

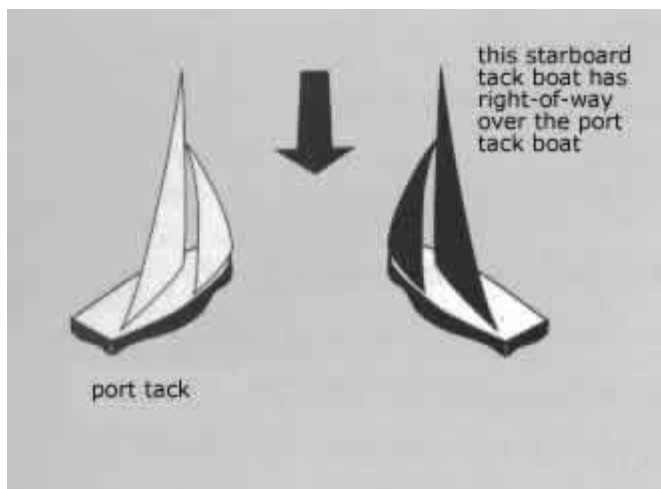
Basic Sailing Rules

An understanding of this introduction to the rules enables a racing helmsman to keep out of trouble and provides the logical framework which underlies all the 'when boats meet' rules, however complex.

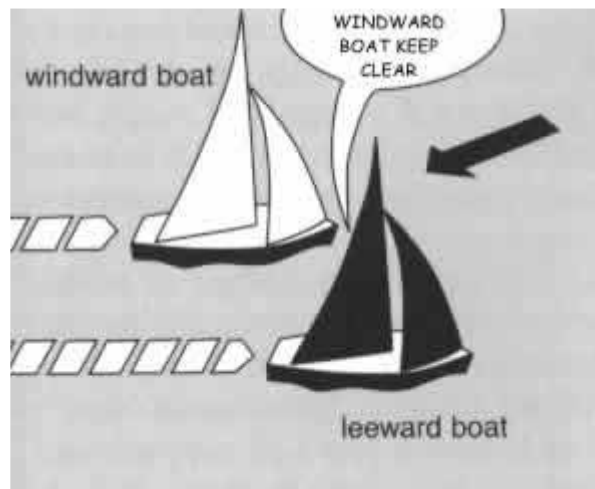
The sailing rules are designed to prevent collisions and to promote fair sailing. So when boats collide, or when a right-of-way boat is forced to steer clear to avoid contact, the boat in the wrong should be penalised. The voluntary penalty is the '720' (two full turns of the boat). If a helmsman in the wrong does not take the voluntary penalty soon after the incident, another competitor or the race organisers may lodge a protest. In the protest meeting the boat in the wrong is disqualified. The basic right-of-way code is quite simple, but it is important to know that the rights and obligation of boats in open water are often different from those at marks of the course or obstructions.

Basic right-of-way in open water

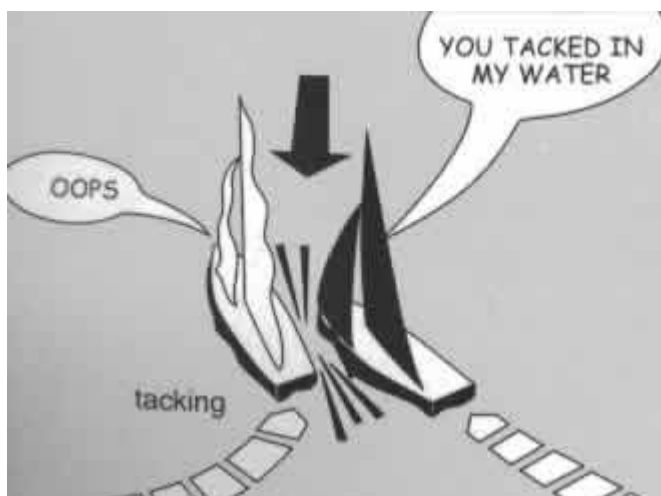
When neither boat is about to pass a mark or an obstruction



