

1. What You Need to Know?

Everyone thinks the rules are complicated and, of course, in many ways, they are. They have to cope with boats in 3 dimensions, often not on the same leg of the course, sailing in different directions at different speeds.

But don't let that put you off. Although the rule book (as published by World Sailing) is about 150 pages long, most of this concerns the organisation of races or is for special types of sailing (match racing, kiteboarding, etc.). The actual rules that are really important for you to know fill just **11 pages**.

As a club racer, what you need to know is:

- P7-10: Definitions
- P14-20: Part 2: When Boats Meet

You can download the rules for free here: <https://d7qh6ksdplczd.cloudfront.net/sailing/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/10102248/2021-2024-RRS-with-Chgs-and-Corrns-v1to-4-Jan-1-2023.pdf>

In the following sections we will talk more about the 10 rules you need to know.

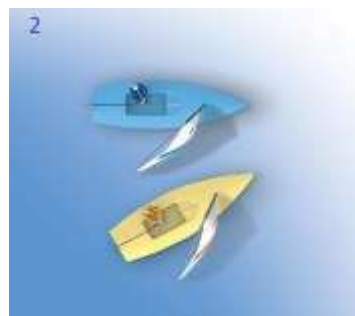
2. Right of Way

At every stage of a race, when 2 boats meet, one is the **keep clear** boat and one is the **right of way** boat. The following table shows which is which in different situations.

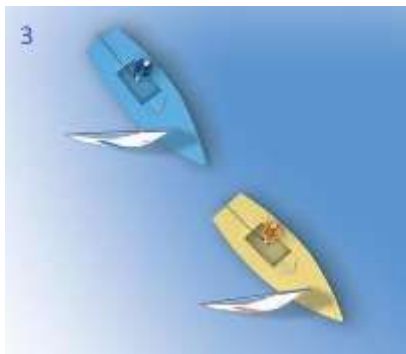
	Keep clear	Right of way
On opposite tacks (Rule 10)	Boat on port tack (wind from port side)	Boat on starboard tack (wind from starboard side)
On the same tack & overlapped (Rule 11)	Boat to windward (nearer the wind direction)	Boat to leeward (further from wind direction)
On the same tack, but not overlapped (Rule 12)	Boat clear astern (behind)	Boat clear ahead (ahead)
While tacking (Rule 13)	Boat tacking (from passing head to wind until on close hauled course)	Boat not tacking
If both are tacking (Rule 13)	Boat to port Boat astern	Boat to starboard Boat ahead



Yellow is on starboard tack and has right of way. Blue is on port and is the keep clear boat.



Yellow is to leeward and has right of way. Blue is to windward and is the keep clear boat.



Yellow is clear ahead and has right of way.
Blue is clear astern and is the keep clear boat.



Yellow is tacking and is the keep clear boat until it is on a close-hauled course. Blue does not have to keep clear until Yellow is established on a close-hauled course on starboard.

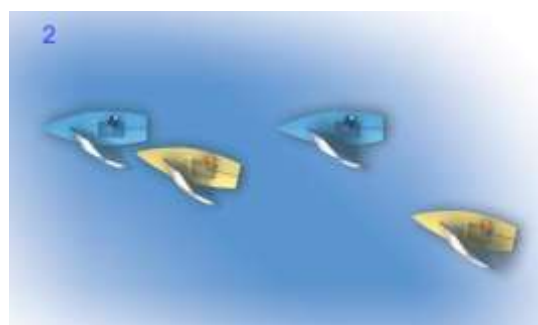
3: *Limitation on a Right of Way Boat*

Being right of way boat doesn't mean you can do anything – there are some limitations on you which we will cover in this section.

