Roles and Responsibilities

The exact roles and responsibilities will vary depending on the type of boat (keelboat, offshore racer, dinghy with crew, etc.), and the skill set within the crew. Generally, each person has defined responsibilities to balance boat handling, sail trim, tactics, and safety. Here's a breakdown of the typical roles and responsibilities:

⚓ Racing Yacht Crew Roles (6-Person Team)

Position	Role and Primary Responsibilities
1. Skipper (Helm)	Role: Overall leader, responsible for steering and decision making - Steers the boat - Makes strategic and tactical decisions - Delegates tasks and oversees crew coordination - Ensures safety and compliance with racing rules
2. Tactician / Navigator	Role: Second-in-command, focuses on strategy, wind and competition - Assists skipper with strategy, calls tactics during the race (when to tack/gybe, positioning vs. competitors). - Monitors wind shifts, current, and course layout - Provides input on time-on-distance for starts - Manages racecourse positioning - May double as a trimmer on smaller boats
3. Mainsail Trimmer	Role: Manages the mainsail, the boats primary power source. - Trims the mainsheet, traveller, vang and backstay for speed and balance - Coordinates with helm and headsail trimmer - Helps balance heel and optimize upwind performance
4. Headsail Trimmer (Jib/Genoa)	Role: Controls jib/genoa trim to optimise speed and pointing. - Trims the headsail sheets and leads for efficiency - Executes tacks and sail changes - Communicates with helm and mainsail trimmer on trim and balance - Calls wind pressure - May trim spinnaker on downwind legs
5. Pit (Mast Base / Controls)	Role: Middle-boat operator, managing halyards, hoists and sail changes. - Manages halyards, reef lines, and control lines - Organizes hoists, drops, and sail transitions - Coordinates with bow for timing and communication - Controls internal lines (e.g., pole topping lift, downhaul) - Relays communication between bow and cockpit.
6. Bow (Foredeck)	Role: Front-line crew, handling sails at the bow during manoeuvres. - Works at the bow for sail changes and hoists - Manages spinnaker sets, gybes, and douses - Connects sail tacks and hanks/snap-on changes - Calls time and distance to the start line - Requires agility and communication with pit

How They Work Together:

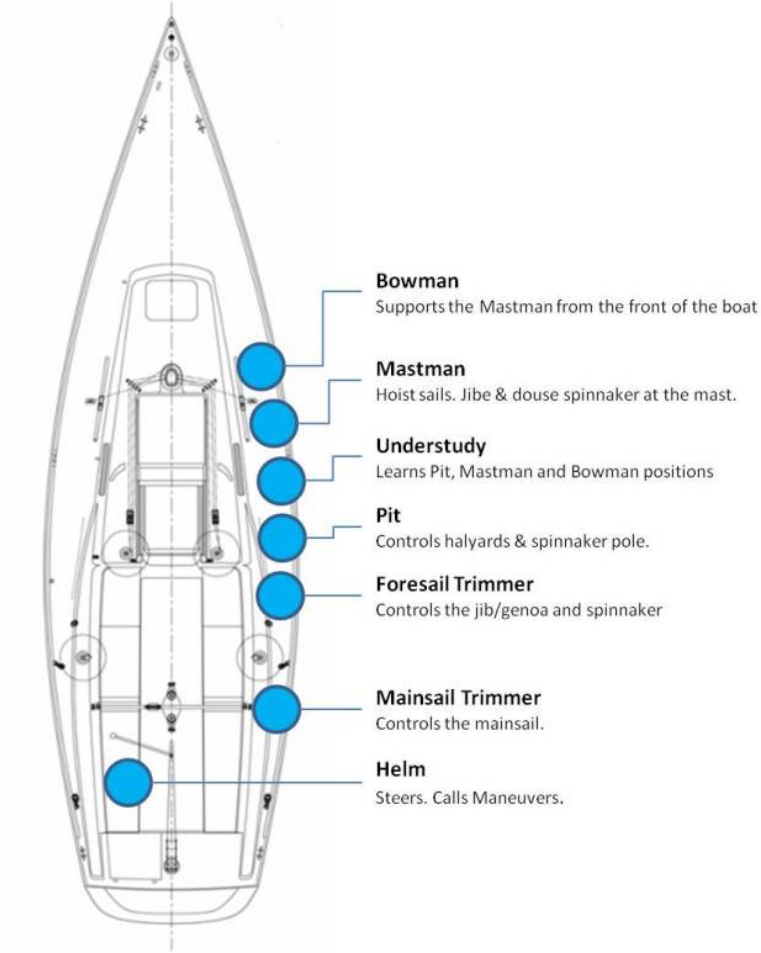
Starts: Bowman calls line, tactician sets strategy, skipper steers, trimmers fine-tune sails for acceleration.