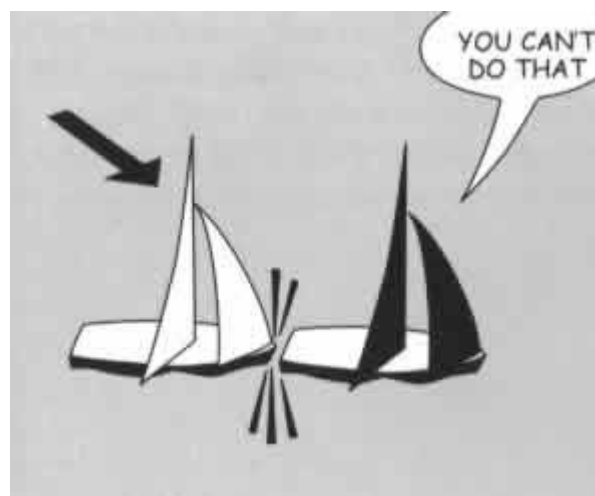
1 A boat on port tack must keep clear of a boat on starboard tack (rule 10).



2 A windward boat must keep clear of a leeward boat (rule 11).



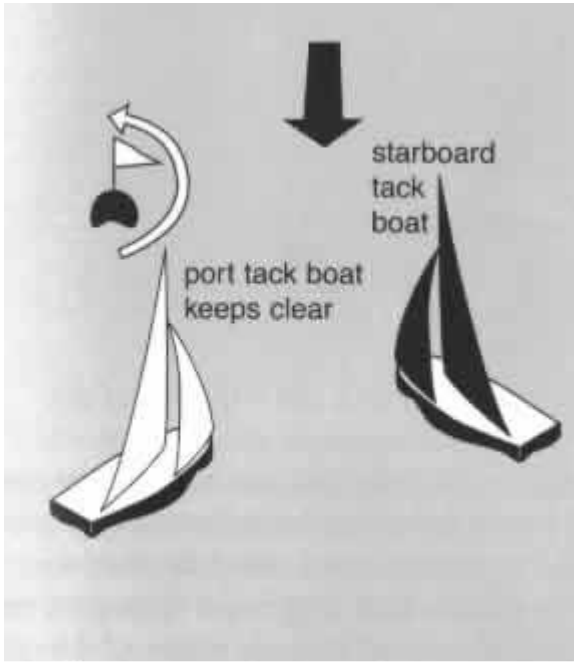
3 A boat which is tacking must keep clear of one that isn't (rule 13).



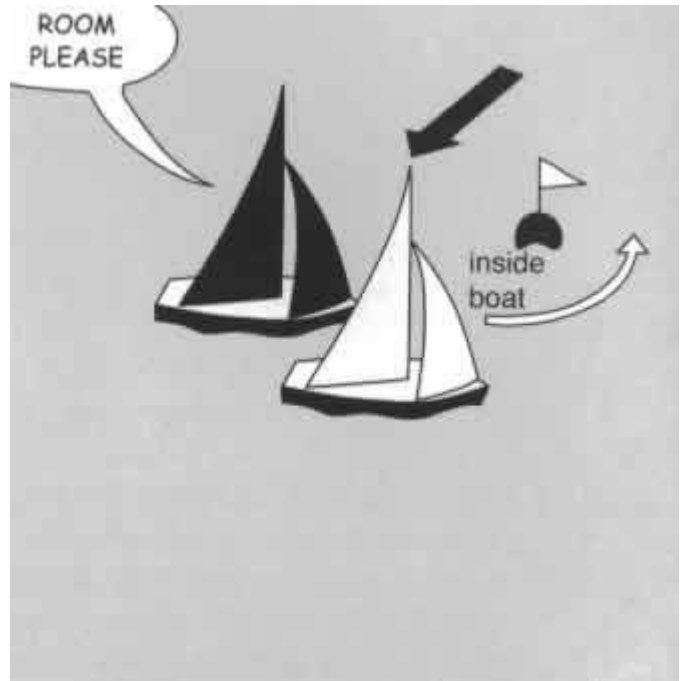
4 A boat clear astern of another must keep clear of the one ahead when they are both on the same tack (rule 12).

