

Same Tack Rules:

fig. 2 - Basic Rule #2 - Windward/Leeward.
Windward boat stay clear.

fig. 3 - Basic Rule #3 - Clear Ahead/Astern.
The overtaking yacht must stay clear.

8.2 Introduction to the Right of Way Rules - THE FIVE BASIC RULES

The right of way rules can be reduced to 5 basic principles. If you are new to the rules you should start by learning these five. They cover most situations. Once you are clear on these five you can then look at the transitions and conflicts between them.

#1 - Opposite Tacks. fig. 1.

Starboard - Port (Rule 36).

Port tack must stay clear.

The Starboard - Port Rule is one we use every race. A close crossing situation upwind is a common source of protests; and the port tack boat rarely survives such a protest. The next time you are on port tack try to imagine how the situation looks to the starboard tack boat.

The helmsman, sitting aft on a starboard tack boat, does not have a good view of the crossing. What the port tack boat sees as a clear crossing the starboard tack boat may see as an unacceptable risk. The jury will accept the starboard tack boat's judgement.

fig. 2

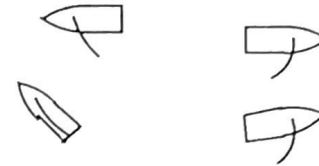
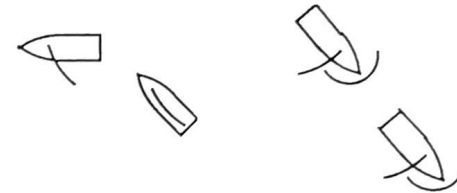


fig. 3



If you want to continue of port tack it is better to duck than to risk a DSQ in a close crossing. With a proper duck and good sailing you will gain a reversal at the next crossing when you are on starboard. (For more on ducking see Chapter 4 - Upwind Tactics.)

#2 - Same Tack. fig. 2.

Windward - Leeward (Rule 37.1).

Windward boat must stay clear.

The windward-leeward rule (37.1) is one of the simplest in the book. In its purest form the leeward boat may do as she pleases, and the windward boat must stay clear. The rule becomes complex when we study the Luffing Rights and Mast Abeam restrictions of Rule 38; but the fundamental right-of-way of the leeward boat does not change. (See Downwind Tactics & Strategy for more on Rule 38 and the Mast Abeam rule.)

fig. 4 - Basic Rule #4 - Buoy Room.
The inside boat gets room to round a mark or obstruction.

Basic Rule #5 - Changing Course.

fig. 5a - Cannot alter course into a right of way position without giving the newly burdened vessel the opportunity to stay clear.

fig. 5b - A right of way yacht cannot alter course to interfere with a burdened boat which is staying clear (by pinching up on starboard for example).

The leeward boat's freedom is also tempered somewhat before starts. This rule (#40) is discussed in detail in Chapter 2, Section 3 - Starting Rules.

#3 - Same Tack. fig. 3.
Clear Ahead - Clear Astern (Rule 37.2).
Overtaking boat must stay clear.

An overtaking boat must stay clear of a boat clear ahead (Rule 37.2). This rule, like the windward - leeward rule, applies to boats on the same tack. The rule itself is straightforward, but the transitions to windward - leeward and starboard - port add complexity, as we shall see.

#4 - Mark Roundings. fig. 4.
Inside boat gets room at marks & obstructions (Rule 42)

Rule 42 governs room at marks and obstructions. The principle is that an inside boat gets room. The practice is more complex and is the source of many protests. The details of the rule are covered in Chapter 6 - Mark Rounding & Finishing.

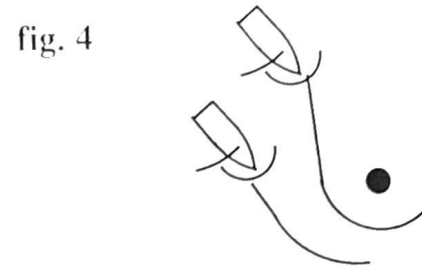


fig. 5a

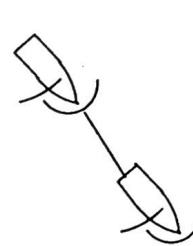
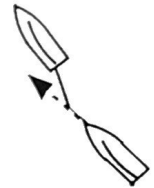


fig. 5b



#5 - Changing Course. fig. 5.

