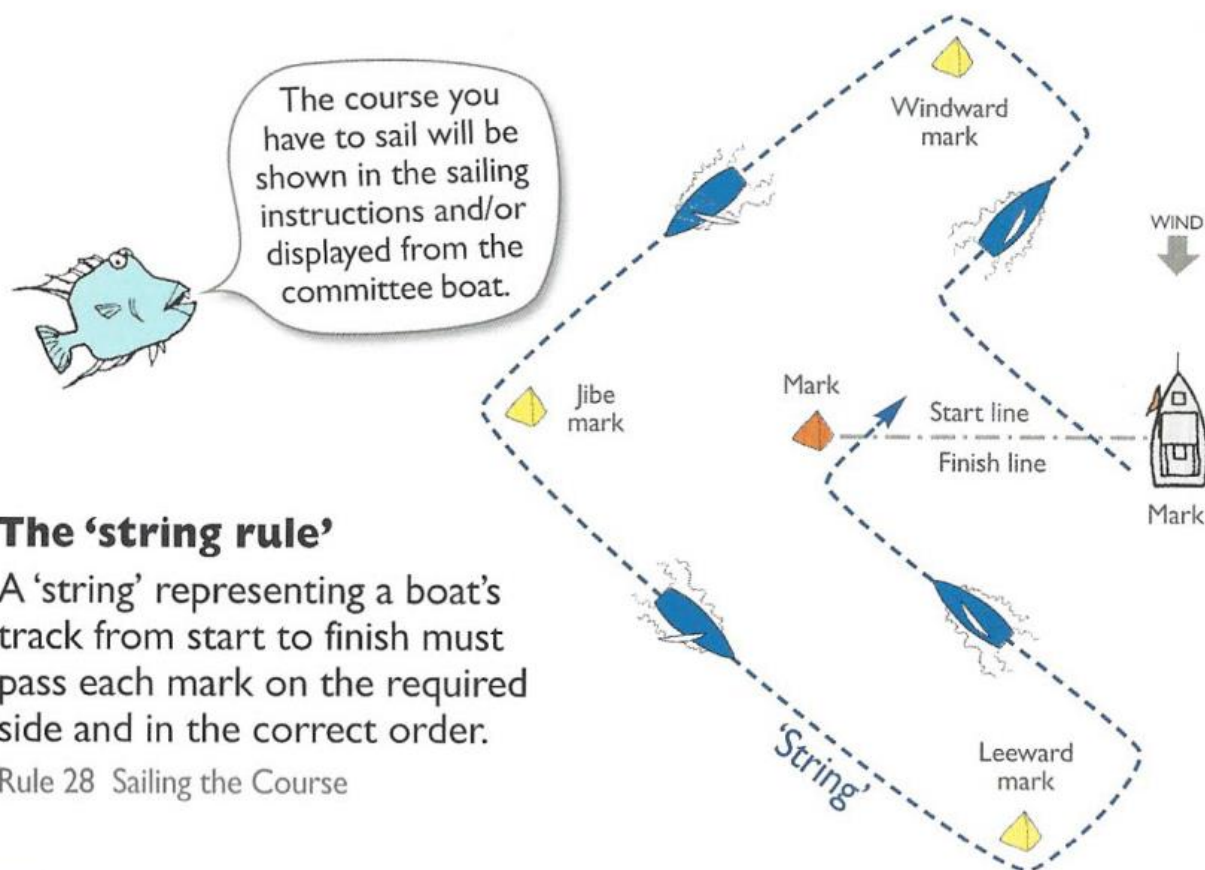
Life-saving equipment – Every boat must carry adequate life-saving equipment for all persons on board, and each competitor is individually responsible for wearing a personal flotation device that is adequate for the conditions. Rule 1.2 Life-Saving Equipment



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

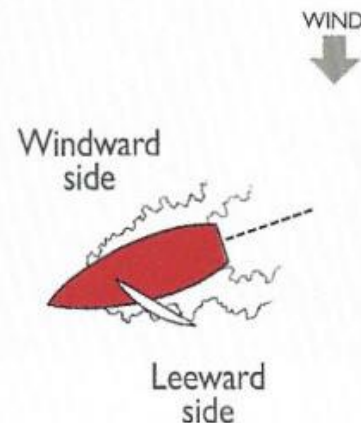
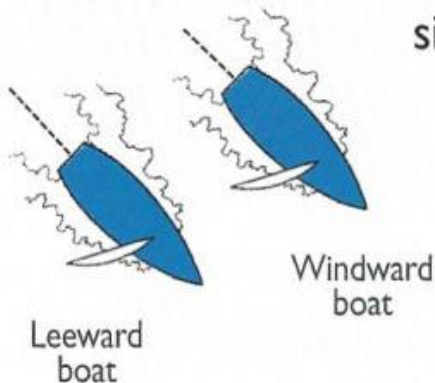
Definitions

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.

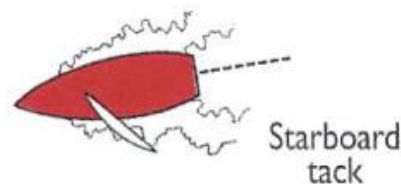
Definition: *Leeward and Windward*

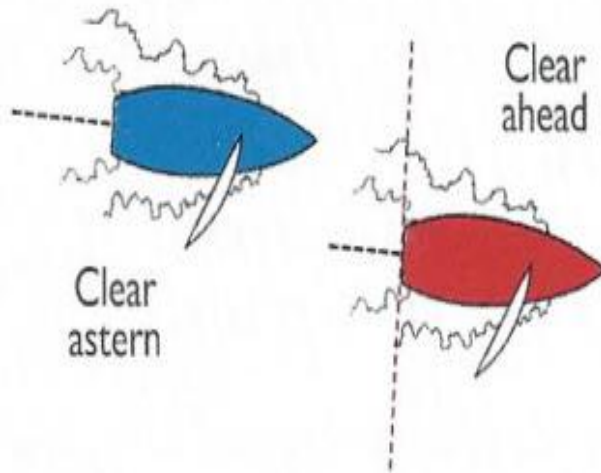


Starboard or Port?

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

Definition: *Tack, Starboard or Port*





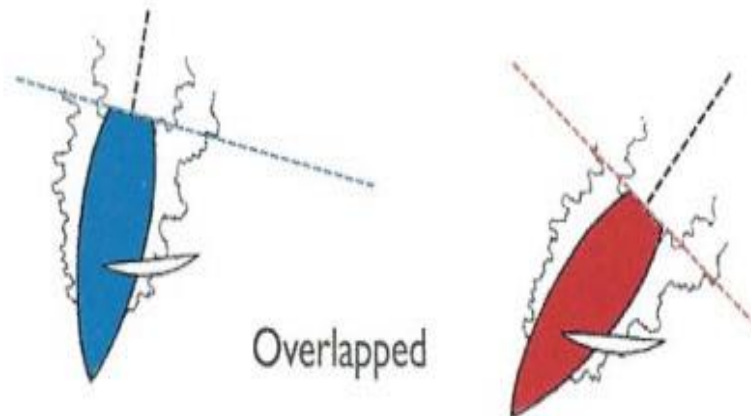
Clear Astern and Clear Ahead

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*

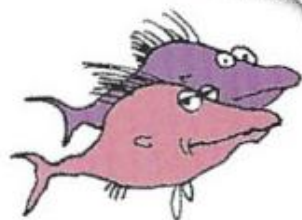
Overlapped

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



Right-of-way rules

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



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.

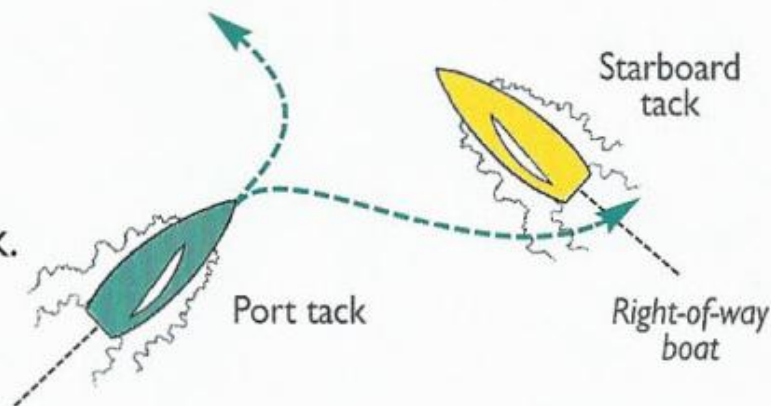
Keep Clear

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.