Basic right-of-way at a windward mark

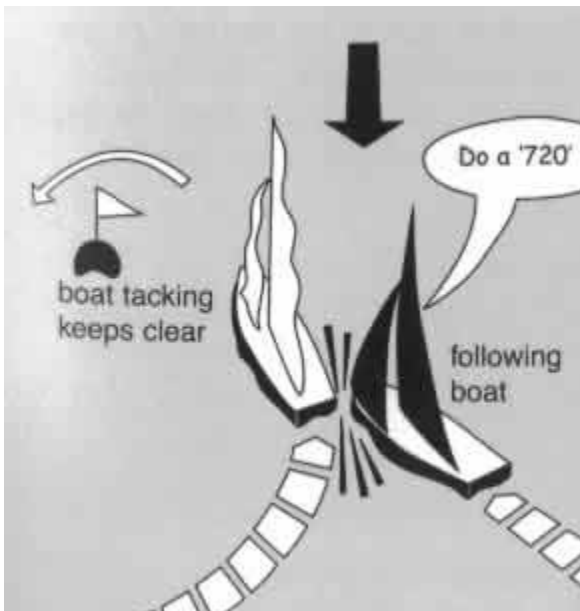
At a windward mark - that is a mark of the course that you have been tacking to get to - the basics are:



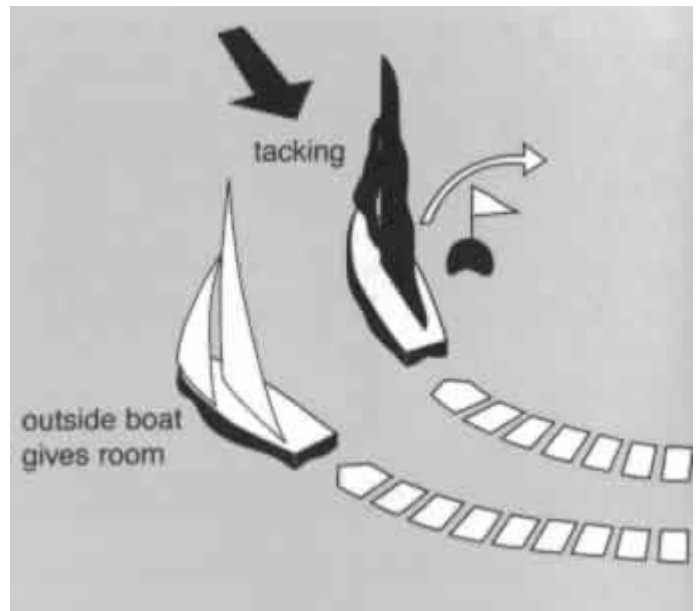
1 When on opposite tacks, take the mark away and apply the principles as in open water (rules 10 and 18.1(b)).



2 When on the same tack, the boat next to the mark must be given room to pass the mark by the boat outside (rule 18.2 (a)).