A right-of-way boat may not alter course to interfere with a boat maneuvering to stay clear (Rule 35). A boat on a tack has right of way over a boat which is tacking or jibing (Rule 41).

A boat which is changing course must stay clear of a boat on a steady course. A starboard tack boat may not steer erratically if it makes things difficult for a port tack boat trying to stay clear (Rule 35). Leeward boats are specifically exempt from this restriction.

Boats which are tacking or jibing must also stay clear of boats on a tack (Rule 41). This rule is clear as it stands alone, but problems arise in the transition to other rules, as we shall see.

The 5 basic rules - Conflicts & Transitions.

fig. 6 - #1 Starboard/Port & #2 Windward/Leeward. Starboard/Port is the opposite tack rule; windward leeward applies to boats on the same tack. No conflict.

fig. 7 - #1 Starboard/Port & #3 Clear Ahead/Astern. Clear Ahead/Astern applies only to boats on the same tack. In the diagram the middle boat has right of way over the port tack boat and the boat clear astern.

fig. 8 - #1 Starboard/Port & #4 Buoy Room. Starboard/Port prevails upwind. Buoy Room takes precedence downwind.

fig. 6

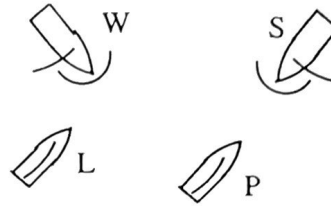


fig. 7



Conflict & Transition

Once you understand the five principles behind the right of way rules the next step is to study the conflicts and transitions between the basic rules.

#1 Starboard/Port & #2 Windward/Leeward fig. 6.

No conflict here. #1 applies when boats are on opposite tacks, #2 applies only when boats are on the same tack. Transition from opposite tack to same tack rules involve a tack or jibe, and are covered by principle #5, Changing Course, below.

#1 Starboard/Port & #3 Clear Ahead/Astern fig. 7.

#3 applies only to boats on the same tack. When a starboard tack boat is overtaking a port tack boat (on a dead run for example) the starboard - port rule applies. Transitions involve #5, Changing Course, below.

#1 Starboard/Port & #4 Buoy Room fig. 8.

Upwind starboard/port takes precedence.
Downwind the starboard/port rule is in force until the

fig. 8

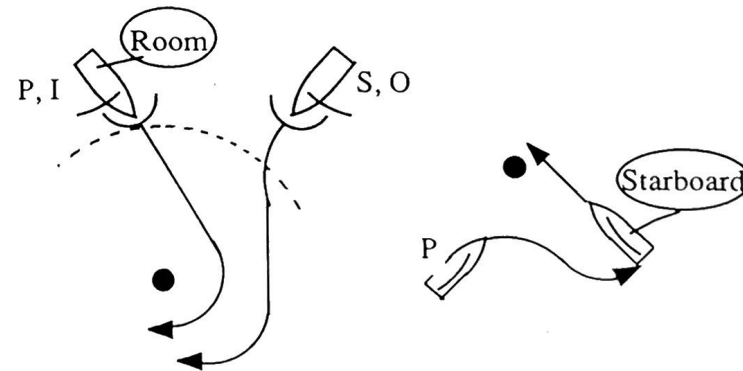


fig. 9 - #1 Starboard/Port & #5 Changing Course.
 When changing tacks onto starboard port tack boats must have an opportunity to keep clear. The tacking boat must complete her tack before the port boat starts evasive maneuvers or the tack is illegal.

fig. 10 - #2 Windward/Leeward & #3 Clear Ahead/Astern.
 An overtaking boat establishing an overlap to leeward must give the windward boat room and opportunity to keep clear.

fig. 9

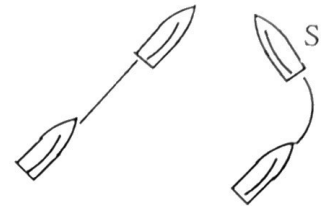
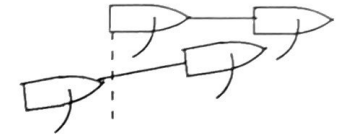


fig. 10



lead boat reaches the two boat length circle; then buoy room rules govern. In practice the only time there is a change in right-of-way is at a leeward mark with marks to starboard, where the port tack boat becomes the inside boat.