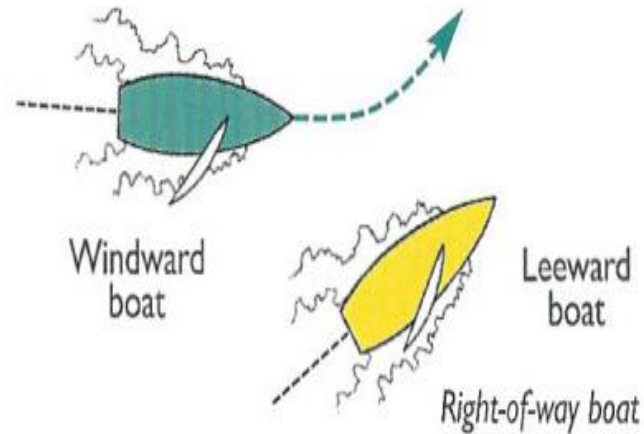
Rule 10 On Opposite Tacks



When boats are on the
Same Tack, Overlapped

A windward boat must keep
clear of a leeward boat.

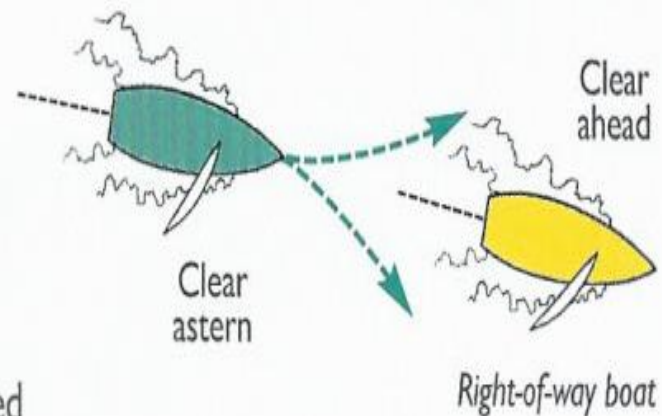
Rule 11 On The Same Tack, Overlapped



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

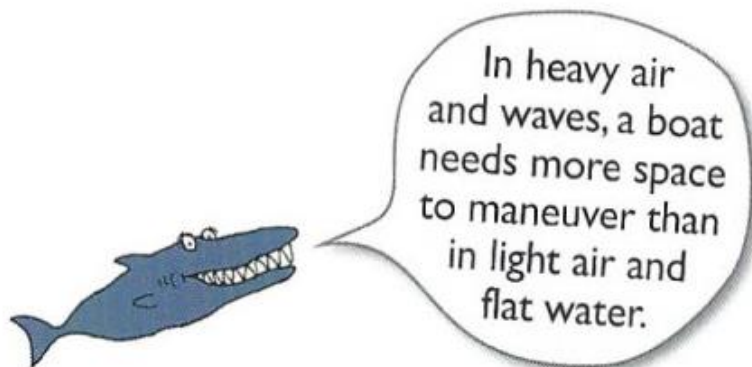
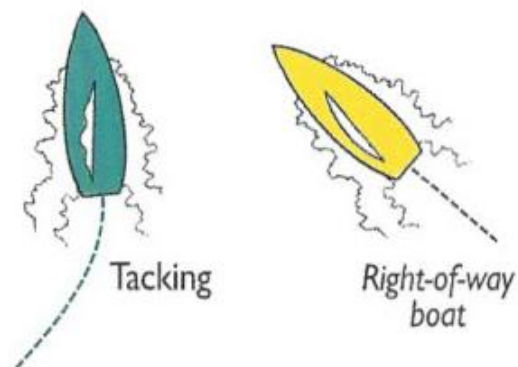
Here is the fourth basic right-of-way rule, plus two more key definitions.

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



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.

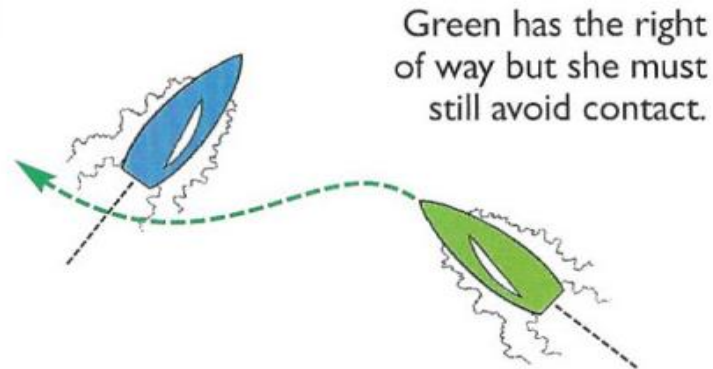
Limitations

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.