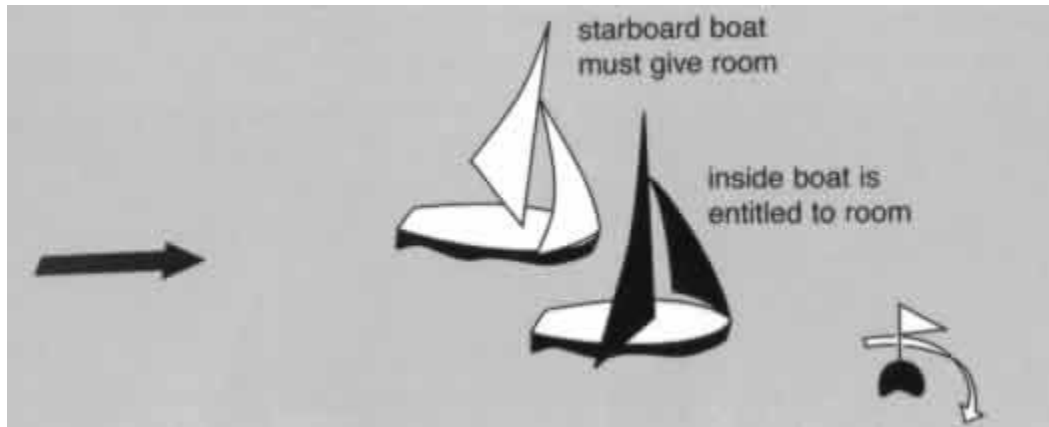


3 When a boat is tacking to pass the mark, she must keep clear of any other boat (rule 13).



4 A boat overlapping on the outside must give room to a boat tacking on the inside (rule 18.2(a)).

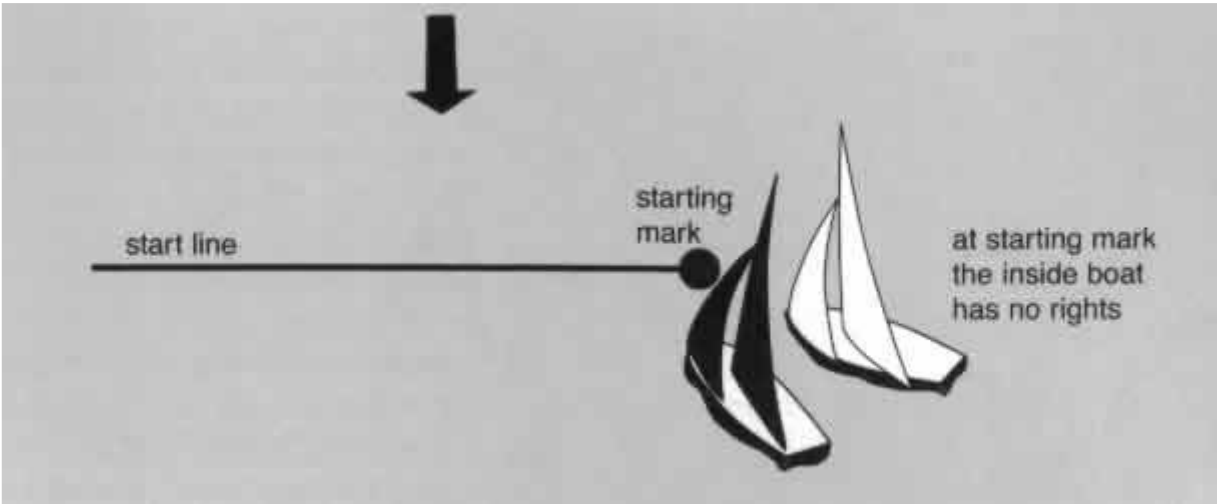
Basic right-of-way at the gybe mark and leeward mark



At an off-wind mark - one you have sailed to on a reach or a run - the basics are:

1. If the boat on the inside at the mark is the give-way boat (on port tack if they are on opposite tacks, or to windward if they are on the same tack), she must be given room to pass the mark (rule 18.2(a)). The port and starboard rule (10) does not apply. But the inside boat must not take more room than that required to pass the mark in a seamanlike way in the existing conditions (rule 18.2, definition of Room).
2. If the boat on the inside at the mark is the right-of-way boat (on starboard tack if they are on opposite tacks, or to leeward if they are on the same tack), the outside boat must keep clear (rule 18.2(a)). But the inside boat must not sail further from the mark than needed to sail her proper course (unless neither will have to gybe, and the leeward boat did not establish the overlap from clear astern) (rules 18.2 and 18.4).
3. A boat which approaches the mark clear ahead of another has the right to bear away or gybe round the mark; the other boat must keep clear (rule 18.2(c)).
4. If they are overlapped when one of them reaches to two-length zone, the outside boat's obligation continues even if the overlap is broken later (rule 18.2(b)).