#1 Starboard/Port & #5 Changing Course fig. 9.

Two types of situations are involved here. One involving boats sailing on a tack, the other when a boat changes tacks.

When boats are sailing on a tack a starboard tack boat must not alter course to restrict a port tack boat from keeping clear.

When a boat tacks into a right-of-way position the newly burdened boat must have an opportunity to respond. One example of this starts with two boats sailing upwind on port tack. If the boat ahead and to leeward (SL) decides to tack to starboard then the windward port tack boat (PW) may suddenly find himself confronted with a starboard tack boat. The tack is legal if PW can stay clear by altering

course after SL has completed her tack. The tack is illegal if PW, in an effort to avoid a collision, must alter course before SL's tack is complete. The burden falls to SL to show that the tack was legal.

The situation downwind is the same. A boat which jibes into a right-of-way position must allow the other boat room to stay clear.

#2 Windward/Leeward & #3 Clear Ahead/Astern fig.10

Boats are either overlapped, & #2 applies; or one is clear ahead of the other, & #3 applies.

When the boat astern establishes an overlap to windward the right-of-way is unchanged. The lead/leeward boat may do as she pleases.

When the boat astern establishes an overlap to leeward she must allow the windward yacht "ample room and opportunity to keep clear" (Rule 37.3). The leeward boat will also be restricted by Mast Abeam to sailing her proper course (No hail is required).

fig.11- #2 Windward/Leeward & #4 Buoy Room.
 Inside two boat lengths the bouy room rule prevails.

fig. 12 - #2 Windward/Leeward & #5 Changing Course.
 The Leeward boat may luff as she pleases. Until the windward boat has Mast Abeam there are no restrictions on the leeward boat.

fig. 13 - #3 Clear Ahead/Astern & #4 Buoy Room.
 If the inside boat has no overlap when the outside boat reaches the 2 boat length circle the inside boat does not get room; even if she later gets an overlap.

fig. 11

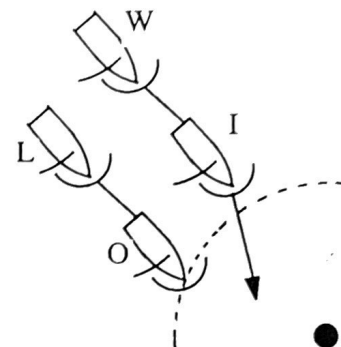
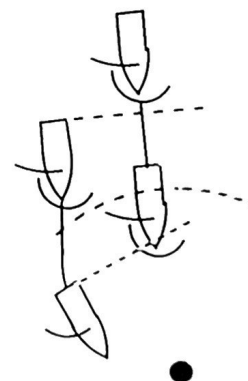


fig. 12



fig. 13



#2 Windward/Leeward & #4 Buoy Room fig. 11.

A leeward boat has right of way until the lead boat reaches the two boat length circle; then buoy room prevails.

#2 Windward/Leeward & #5 Changing Course fig. 12.

The leeward boat may do as she pleases except as covered in rule 38. The rule explains that the leeward boat is not restricted until a windward boat hails "Mast Abeam" (or words to that effect. On the rare occasion when Dave Perry was behind me in collegiate practice he would often pass me downwind and hail "Words to that effect" as he achieved mast abeam.) See Chapter 5, Section 4.

A boat which tacks or jibes into a leeward (right-of-way) position must do so giving the burdened boat room to keep clear after the tack or jibe is completed (41.2).

#3 Clear Ahead/Astern & #4 Buoy Room fig. 13.

A boat which is clear astern when the boat clear ahead reaches the two boat length circle is not entitled to room. The boat astern must stay clear of the boat ahead during a mark rounding.

fig. 14 - #3 Clear Ahead/Astern & #5 Changing Course.
A yacht clear ahead may alter course as she pleases;
except she may not sail down on a boat steering to
overtake to leeward.

fig. 15 - #4 Buoy Room & #5 Changing Course.
When part of the rounding involves changing course
buoy room includes room to tack or jibe.

#3 Clear Ahead/Astern & #5 Changing Course fig. 14.