Upwind: Helmsman & trimmers focus on speed, tactician calls shifts, pit & bow prep for manoeuvres.

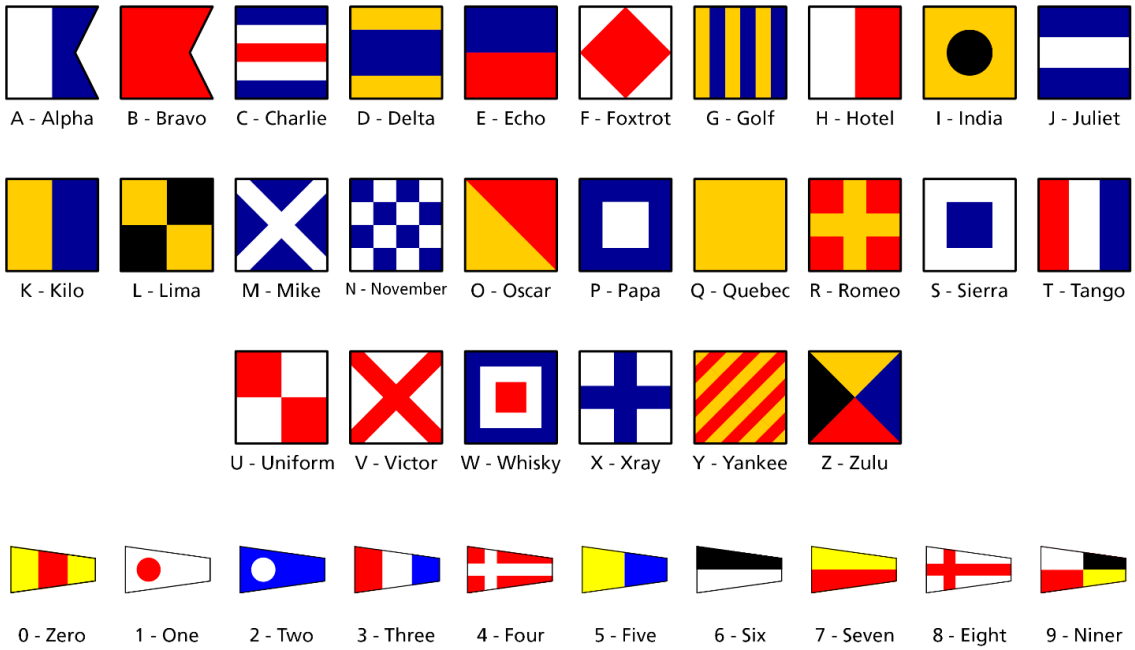
Downwind: Bowman & pit handle spinnaker, trimmers keep sails powered, tactician manages fleet position.

Mark Roundings: Everyone has a choreographed sequence—bow sets up, pit coordinates, trimmers adjust, helm drives clean turns.

On some boats, roles may combine (e.g., tactician doubles as mainsail trimmer, or skipper also trims), but the essence is coordination, communication, and efficiency.



Know your flags



The start sequence follows a standard format with **flags and timing** and is described in the Racing Rules of Sailing (RRS) Appendix S Standard. The Start line is described in the Sailing Instructions: "*The starting line is between a staff displaying an orange flag on the committee vessel at the starboard end and the course side of the port-end starting mark.*"

Time before start	Signal	Flag	Action	Flag motion	Sound Signal
-10:00 (best practice)	On Station Signal		Orange Flag UP		
-5:00	Warning Signal	W - Whisky J - Juliet	Division Flag UP W: Spinnakers, J: NonSpinnakers		
-4:00	Preparatory Signal	P - Papa	Prep Flag UP (P, I, Z, or Black)		
-1:00	One Minute Signal	P - Papa	Prep Flag DOWN		
0:00	Start	W - Whisky J - Juliet	Division Flag DOWN		

