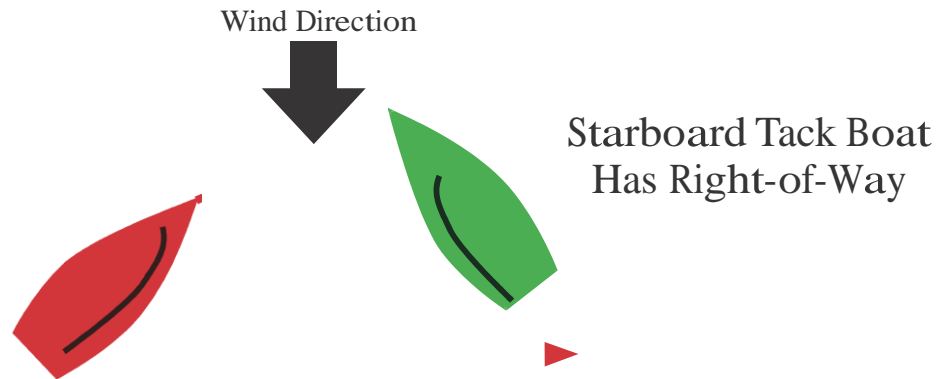


# THE BASIC SAILBOAT RACING RULES ALL RACERS SHOULD KNOW

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!**

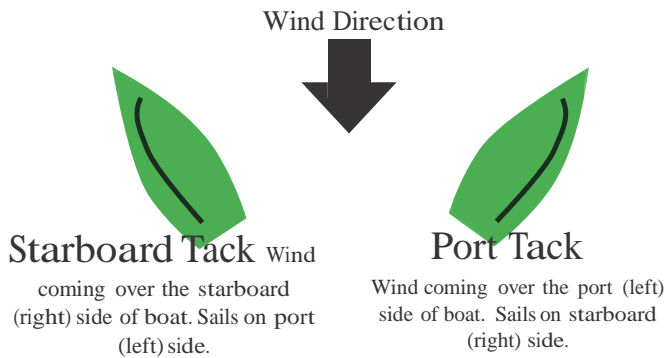
To get an official copy of the complete rules, join US Sailing at [www.ussailing.org](http://www.ussailing.org) Members receive an official copy of the current rules as a membership benefit. For a plain language discussion of the rules, look into purchasing Dave Perry's book entitled "Understanding the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

Reproduction for FREE distribution is encouraged.

