

Racing Rules Cheat Sheet

These are philosophies rather than rules. These should keep you out of trouble in a friendly fleet. If you have a question about the actual rules, consult the actual rule-book.

Rules of General Application

General Rule 1 – Don't hit anyone.

General Rule 2 – If you change course near another boat, give her reasonable way out.

Rules Applicable to Starting

Starting Rule 1 –Port avoids Starboard, Windward avoids Leeward, Clear Astern avoids Clear Ahead. (If you're already lost, the rest of this sheet isn't going to be of much use. Refer to General Rules 1 & 2, stay away from close situations and enjoy!).

Starting Rule 2 – Leeward can luff head to wind at any time before the start (yes, even if it means taking you over the starting line early).

Starting Rule 3 – Don't sail into the opening between the stern of the committee boat and the windward side of a boat near the committee boat. Ever. Unless you're sure the other boat can't or won't close the door on you.

Starting Rule 4 – If someone is already between you and the committee boat, or cannot avoid becoming between you and the committee boat, give them room to sail between you and the committee boat. They'll appreciate it. (See also General Rules 1 and 2).

Rules When Beating to Windward

Windward Leg Rule 1 –Port avoids Starboard, Windward avoids Leeward, Clear Astern avoids Clear Ahead (we're starting to establish a theme here).

Windward Leg Rule 2 – When you and an overlapped boat approach an obstruction (which can include a third boat with right-of-way over both of you), the leeward boat decides which way to go.

Windward Leg Rule 2(a) – If you are leeward and want to duck the obstruction, give the other boat room to duck with you. (See General Rules 1 & 2).

Windward Leg Rule 2(b) – If you are leeward and want to tack at the obstruction, hail the windward boat for room to tack. If you are the windward boat and the leeward boat hails for room to tack you have but two options:

- i. tack right away (no unnecessary delay); or
- ii. hail "You Tack" and avoid the leeward boat when she tacks.

If you are the leeward boat who hailed for room to tack, tack promptly after the windward boat tacks or hails "You Tack." Don't cry wolf.

Windward Leg Rule 3 – Don't tack so close to another boat that she must avoid you.

Rules When Sailing Free

Free Leg Rule 1 – Port avoids Starboard, Windward avoids Leeward, Clear Astern avoids Clear Ahead (foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, but there's nothing foolish here).

Free Leg Rule 1(a) – If you come up on someone to leeward from behind, don't luff, they were there first. If someone else comes up to windward from behind, take-em-to the moon, you were there first.

Free Leg Rule 2 – Remember to observe General Rules 1 and 2. (No, you can no longer luff as fast as you want.)

Free Leg Rule 3 – When you and an overlapped boat approach an obstruction, (which can include a third boat with right-of-way over both of you), the leeward boat decides which way to go, but should give room to the windward boat if she ducks the obstruction.

Free Leg Rule 4 – Enjoy! Hey, it's a free leg!

Free Leg Rule 152 – If a yacht with sail with the number 152 is astern on a free leg of the course, you must turn to windward and sail no closer to the next mark until the condition no longer exists.

Rules at Those Confounded Marks

Mark Rule 1 – Don't forget General Rules 1 and 2 (the actual rules differ here, but this is not bad practice).

Mark Rule 2 – If you are overlapped with another boat when either of you comes within 90' (3 lengths) of the mark, outside gives inside room to pass the mark, regardless of what happens to the overlap after that. (Do this regardless of whether you are port or starboard, windward or leeward).

Exception – At a windward mark, if you are port tack, avoid starboard tackers, even if you're overlapped when the first of you reaches the 3 lengths zone.

Mark Rule 4 – If you are not overlapped with another boat when you arrive within three lengths of the mark, avoid the boats ahead and ignore the boats behind (it's their job to look out for you).

Mark Rule 5 – If you are on port tack approaching a windward mark, don't tack inside someone near the mark unless you're sure they can't or won't close the door on you. (See Starting Rule 3).

Answers to questions on these philosophies, or on the actual rules, are available at the cost of one beer, two if the question relates to an actual race, three if you insist on using your hands.

Cheat Sheet Rule – Do not distribute to anyone who wants to follow the actual rules.

Cheat Sheet Disclaimer – These are not actual rules, and diverge in some subtle ways from the actual rules. I disavow any responsibility for your use of these suggestions. If in doubt, avoid situations that could potentially result in contact with boats or inanimate objects.