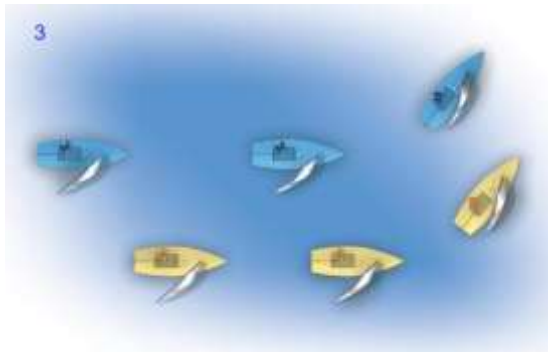
1. You must **avoid contact** with another boat if reasonably possible (Rule 14).
If you are the right of way boat (or entitled to room, which we will come to in section 5) you don't need to act to avoid a collision until it is clear the give way boat is not keeping clear / giving room but, when it does become clear, you should try to avoid contact – but you will usually be exonerated if the contact does not cause damage or injury.
2. When you **acquire right of way** (e.g. by tacking on to starboard or establishing an overlap to leeward) you must initially give the other boat room to keep clear (Rule 15).
The only exception to this is if you acquire right of way because of the other boat's actions (e.g. someone tacks onto port in front of you).
3. When you **change course** you must give the give way boat room to keep clear (Rule 16).
This is for every change of course, so a gradual luff is multiple changes of courses.
4. If you were clear astern and **became overlapped** within 2 hull lengths of a boat on the same tack you shall not sail above your proper course (Rule 17).
When you were clear astern you were give way boat but as you established the overlap to leeward you became the right of way boat (to leeward) but you must not do this so close that the windward boat cannot keep clear (point 2) and you must not sail higher than your proper course (the course you would sail to finish as soon as possible in the absence of the other boat).



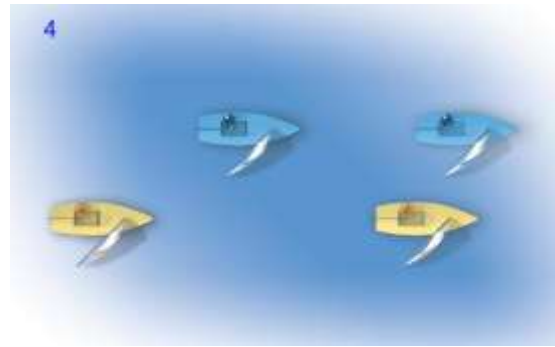
Yellow is right of way boat (on starboard) but has an obligation to avoid contact with Blue but does not need to act if they believe Blue is keeping clear, as they are here.



Yellow acquires right of way when it establishes an overlap to leeward of Blue, but Yellow must initially give room to Blue. Blue does not need to anticipate Yellow becoming the right-of-way boat. Here Yellow has not 'initially given room', and breaks rule 15.



Yellow is right of way boat (to leeward) and Blue (to windward) must keep clear. But with each change of direction, Yellow must give Blue room to keep clear.



Although Yellow (to leeward) is the right of way boat, she became overlapped from clear astern and so is not allowed to sail above her proper course.

4: When Boats Meet at Marks – Definitions

We now turn to the tricky subject of boats meeting at marks. Firstly, we need to be clear of the definitions and that is what we will cover in this section.

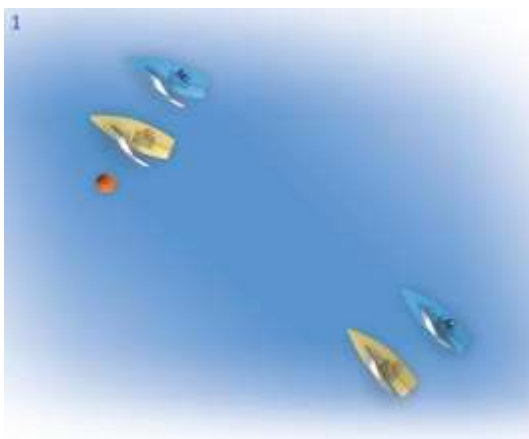
Mark room is room to:

- Leave a mark the required side
- Sail to the mark
- Round the mark

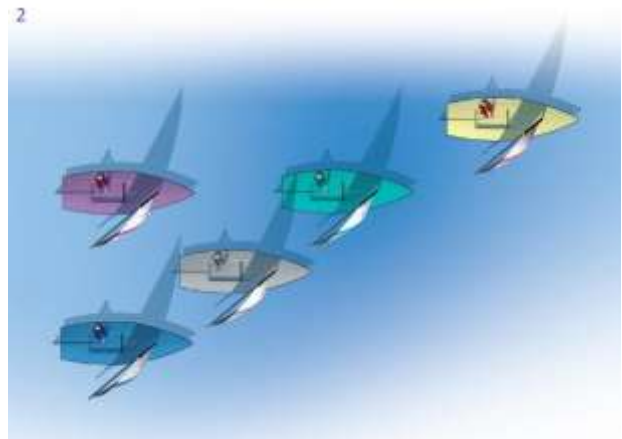
It is not room to tack round the mark or to sail wide round the mark.