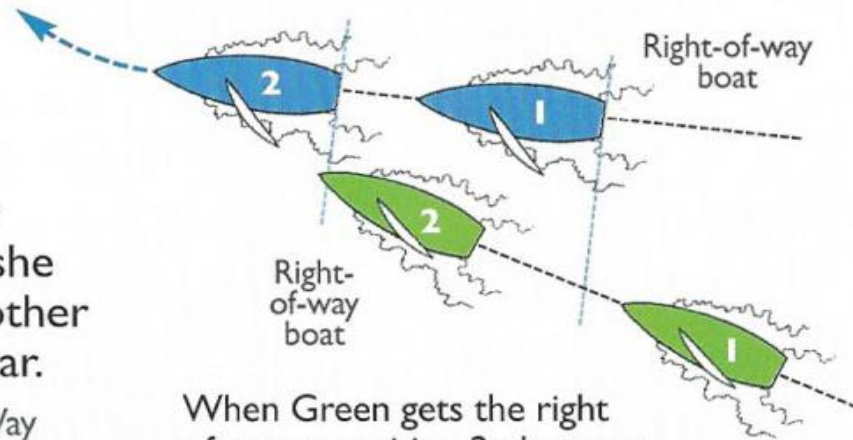
Rule 14 Avoiding Contact



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



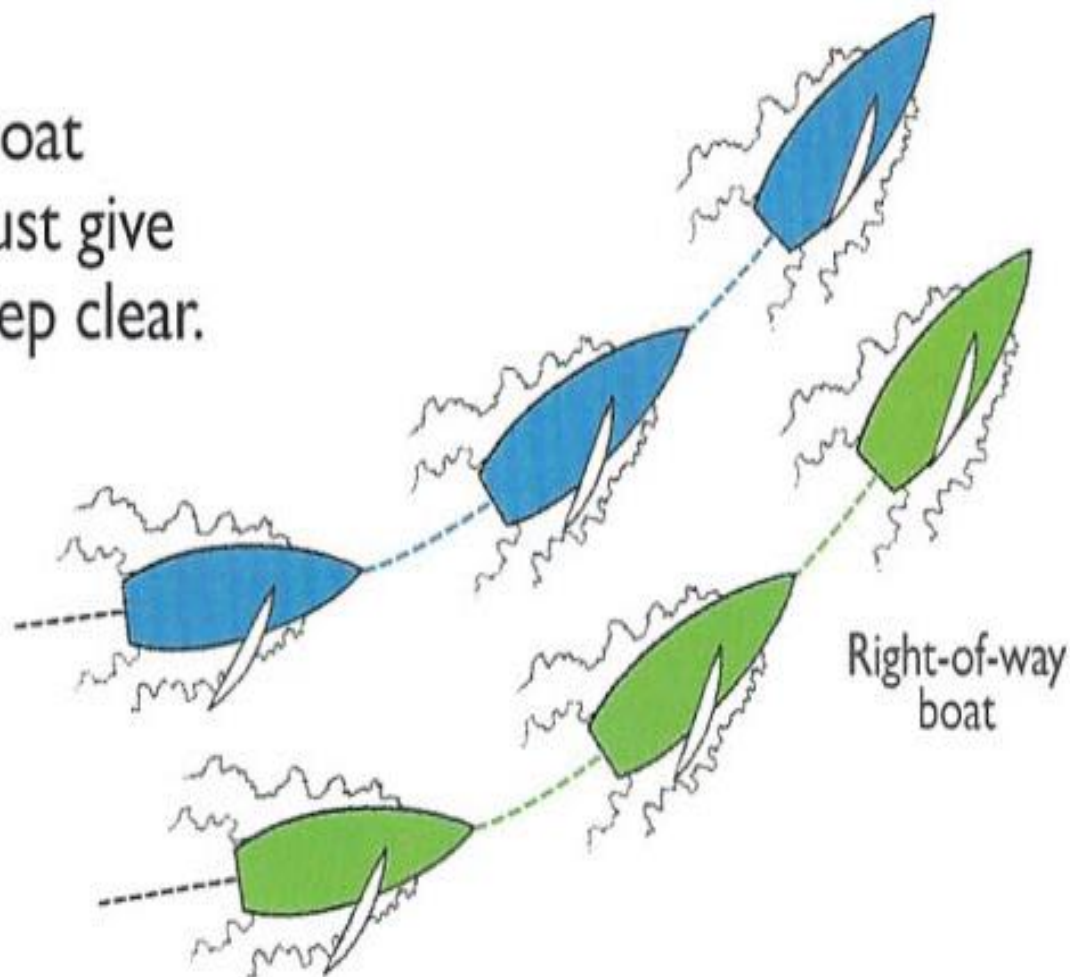
When Green gets the right of way at position 2, she must give Blue a chance to keep clear.

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.'

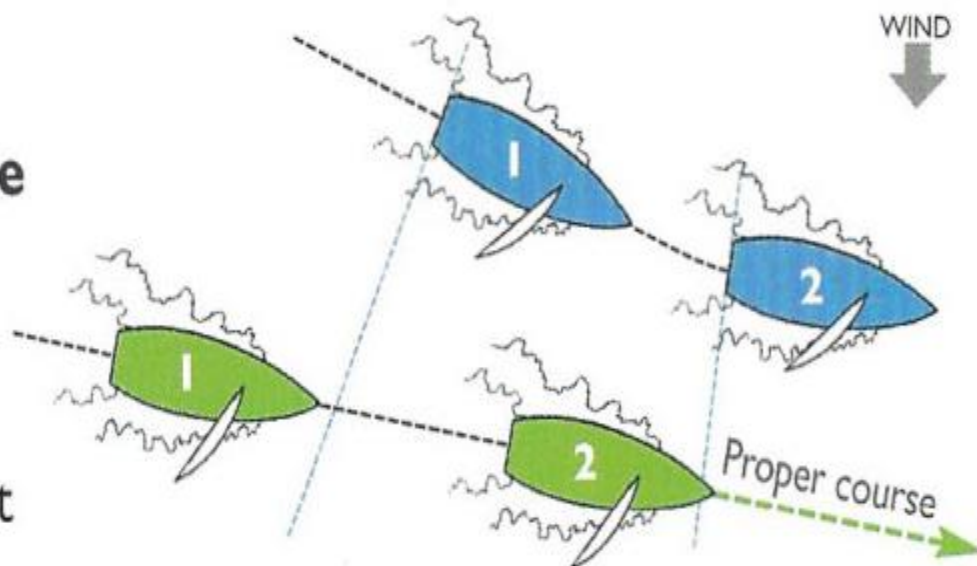


Here is a fourth limitation on the right-of-way boat, plus another definition.

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



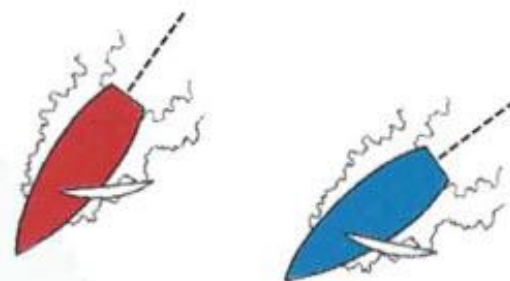
Green came from clear astern, so she can't sail above her proper course at position 2. However, Green still has the right of way, so Blue must keep clear.

'Zone'

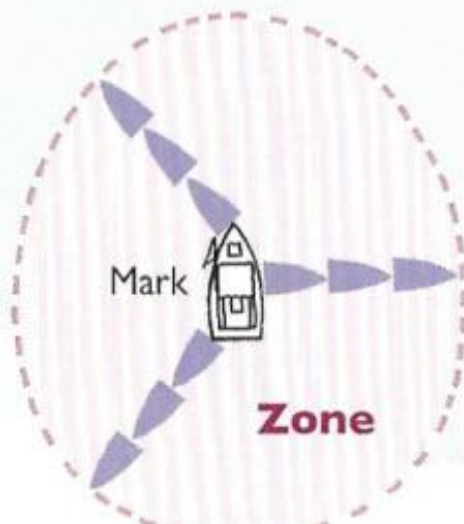
The area around a mark within a distance of three hull lengths of a racing boat.

Definition: Zone

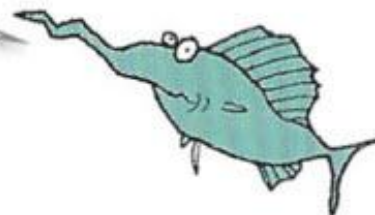
Zone



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).



The zone is usually round, but it could be a different shape if the mark is irregular.



What is Mark-Room?

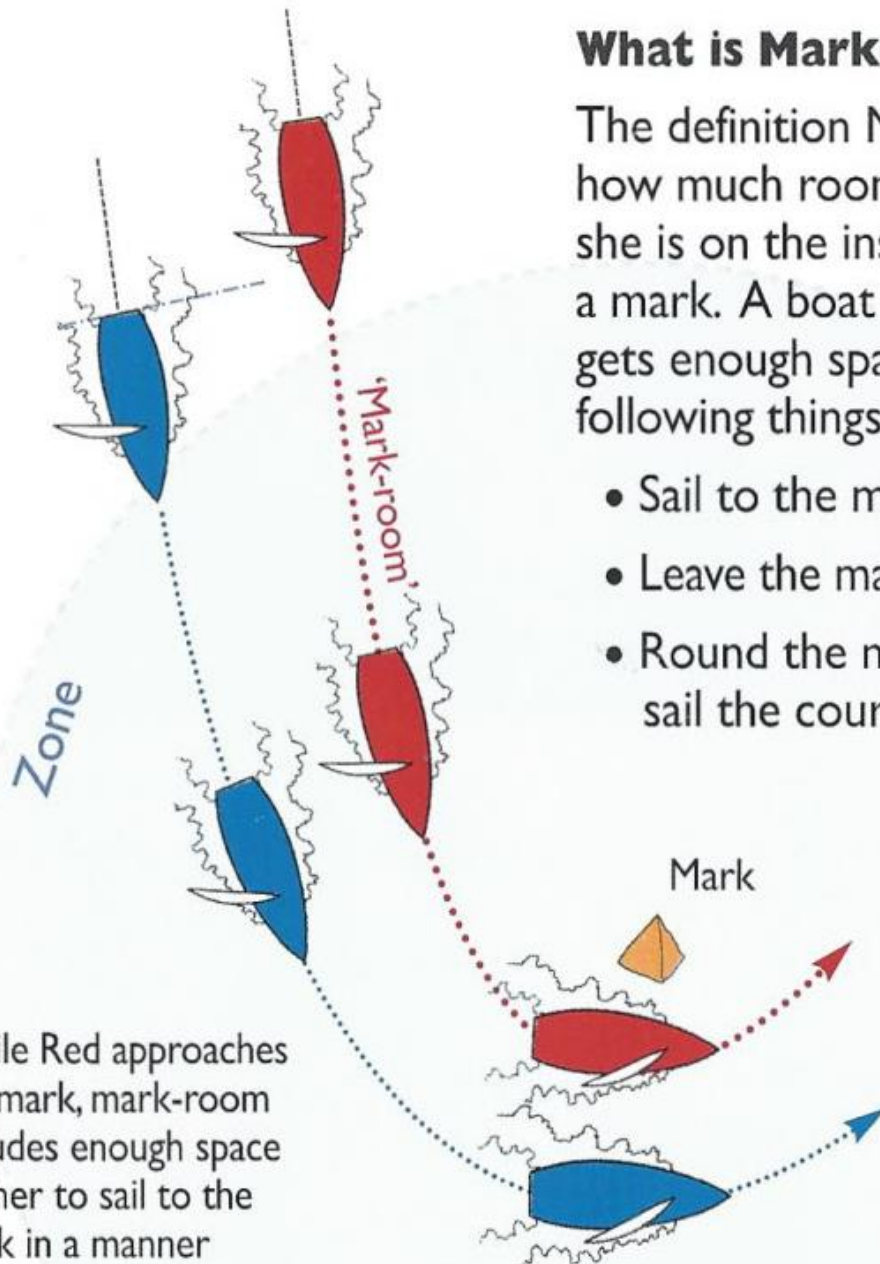
The definition Mark-Room describes how much room a boat gets when she is on the inside or clear ahead at a mark. A boat entitled to mark-room gets enough space to do all of the following things in a seamanlike way:

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

While Red approaches the mark, mark-room includes enough space for her to sail to the mark in a manner that is 'seamanlike.'

While Red rounds the mark, mark-room includes enough space to begin sailing the next leg of the course.

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





Rules at marks

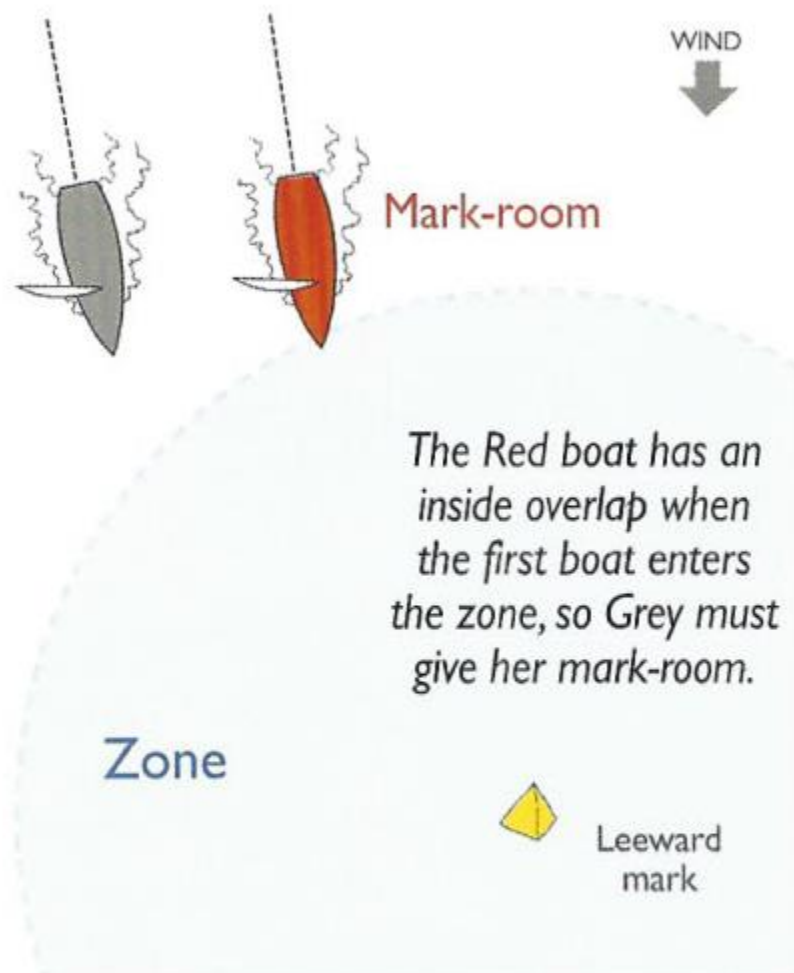
Who gets mark-room?

When two boats round a mark, one is entitled to mark-room and the other must provide mark-room. This is determined by the relative position of the two boats at the moment when the first one enters the zone (see *below*).

Rule 18.2(b) Giving *Mark-Room*

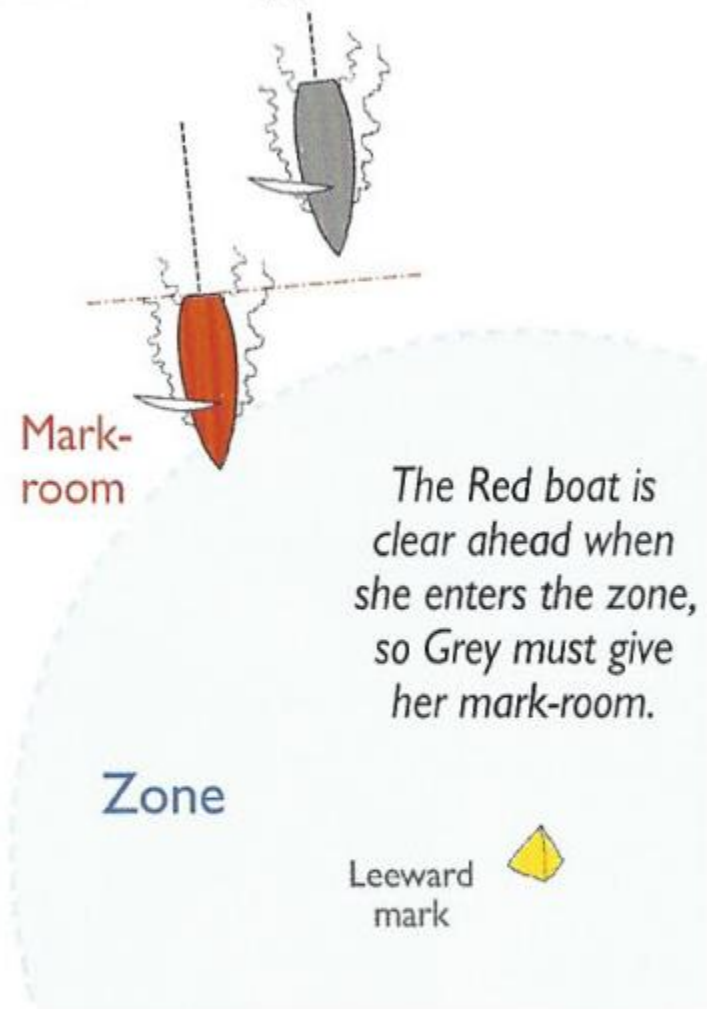


Overlapped at the Zone



If boats are overlapped when the first one reaches the zone, the outside boat at that moment must give the inside boat mark-room during the rounding.

