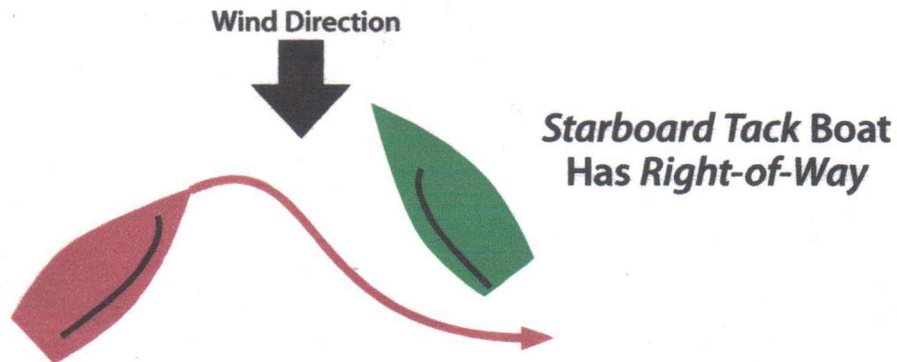


# **THE BASIC SAILBOAT RACING RULES ALL RACERS SHOULD KNOW**

By Ken Quant



In sailboat racing there are no out-of-bounds lines on the floor or referees to call fouls. The rules are self enforced and administered within the fleet. A basic understanding of just a few important rules will help ensure that everyone has fun and gets home safe.

The specifics of the sailboat racing rules are mind-numbingly detailed and written to cover all potential incidents. **DON'T WORRY** - You do not need to know everything about the rules to go out and have fun and be safe. By reading and understanding the following rules and terms, you should be able to get around the course without fouling another boat or causing an accident.

## **These rules should only be thought of as a beginning!**

To get an official copy of the complete rules, join US Sailing at [www.ussailing.org](http://www.ussailing.org) Members receive an official copy of the current rules as a membership benefit. For a plain language discussion of the rules, look into purchasing Dave Perry's book entitled "*Understanding the Racing Rules of Sailing*" at the same site.

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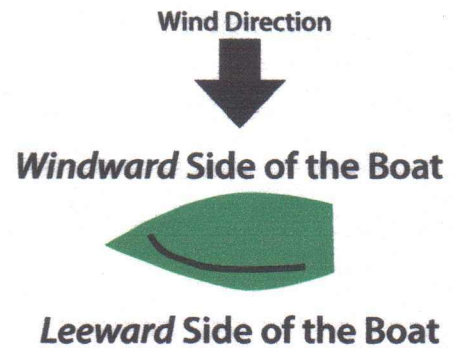
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# BASIC TERMS

## Starboard Tack vs Port Tack

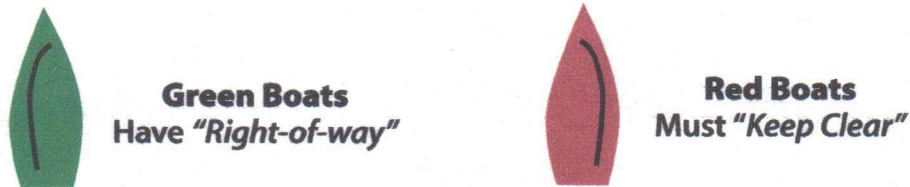


## Windward vs Leeward



## Right-of-Way

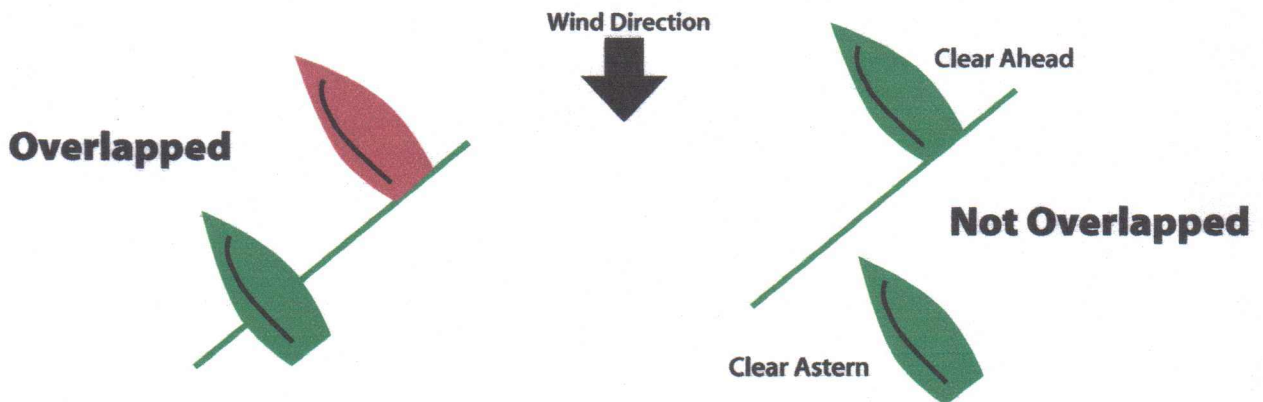
When one boat has the *Right-of-Way*, the other boats is required to *Keep Clear*.