The **zone** is the area around a mark within 3 hull lengths of the boat nearer to it. A boat is in the zone when any part of her hull is in the zone.

An **overlap** between 2 boats is when any part of a boat's hull / equipment is in front of a line abeam from the aftermost point of the other boat's hull / equipment. In both cases the hull / equipment needs to be in its normal position.



Mark room is room to sail to and round the mark



Yellow is clear ahead of all the others and is not overlapped. Green & Grey are overlapped. Grey & Blue are overlapped. Green & Blue are overlapped because Grey is between them. Green & Purple are not overlapped because Grey is not between them.

5: When Boats Meet at Marks – Rules

We now get onto **mark room** (or 'water' as those of a certain age will remember it!) – refer to the last section for the definition of 'mark room'.

Mark room **applies** when 2 boats are required to leave a mark on the same side.

However, mark room **does not** apply:

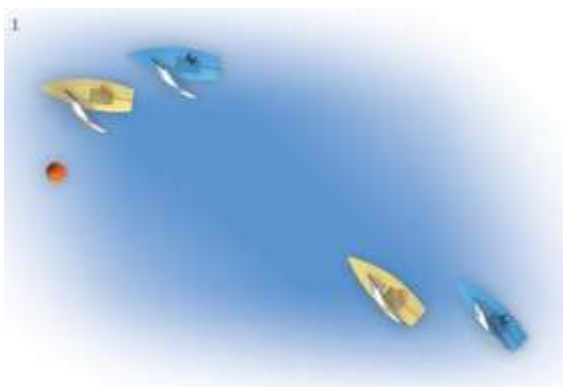
- At a starting mark
- When on opposite tacks on a beat (this is often mistakenly thought to mean that mark room does not apply on a beat – it only doesn't apply on a beat if you are on opposite tacks)
- When on opposite tacks when the proper course is for one boat, but not both, to tack
- Between a boat approaching the mark and one leaving it
- If you tack in the zone (check definition in last section) to be on the same tack as a boat fetching the mark (see below)

Mark room (definition in last section) is given:

- By the outside boat to the inside boat if they were overlapped (definition in last section) when the first boat reaches the zone (definition in last section)
- By the boat clear astern if the boat was clear astern when the first boat reaches the zone

There are, however, 2 limitations:

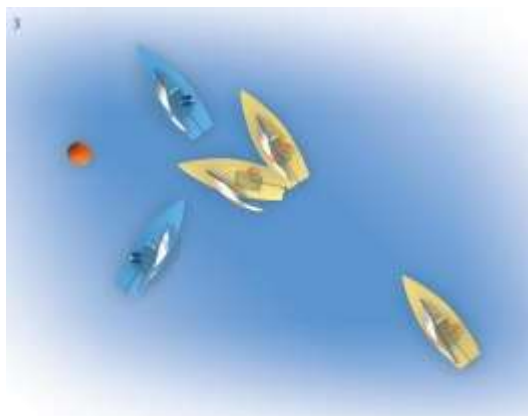
- You are not entitled to mark room if you got your inside overlap from clear astern or tacking to windward and the outside boat is **unable** to give mark room (you can't just barge in there!)
- If you **tack in the zone** to be on the same tack as a boat fetching the mark (see above) you cannot luff above close-hauled or prevent the other boat from rounding the mark and you have to give the other boat mark room if it gets an inside overlap – so, if you tack in the zone, there's a lot you must and cannot do – you should only do it if you know what you're doing!



Blue is giving Yellow mark room.



Mark room does not apply at a starting mark. Yellow cannot ask Blue for room to pass inside the committee boat.



Blue has tacked in the zone. Blue cannot luff above close-hauled and must give Yellow mark room if Yellow gets an inside overlap. Don't be Blue unless you really know what you are doing!

6: When Boats Meet at Obstructions

Firstly, let's **define** an obstruction. The primary definition is an object that a boat could not pass without changing course substantially, if sailing directly towards it and one hull length from it. This does not include other racing boats unless you are required to keep clear (e.g. a starboard boat when you are on port).

The sailing instructions can also define obstructions and at Draycote these are:

- Fishing boats, whether engaged in fishing or not (the area within which a fishing line extends from, or is being cast from, a fishing boat forms a part of the fishing boat)
- Rescue boats and Committee Boats, when not displaying definitive start or finish flags
- 30 metres from the shore except at the Club compound
- Soon to come: The area surrounded by buoys around the drainage pipes in the vicinity of marks A & M.