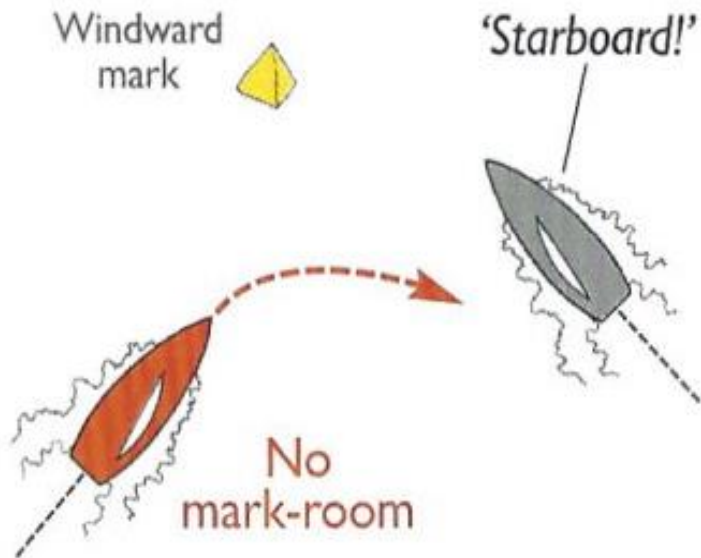
Not Overlapped at the Zone



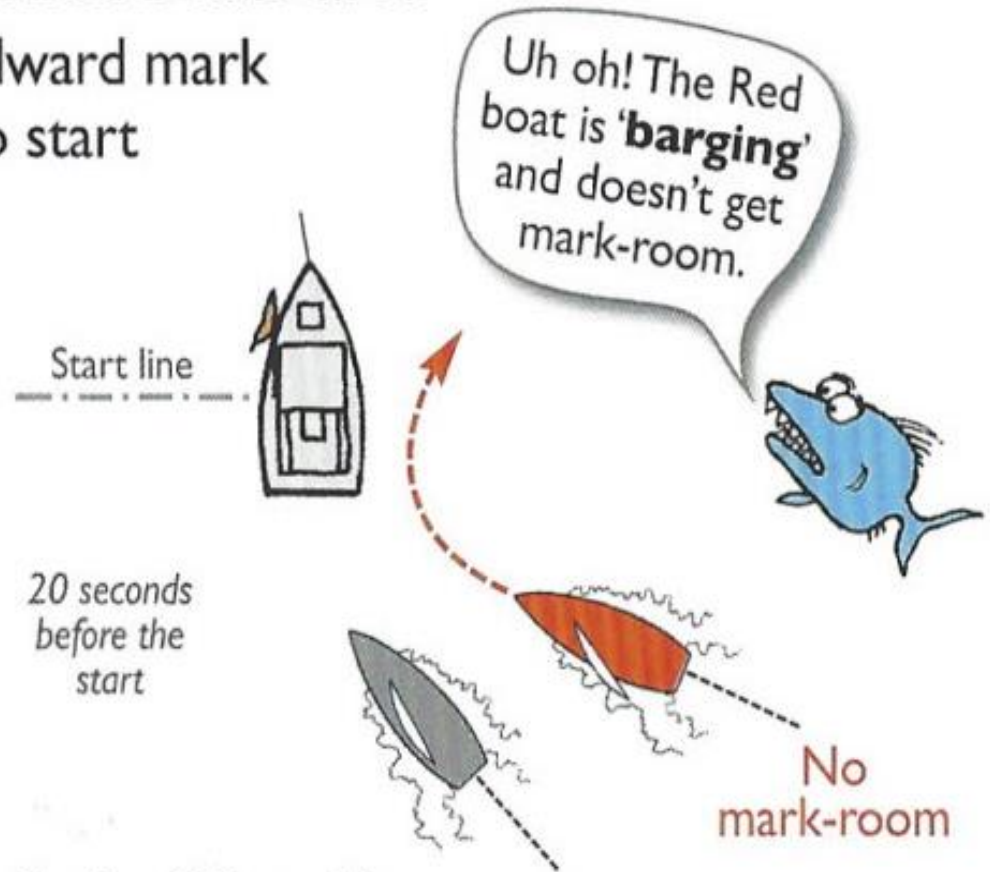
If a boat is clear ahead when she reaches the zone, the boat clear astern at that moment must give her mark-room during the rounding.

Mark-room does not apply when boats are:

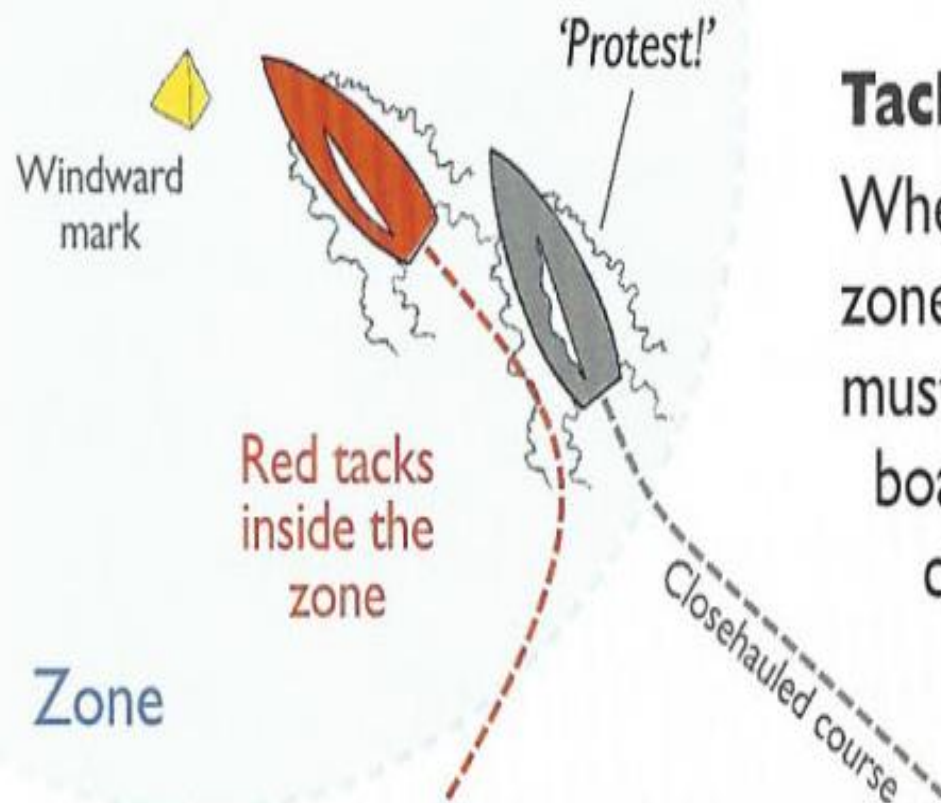
- On opposite tacks near a windward mark
- Approaching a starting mark to start



Rule 18.1(a) When Rule 18 Applies



Section C Preamble



Tacking near a mark

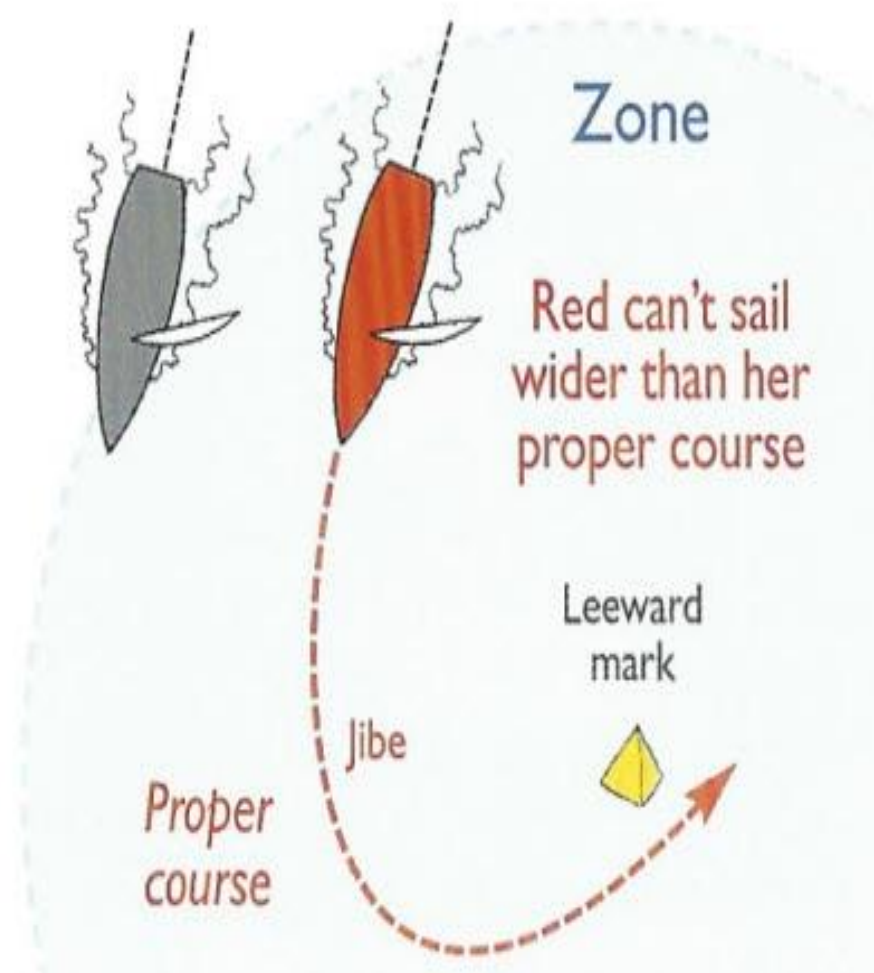
When a boat tacks inside the zone at a windward mark, she must not force a starboard-tack boat to sail above a closehaunched course to avoid her.