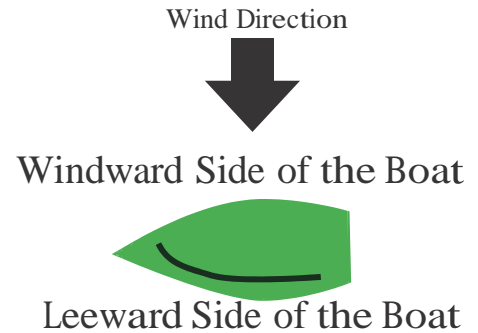


# BASIC TERMS

## Starboard Tack vs Port Tack

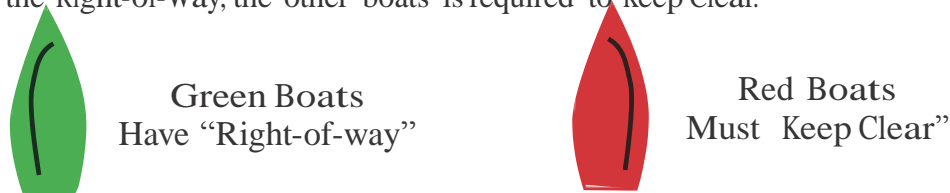


## Windward vs Leeward



## Right-of-Way

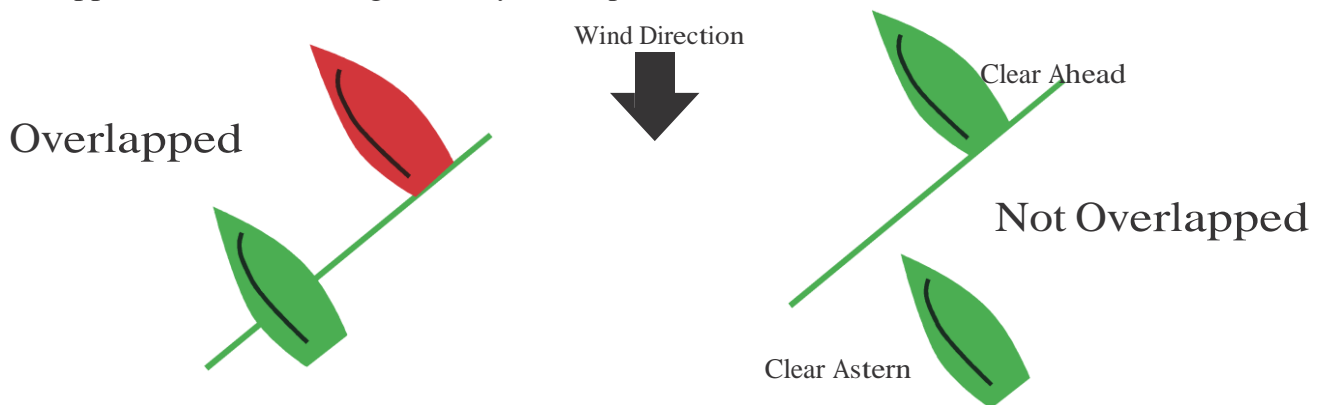
When one boat has the Right-of-Way, the other boats is required to Keep Clear.



**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.



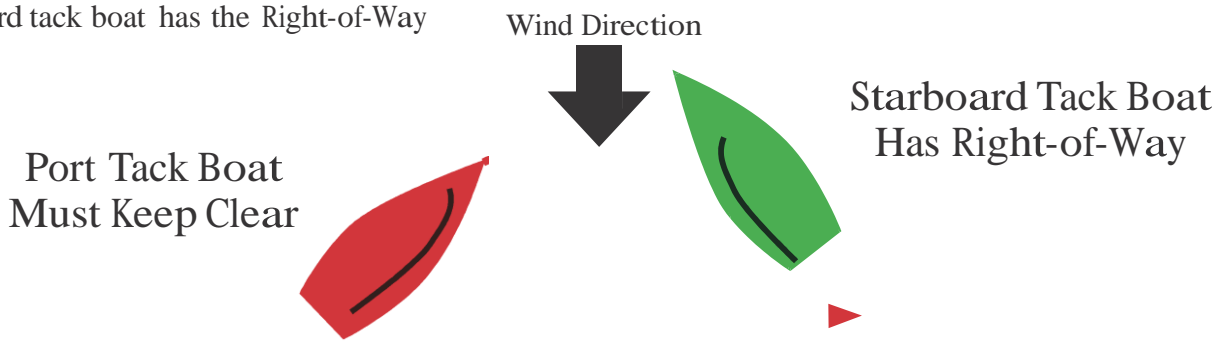
## Other Terms Used In This Discussion

- 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

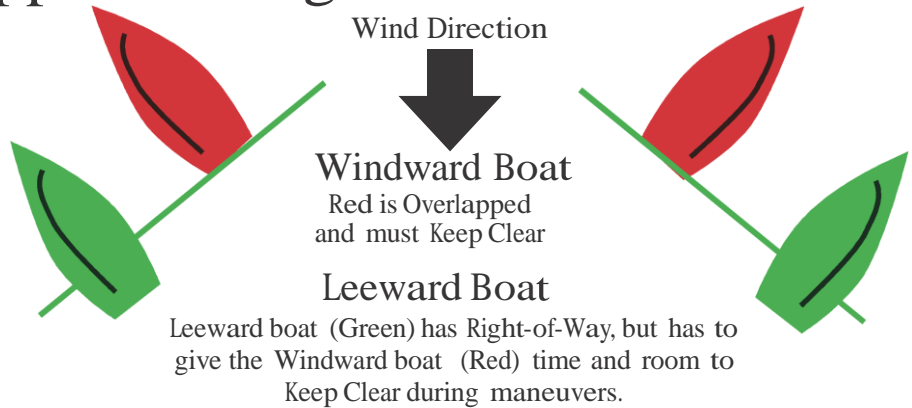
A Starboard tack boat has the Right-of-Way