A boat clear ahead may do as she pleases, and the boat
astern must stay clear. A lead boat may not sail down on a
boat astern (or to leeward) which is steering a course to
pass to leeward (Rule 39).

When a port tack boat tacks in front of a starboard tack
boat he must complete his tack to a clear ahead position
before the starboard tack boat starts evasive action. If the
starboard tack boat must alter course before the tack is
complete then the port tack boat has tacked too close. As
in #1 & #5 above, the tacking boat has the onus of showing
the tack was completed allowing sufficient time/room for
the other boat to stay clear.

#4 Buoy Room & #5 Changing Course fig. 15.

Often a change of course is part of the mark rounding
process; and buoy room includes room to maneuver (in-
cluding room to tack or jibe) if that is part of the rounding
process.

A few thoughts on “Onus”

Rules 41.3, 42.1(c), & 42.1 (d) put the onus on boats
assuming right-of-way in transitional situations to “satisfy
the race committee” that the requirements of the rule were
met. All too often this “Onus” becomes a burden of proof
which leaves a protested yacht guilty until proven innocent.

fig. 14

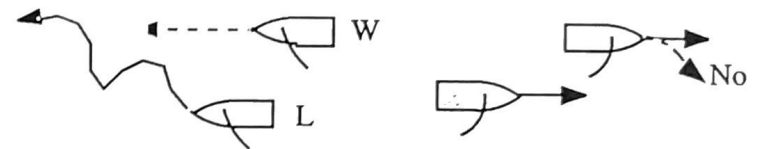
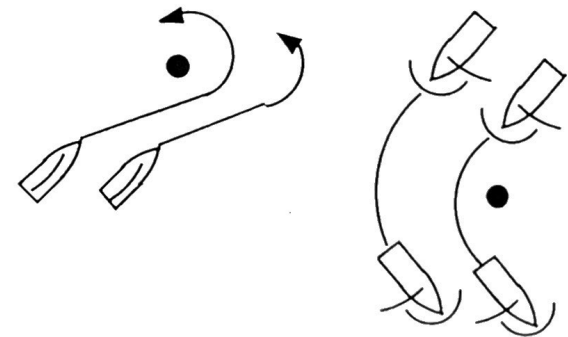


fig. 15



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More on Learning the Rules:

If you race sailboats in the United States you should be a member of the United States Yacht Racing Union. USYRU membership is only \$35/year. Benefits include a rule book, a T-Shirt, the monthly "American Sailor" magazine, a calendar, race administration, Appeals and other benefits too numerous to mention.

While I'm at it let me put in a plug for Dave Perry's book, *Understanding the Yacht Racing Rules*. If you want to study the rules this book is the one to buy. There is no other source which compares.

When you get your rule book study the definitions in the front of the book. They will give the legal meaning of luffing, tacking, racing etc. You'll need to know the definitions to understand the rules.

Another good way to learn the rules is to think about the rules in situations you see on the race course. Try to apply the rules, and ask (after the race) about situations you did not understand.

8.3 APPEALS & PROTESTS

Q3. What are the Appeals

When you join USYRU you will get a rule book. You should also buy a copy of the Appeals. The Appeals are the Supreme Court decisions of yacht racing. There are United States and International Appeals. The appeals process is used to resolve conflicts over the interpretation (understanding) of the rules.

As you become comfortable with the basic workings of the rules you can try to develop a more thorough understanding. The best way to do this is to study a particular facet of the rules in detail - say mark roundings for example - and review all the appeals on that particular topic. Then move to other topics - starting, or luffing rights - and give them a thorough study.

Dave Perry's book is an excellent guide in this study process.

Q4 What do I need to know about Protests?

Sooner or later you are going to have to defend your actions on the race course before a jury. Obviously you want an understanding of the rules. More important, you need to present your information about the incident in a clear, precise manner. Give facts, not generalizations. Be specific. Listen carefully to what others say and question anything you disagree with. Search for inconsistencies in the story offered by others.

Sit in on protest hearings. As you learn the rules sit in and watch the rules in action. Most juries and parties to a protest will allow you to observe (in silence). Protest hearings range from boring to fascinating. Observing a hearing can give you some insight into the application of the rules - how they really work. It will also be invaluable preparation for the day when you are a party to a protest.