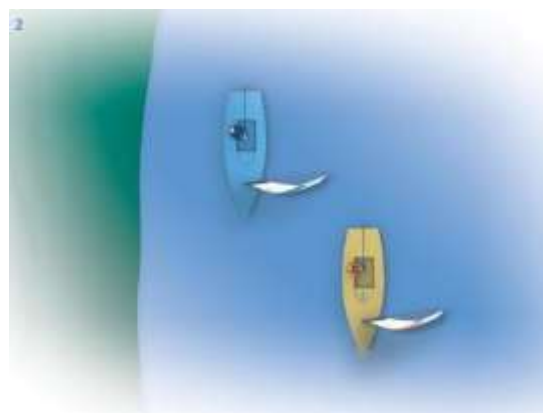
When 2 boats are passing an obstruction, the right of way boat (remember section 2!) may leave the obstruction either side. But, when 2 boats are overlapped (see definition in section 4), the outside boat must give the inside boat room, unless they were unable to do so when the overlap began (i.e., if you are clear astern, you can't barge in if there isn't room!).

If you are close-hauled and require room from another boat to tack at an obstruction you may hail for room to tack (one of the very few times in the rules that a hail is required). The hail must be made to give the hailed boat sufficient time to respond but the hailed boat **must** respond in one of two ways:

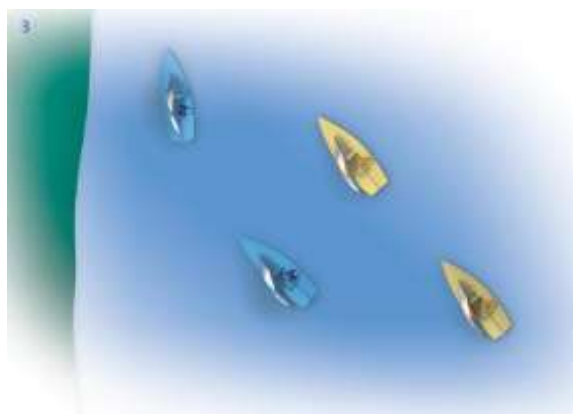
1. Either they must tack as soon as possible to allow the hailing boat to tack
2. Or they can say 'you tack' and then they have to give the hailing boat room to tack and have to avoid them



Green (on starboard) is an obstruction to Yellow and Blue.



If at the moment the overlap begins, there is sufficient room for Blue to pass between Yellow and the shore, Blue has the right to room. If not, Yellow is not required to give room.



Blue may hail for room to tack. Yellow must respond by tacking or hailing 'You tack'.

7: Penalties & Protests

You should now know your obligations in most situations you will experience. But knowing your obligations may not be enough – occasionally you may realise that you have broken a rule. In that case, it's fairly simple. If you break a boat-on-boat rule (the one's we've covered so far) then you need to take a penalty. The simplest penalty is a **two-turns penalty**. To take this you need to get away from other boats as soon as possible and do two turns in the same direction, with each turn consisting of a tack and gybe.

Another rule you might occasionally break is if you hit a mark of the course while rounding it. In this case you need to take a **one-turn penalty**. Again, get away from other boats as soon as possible and do one turn, consisting of a tack and gybe.

If you're having a mare and, in the same incident, you hit another boat and hit a mark of the course, these penalties don't add up – you just have to do a two-turn penalty.

At our level, our sport is self-policing so, if you think you have broken a rule, take a penalty. Don't wait for someone to point out that you have broken a rule – just do the penalty.

If you think someone else has broken a rule, point this out to them. If they don't take a penalty immediately you can protest them. This is all done ashore after the race, but the most important thing is to shout 'Protest' to them there and then. It's also a good idea if you can identify potential witnesses to the incident.

When the race has finished you can discover the delights of protests and someone will help you through this. If both parties are sensible it doesn't have to be acrimonious and can be a learning experience for all parties.

More often though, you may have an incident and you are not sure who was in the right. By applying the rules we've been through in this series you should be able to work it out but, if not, there are many people at the club who will be happy to chat it through with you.



A two-turns penalty, with each turn consisting of a tack and gybe.



A one-turn penalty, consisting of a tack and gybe.

That's it – we hope you have found this series helpful and look forward to racing against you soon!