**Avoiding Collisions - All boats are required by rule to avoid a collision if possible!**  
*Right-of-Way* is no excuse to cause a collision.

## Overlapped Boats

A boat *Overlapped* to *Leeward* has *Right-of-Way*. Overlaps are established from the transom.



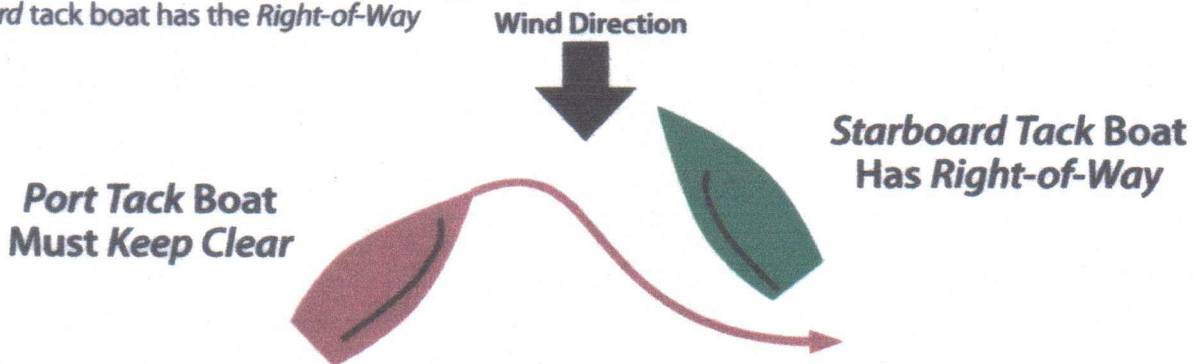
## Other Terms Used In This Discussion

- Close Hauled** - A boat sailing as close to the wind direction as possible
- Head-to-Wind** - A boat pointed straight into the wind. Sails will be luffing.
- Inside** - A boat positioned between the mark and another boat
- Outside** - A boat positioned with another boat between them and the mark
- Proper Course** - The course a boat would sail to get to the next mark as quickly as possible
- Room** - The space a boat needs to maneuver properly given conditions

# BASIC RIGHT-OF-WAY SITUATIONS

## Two Boats Converging on Opposite Tacks

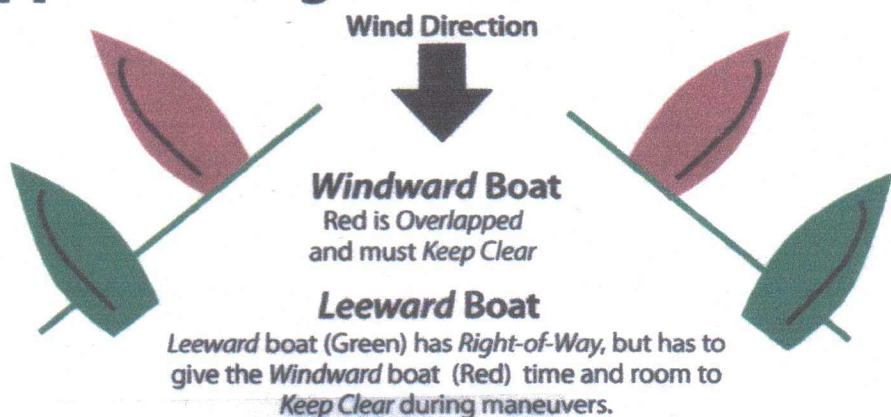
A Starboard tack boat has the *Right-of-Way*