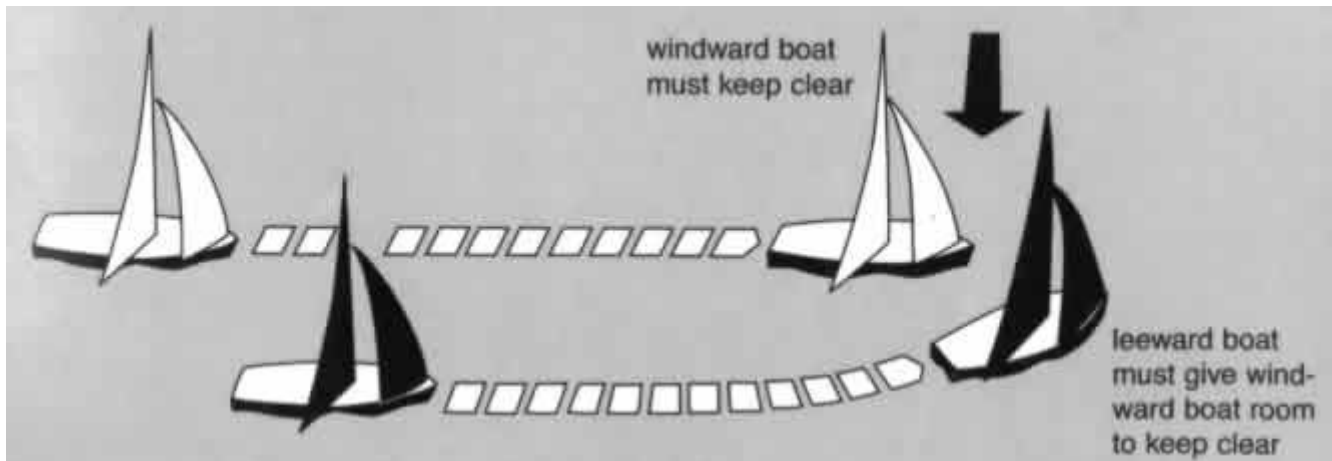
Basic rights before and at the start



When milling about before a start, it is important to realise that if you are out of control or are preoccupied in adjusting a halyard, you can be penalised in a collision with a boat that has right-of-way. So if you're going to mess about with your boat before the start, make sure you're on starboard tack and keep a good lookout for boat approaching to leeward. If you break a rule in the 'preparatory period' (usually the four minutes before the start), you will have to take a 720° penalty as soon as possible after the incident.

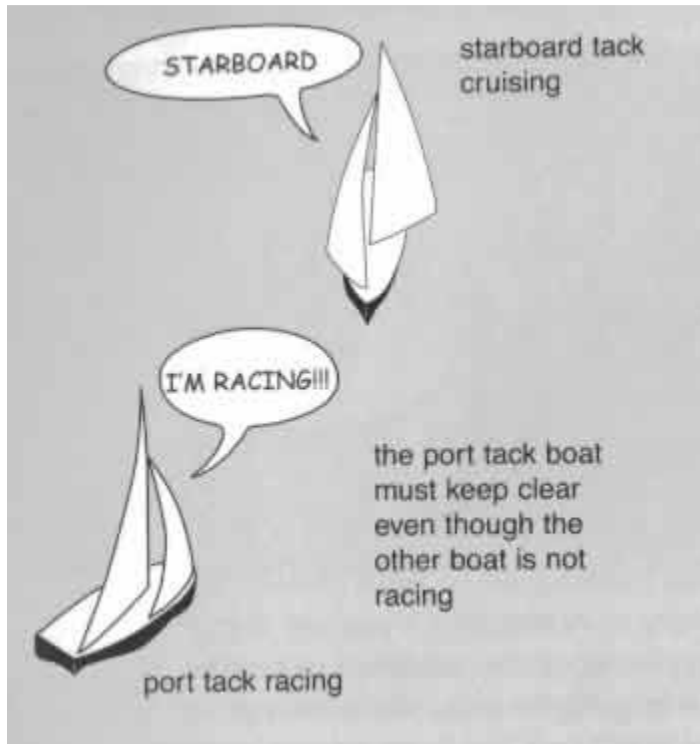
The rules about giving room at marks change when boats are 'approaching the line to start'. No boat has the right to room at a starting mark when approaching the line to start (unless the mark is not surrounded by navigable water).

Changing course



Whenever a right-of-way boat changes course, she must usually give the give-way boat 'room to keep clear'. Sometimes a boat is not allowed to sail above her proper course, but when a boat establishes an overlap on your windward side you may luff right up to head-to-wind provided that you give the windward boat room to keep clear (rule 16).

Boats, cruising, in other races and motor boats



The racing rules apply only between boats that are racing, either in the same or different races. When a boat that is racing meets one that is cruising, a different set of rules apply: they are the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (IRPCAS). Although essentially the same as the basic racing rules defined above, there are some important differences. The IRPCAS do not allow luffing an overtaking boat, and a boat that is overtaking must keep clear, regardless of which tacks the boats are on. IRPCAS give no rights to boats that are rounding or passing marks or obstructions. As a matter of courtesy, boats not racing should do their best to keep clear of those racing but there are no rules requiring them to do so.

Sailing boats have right-of-way over motor boats, but in confined waters, ships have right-of-way over sailing boats. It should always be remembered that the racing rules are primarily intended to enable boats to manoeuvre closely without colliding.

Extracts from the ISAF "Rules of Sailing 2001 to 2004"