## Two Boats Overlapped Sailing On the Same Tack

Leeward boat has the Right-of-Way

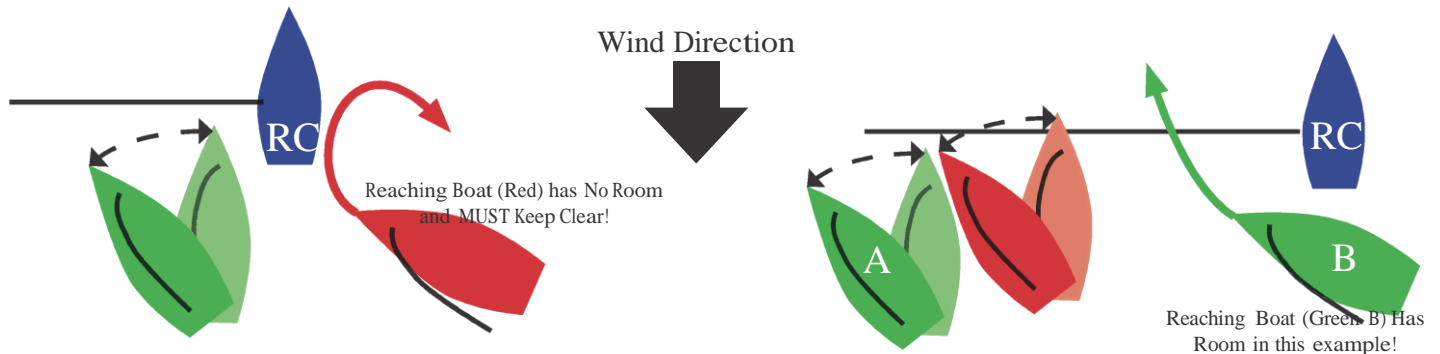
**NOTE:** This Rule applies for two boats near each other on the same tack. However, remember that any approaching Starboard Tack boat will have Right-of-Way over all Port Tack boats



## No Barging at Start

A Leeward boat has Right-of-Way at the start and is allowed to sail above her Proper Course to shut-out any boat heading into the start before the start signal. After the start signal, the Leeward boat must assume her proper course.

Basically, any boat to leeward that you can potentially hit should be considered a brick wall.



### REACHING BOAT (RED) IS BARGING

Before the start signal, Green has the right to go "head-to-wind" and force a Windward Overlapped boat (RED) over the start line or into a position that it must avoid the Committee Boat or Start Mark by turning away.

### LEEWARD BOAT (GREEN A) HAS RIGHT-OF-WAY RED MUST KEEP CLEAR OF GREEN A!

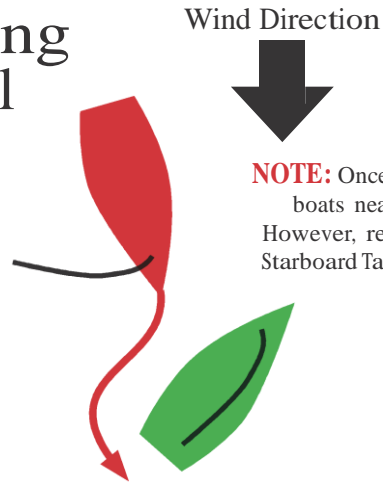
Green A has the right to go "head-to-wind" to force Red over the start line before the start signal. Green A is not close enough to committee boat to shut-out Green B.