## Two Boats Overlapped Sailing On the Same Tack

Leeward boat has the *Right-of-Way*

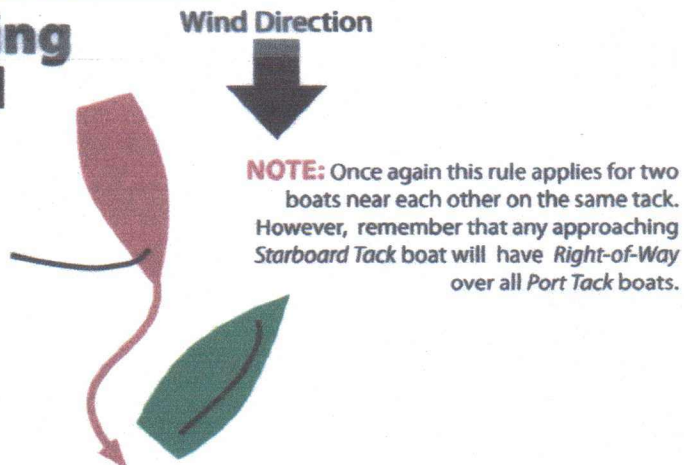
**NOTE:** This Rule applies for two boats near each other on the same tack. However, remember that any approaching Starboard Tack boat will have *Right-of-Way* over all Port Tack boats



## Same Tack Boats Converging on Different Points-of-Sail

### Leeward Boat has *Right-of-Way*

In this example, both boats are on *Port Tack*. As they converge, the windward boat (Red), which is sailing downwind, has to *Keep Clear* of the leeward boat (Green).

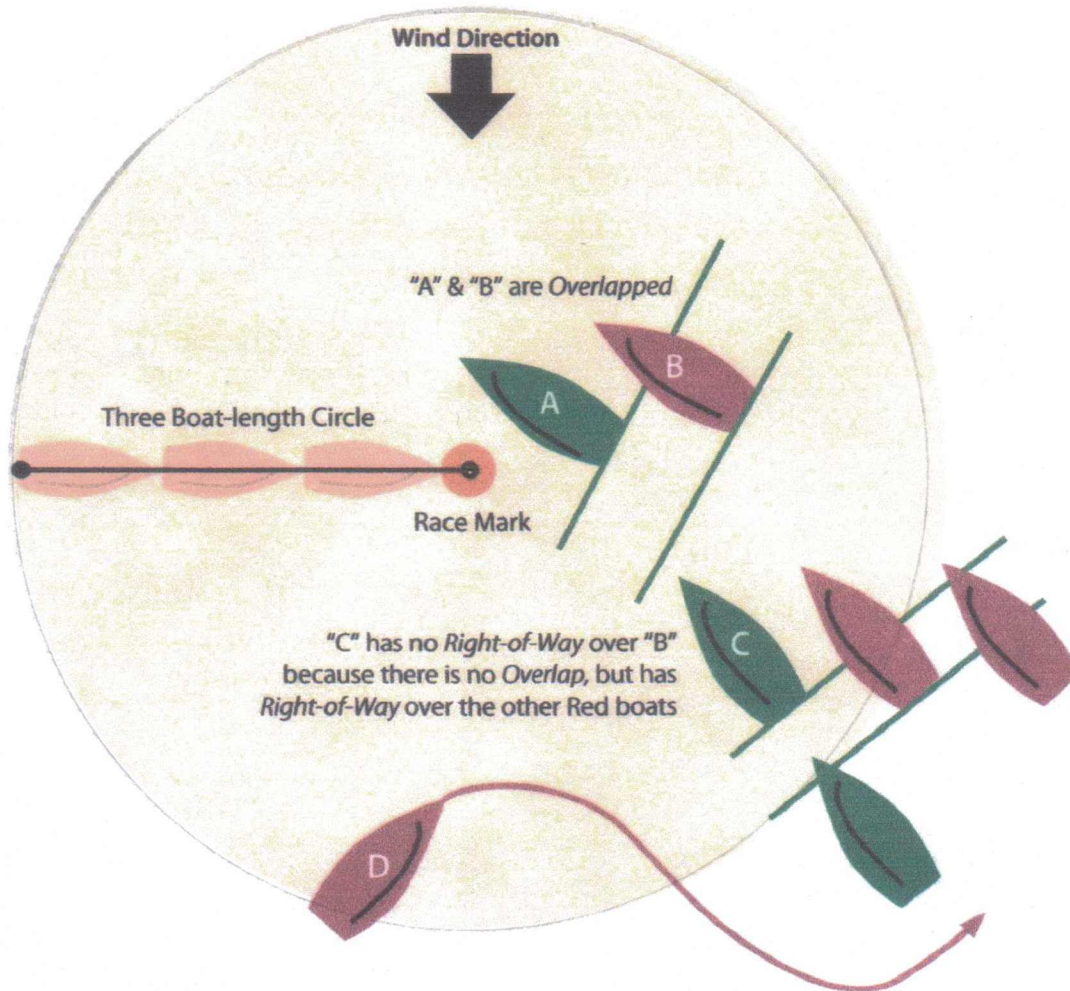


# BASIC RIGHT-OF-WAY SITUATIONS

## Boats Converging at Mark

An *Inside* and *Overlapped* boat (Green A) within three boat-lengths of the mark has the *Right-of-Way*. In general, any *Overlapped* outside boat (Red B) must *Keep Clear* and give room to any boat between them and the mark.