Rule 18.3 Tacking in the Zone

Jibing at a mark

When a right-of-way boat has an inside overlap and needs to jibe to sail her proper course around a mark, until she jibes she must sail no farther from the mark than needed to sail that course.

Rule 18.4 Gybing



Rules at obstructions

Obstruction

An obstruction is an object that's big enough so a racing boat would have to change course 'substantially' if she were one hull length from it and sailing directly toward it.

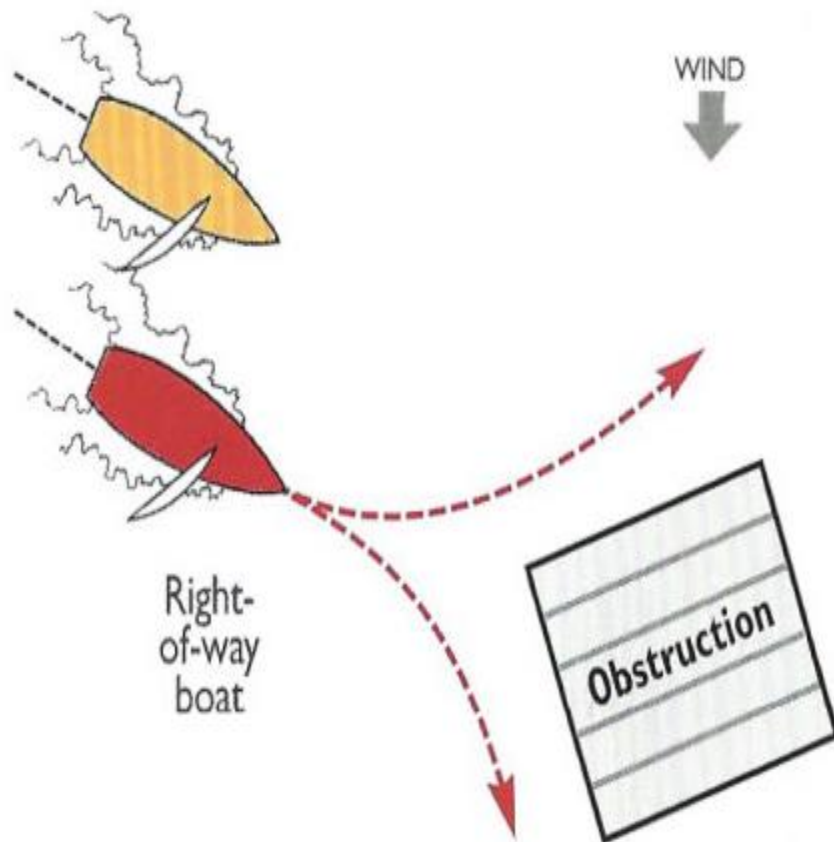
Definition: *Obstruction*

Typical obstructions

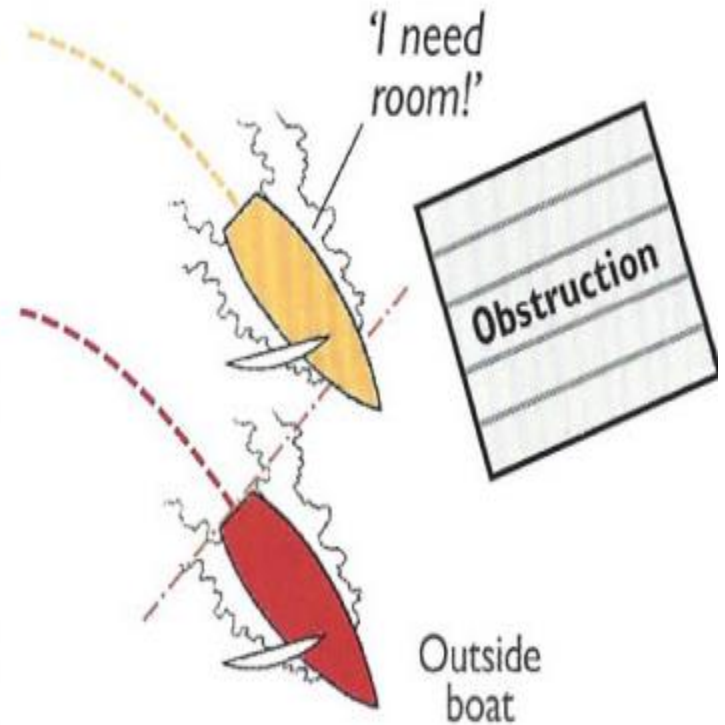
The race committee boat
A ship, tugboat, fishing trawler
A shoreline or shoal
A right-of-way racing boat
An anchored boat
A dock, pier, lighthouse, breakwater
An area designated as an obstruction by the sailing instructions
A boat that is capsized or aground

Passing obstructions

When boats are approaching an obstruction, the right-of-way boat can choose to pass it on either side (*below left*). If the boats are overlapped, the outside boat must give the inside boat room to pass between her and the obstruction (*right*). Rule 19 Room to Pass an Obstruction



The boat that has the right of way may choose to pass an obstruction on either side. Red is a leeward boat, so she can head up to pass the obstruction on her starboard side or bear off to pass it on her port side.



When Red bears off to pass the obstruction on her port side, the Yellow boat has an inside overlap. Therefore, Red must give Yellow room to pass between her and the obstruction. Hail not required.

Tacking at obstructions

When a closehauled boat is heading for an obstruction, she can hail another boat for room to tack. This allows boats to avoid the obstruction safely while maintaining their relative positions in the race. Here is how it works:

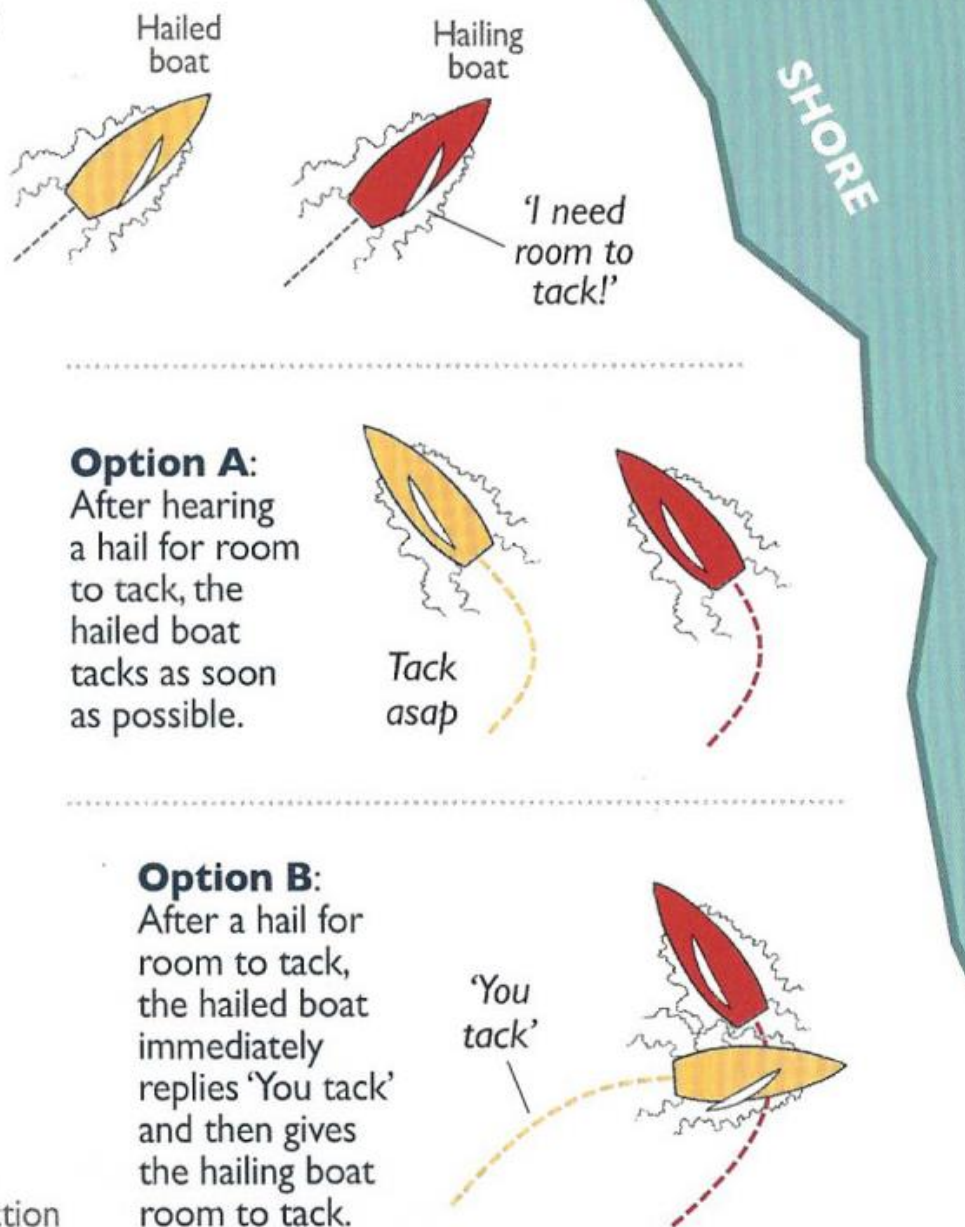
Step 1: The boat that needs room to tack (hailing boat) hails something like "Room to tack!"

Step 2: The other boat (hailed boat) has only two choices of how to respond. She can:

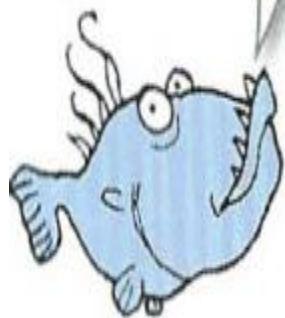
- A) Tack as soon as possible; or
- B) Hail the words "You tack" immediately and then give the hailing boat room to tack.

Step 3: After the hailed boat responds, the hailing boat must tack as soon as possible.

Rule 20 Room to Tack at an Obstruction



The most common obstructions are other racing boats with the right of way, like these boats on starboard tack.



Propelling the boat

While sailors are racing, they are allowed to use only the wind and water to increase, maintain or decrease their speed. They may adjust the trim of their sails and hull, but they can't paddle, use the engine, rock the boat or pump the sails.

Rule 42 Propulsion

Two exceptions to this rule are:

Pumping – Sailors can pump (pull in) each sail to initiate planing or surfing downwind, but only once for each wave or puff.

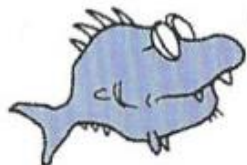
Rule 42.3(c) Exceptions

Roll tacking – The crew can move their bodies to exaggerate the rolling that helps steering through a tack or jibe, but they can't make the boat go faster than it would have gone without a tack or jibe.

Rule 42.3(b)



You are always allowed to get any help needed for crew members who are ill, injured or in danger.
Safety first!



Outside help

Unlike many sports, sailing does not usually permit its competitors to receive outside assistance while they are racing. Coaching is allowed only before and after races.