# BASIC RIGHT-OF-WAY SITUATIONS

## 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).

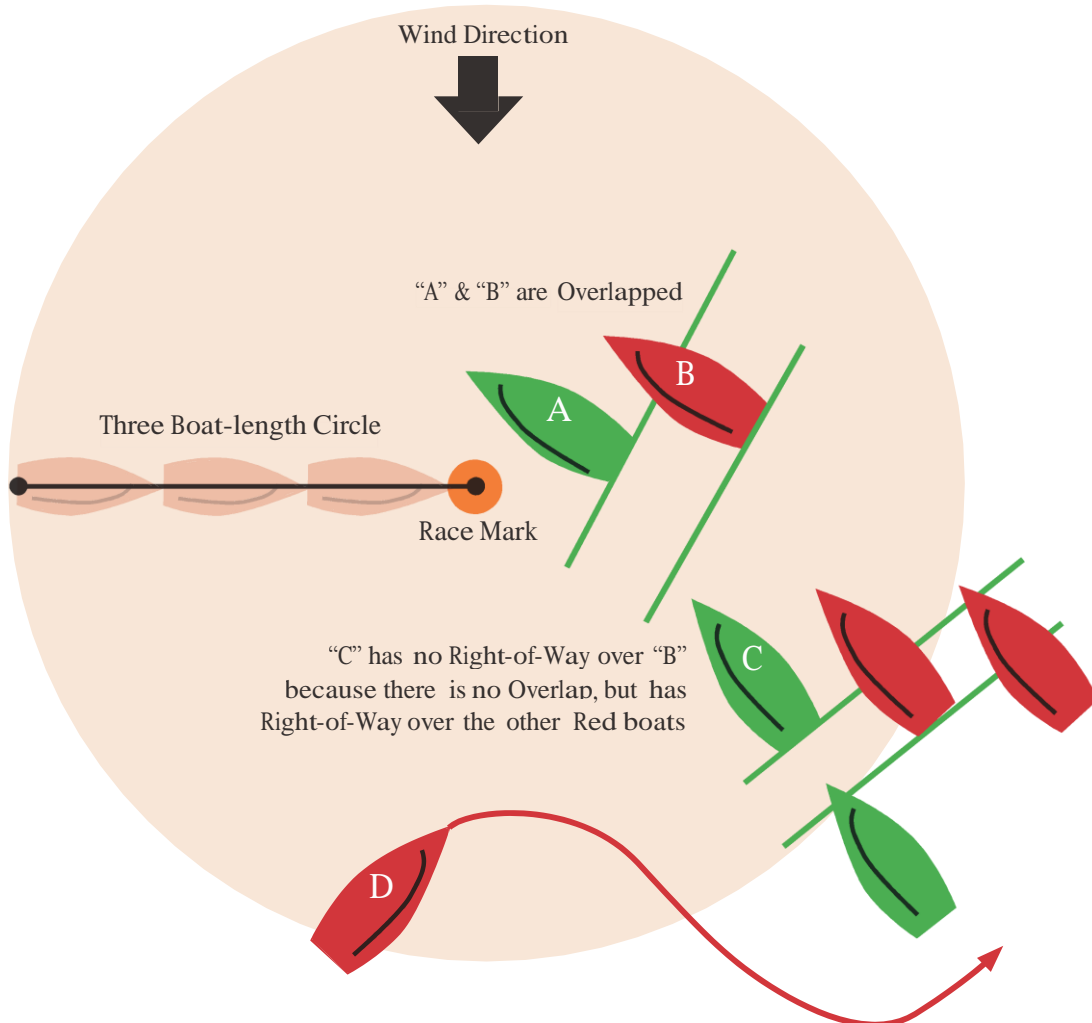


**NOTE:** Once again this rule applies for two boats near each other on the same tack. However, remember that any approaching Starboard Tack boat will have Right-of-Way over all Port Tack boats.

## 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.



# WHAT TO DO IF A FOUL OCCURS

## IF YOU ARE FOULED

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1. Avoid Contact!
2. Hail the word, "PROTEST" to the boat that you believe created the foul.
3. Raise a Red Protest Flag somewhere visible from your stern
4. At the finish, notify the Race Committee that you plan to issue a protest giving the name and/or sail number of the offending boat.
5. Once onshore, find a race official to fill out the appropriate paperwork.

## IF YOU FOUL ANOTHER BOAT

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1. Avoid Contact!
2. If you believe you fouled another boat, promptly get clear of all other boats and do two complete circles in the same direction consisting of two tacks and two gybes. Once the circles are complete, you can rejoin the race without further penalty.
3. If you do not think there was a foul, continue sailing the race with the understanding that you are racing under protest. Once the race is complete, and not necessarily on the same day, a protest committee will hear the incident to determine which boat was correct. If you are wrong, you will be Disqualified (DQ) from that race.

## IF YOU HIT A MARK

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1. Promptly get clear of all other boats and do one complete circle in the same direction consisting of one tack and one gybe

NOTE - You have NO rights over any other boat during the time you are doing penalty circles. Make sure you are clear in both time and distance from all other racers during starting your circles.