A boat coming into the mark on *Port Tack* (Red D) must be able to complete its tack without obstructing the progress of an incoming *Starboard Tack* boat. If a *Starboard Tack* boat has to adjust course, you fouled them.



## **WHEN BOATS MEET - COMMUNICATION !!!**

- **MAKE YOUR INTENTIONS KNOWN. COMMUNICATE VIA VHF CHANNEL 72:**

**" PLATYPUS, THIS IS FINE ALEE":**

**"I'M ON THE STARBOARD TACK"**

**OR**

**"I NEED ROOM AT THE MARK"**

**OR**

**"I'M GOING TO TACK"**

- **AVOID COLISIONS!!!! EVEN IF YOU HAVE THE RIGHT-OF-WAY.**
- **IF YOU ARE IN DOUBT, ASSUME THE OTHER BOAT HAS THE RIGHT-OF-WAY.**

## **FOULS**

- **IF YOU COMMIT A FOUL, SUCH AS CAUSING A "RIGHT-OF-WAY" BOAT TO ALTER THEIR COURSE TO AVOID YOU, YOU MUST GET CLEAR OF ALL OTHER BOATS AND THEN DO A PENALTY TURN. (A PENALTY TURN IS A 360° TURN WITH ONE TACK AND ONE GYBE)**
- **IF YOU HIT A MARKER, YOU MUST DO A PENALTY TURN.**

**NOTE: WHILE MAKING A PENALTY TURN, YOU HAVE NO RIGHTS OVER ANY OTHER BOAT. MAKE SURE YOU ARE WELL IN THE CLEAR BEFORE STARTING YOUR CIRCLE.**

## **THE START**

The “start” of a race may seem intimidating for sailors new to racing.

All boats appear to be just sailing around until just before the final horn, and then they all boats converge at the starting line.

Generally, what the captains are doing is trying to determine the best spot to be, and what time to be at that spot, before making their final approach to the starting line.

.An “ideal” start is to have your boat moving at full speed and hit the starting line just as the final horn sounds.

- A more conservative approach would be to be a few seconds, maybe even 10 seconds, behind the line when the final horn sounds.
- If you’re over the line when the horn sounds, you would have to restart. You would be required to sail around the end of the starting line and re-cross the line. You have no rights (right-of-way) while returning to the area behind the starting line.

## **GENERAL RULES-OF-THUMB FOR STARTS**

- Approach the starting line on a starboard tack if possible.
- Avoid approaching the line on a port tack, since you would be required to keep clear of all boats that are on the starboard tack.
- Leave yourself enough room from other boats so that you can “luff” your sails to slow down if you’re approaching too fast.

## **H.B.Y.C. RACING START SEQUENCE**

**10 MINUTES BEFORE THE START:** The Committee Boat will issue a "10 Minute Warning" announcement to the fleet on VHF Ch. 72

**5 MINUTES BEFORE THE START:** The Committee Boat will issue a "5 Minute Warning" on VHF Ch. 72.

**1 MINUTE BEFORE THE START:** The Committee Boat will issue a "final warning".

**10 SECONDS BEFORE THE START:** The Committee will begin a countdown to the start on VHF CH.72.

**START:** The Committee Boat shall sound an air horn to signal "START"

### **ADDITIONAL STARTING RULES:**

- All boats must check in with Committee Boat on VHF Ch. 72 prior to the start.
- At the 10 minute mark prior to the start, all boats should be behind the start line which is the line between the YELLOW FLAG on the Committee Boat and the START buoy.
- Any boat on the race course side of the start line at the 5 minute mark of the start sequence, must return to the area behind the start line by going around either END of the start line, not back across the start line.
- All engines should be off and all boats should be under sail at the 5 minute mark of the start sequence.
- At the start of the race, the Committee Boat, and only the Committee Boat, may call an early crossing or blocking foul.
- Any boat over early (jumping the start) as called by the Committee Boat, must sail clear of the race course and return to the area behind the start line by going around the outside of EITHER END of the start line, and then re-cross the line. The boat must stay clear of other boats and will have NO RIGHTS until she is behind the start line.