Rule 41 Outside Help

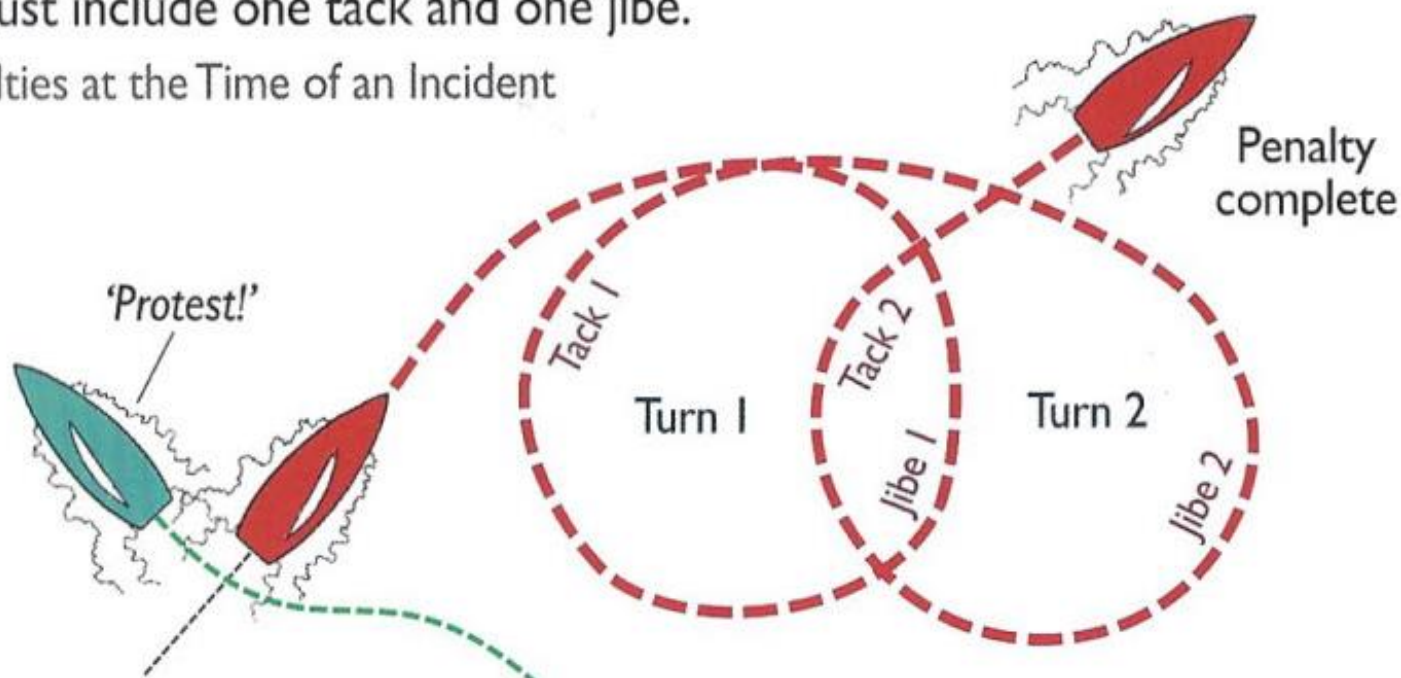
Penalties for breaking a rule

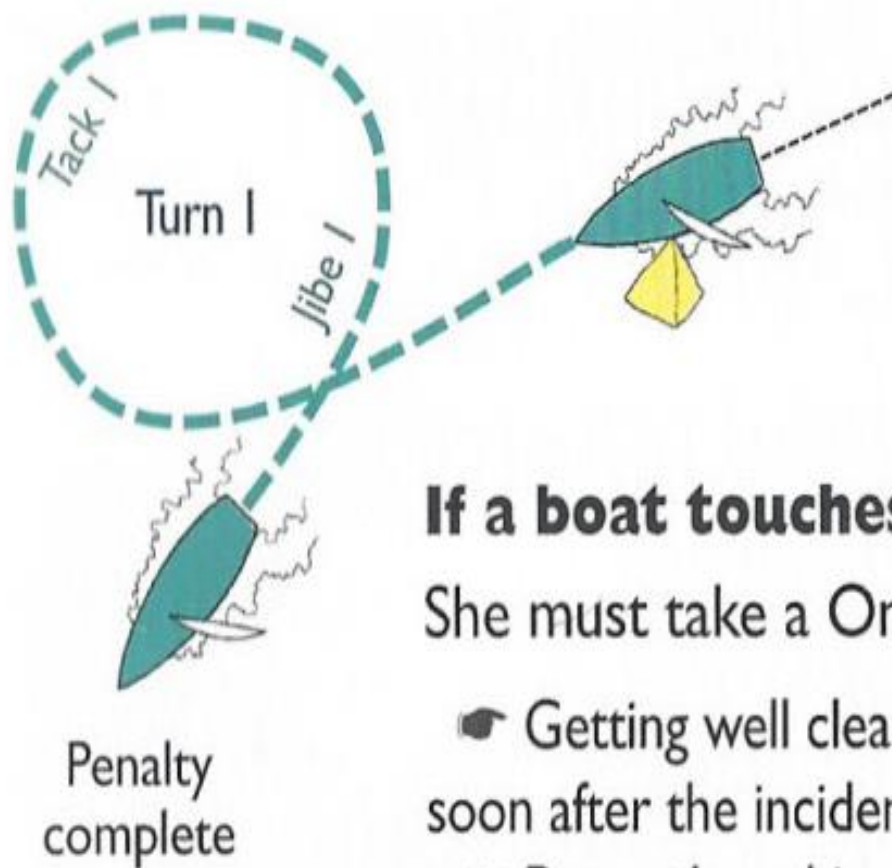
When a boat breaks a right-of-way rule while she is racing, she can either retire or take a Two-Turns Penalty by:

- ☛ Getting well clear of other boats as soon after the incident as possible; and
- ☛ Promptly making two turns in the same direction. Each turn must include one tack and one jibe.

Rule 44 Penalties at the Time of an Incident

When a boat breaks a rule she must take a penalty, even if no one saw her or protested.





If a boat touches a mark . . .

She must take a One-Turn Penalty by:

- Getting well clear of other boats as soon after the incident as possible; and
- Promptly making one turn, including one tack and one jibe.

Rule 44 Penalties at the Time of an Incident

It's OK to touch the mark's anchor line because that doesn't count as part of the mark.



Protests

A basic principle in sailboat racing is that sailors are expected to follow and enforce the rules. This includes protesting when other boats break a rule.

Filing a protest

Any boat may file a protest when she believes another boat has broken a rule. In order for a protest to be valid, a sailor must do four things:

Protest!

1. Hail the word 'Protest' at the *first reasonable opportunity* after the incident.



2. Display a red flag at the *first reasonable opportunity* after the incident and keep it displayed until the finish. (*This does not apply to boats shorter than 6 meters*).



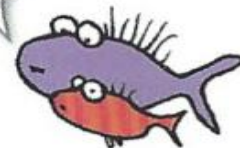
3. Create a written protest that identifies the protestor, the protestee and the incident.



4. Deliver your written protest to the race office within the protest time limit (which is usually stated in the sailing instructions).

Rule 60 Right to Protest, Rule 61 Protest Requirements

The sailing instructions can add to this list. For example, they might say you must report your protest to the committee boat right after you finish.



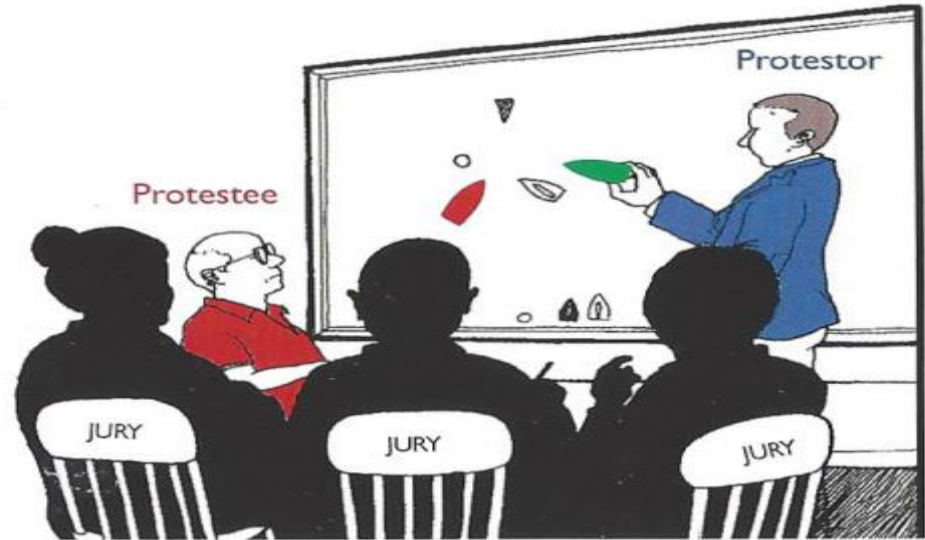
The protest hearing

When the protest committee receives a written protest, they schedule a hearing and post the time and place on the official notice board.

At the beginning of the hearing, the protest committee (PC) takes evidence to see if the protest is valid. If the protestor met all four conditions (see page 18) then:

- First the protestor and then the protestee ('parties' to the hearing) tell their stories and can question each other.
- The PC questions the parties.
- The parties call their witnesses (one at a time) to tell what they saw and to answer questions.
- Each party gives a final statement to summarize their case.
- The PC excuses the parties and discusses the testimony.
- The PC calls the parties back to explain its decision and what penalties are given, if any.

Rule 63 Hearings; Definition: *Party*



After the hearing

If a boat is penalized at a hearing and feels the decision is incorrect she may:

- ☛ *Request to reopen the hearing* – This is normally done when the sailor finds 'significant new evidence' within a reasonable time after the hearing.
- ☛ *File an appeal* – Sailors can appeal the protest committee's procedures or its interpretation of a rule, but not the facts it found about the incident.

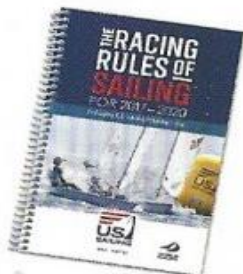
Rule 66 Reopening a Hearing, Rule 70 Appeals

Requesting Redress

There are certain limited occasions when a boat can request redress if her score in a race is made significantly worse through no fault of her own. If the protest committee agrees, they may adjust the boat's score to provide compensation. Rule 62 Redress

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:

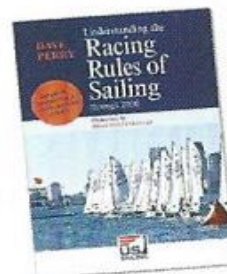


The Racing Rules of Sailing 2017-2020

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 VWS 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



30.3 No part of the boats hull, crew or equipment shall be in the triangle formed by the ends of the starting line and the first mark during the last minute before starting signal. If a boat breaks this rule and is identified she shall be disqualified without a hearing but not if the race is restarted or resailed.

DEFINITIONS

Support Person

Any person who

- (a) provides, or may provide, physical or advisory support to a competitor, including any coach, trainer, manager, team staff, medic, paramedic or any other person working with, treating or assisting a competitor in or preparing for the competition, or
- (b) is the parent or guardian of a competitor.

- Under the new rules, if a boat breaks Rule 2, Fair Sailing, the penalty may be either a DSQ or a disqualification that is not excludable (DNE). In addition, World Sailing race officials now often label certain rules in the notice of race or sailing instructions with the letters “DP” for “discretionary penalty. If a boat breaks a rule labeled “DP,” the penalty may, at the discretion of the protest committee, be less than disqualification

- The rules of Part 2 apply between boats that are sailing in or near the racing area and intend to race, are racing, or have been racing. However, a boat not racing shall not be penalized for breaking one of these rules, except rule 14 (Avoiding Contact) when the incident resulted in injury or serious damage, or rule 24.1