Code flag W = Spinnakers, Code flag J = Non-spinnakers

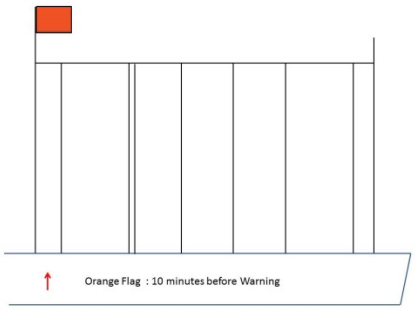
Understanding Yacht Race Start Procedures

Starting a Club or Regatta Race

The start procedure is defined by the Racing Rules of Sailing (RRS) of World Sailing and is managed by the display of signal flags accompanied by sound signals. The procedure comprises a 5 minute cycle from Warning to Start for each division and during that sequence, boats who are not starting must keep clear of the starting area and boats who are preparing to start. The procedure is as follows :

Committee Boat on Station

Approximately 10 minutes before the first warning signal, the orange flag will be displayed with no sound signal to indicate that the start line is set and the committee vessel is 'on station'.



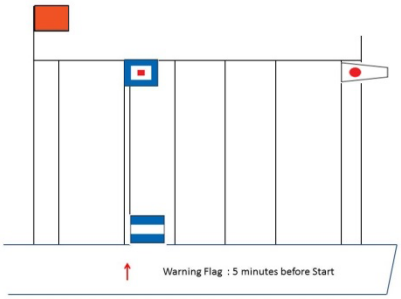
Course Nominated

No less than 5 minutes before the first warning signal, the course flag will be displayed without a sound signal. This is a numeral pennant showing the course number as described in the Sailing Instructions. If the race committee decides to shorten the course, the S flag will be displayed below the course number with 2 sound signals.



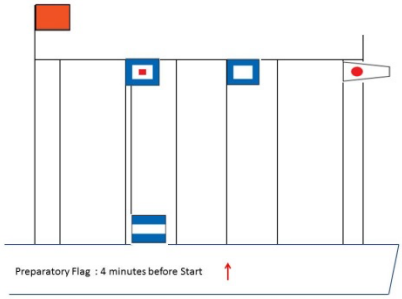
Warning

The Sailing Instructions identify which flag pertains to each competing division. Each flag is displayed as the 5 minute warning for the start of that division with 1 sound signal. Other divisions will be started as soon as practicable after the previous division has started.



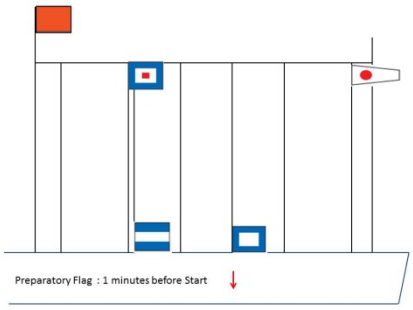
Preparatory Signal

One minute after the Warning flag is raised (4 minutes prior to the start), the Preparatory flag (P) is raised. In some instances, the P flag may be replaced with the I. Z, U or Black flags which enforce different penalties for infringing the start line. Refer to RRS 30.1 to 30.4 for details.



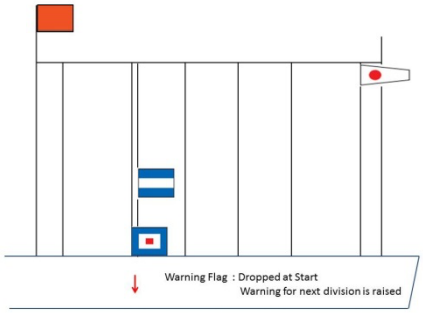
Dropping of Preparatory Signal

Three minutes after the Prep flag is raised, it is dropped with 1 long sound signal. This is the 1 minute warning to the start.



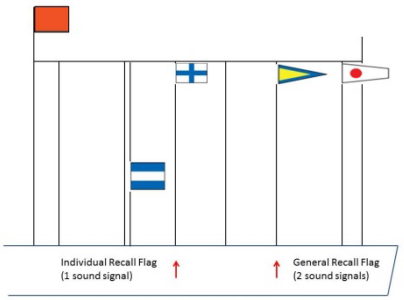
The Start

One minute after the Prep flag is dropped, the warning flag (Class/Division flag) is dropped with 1 sound signal and this signals the START.



Recalls

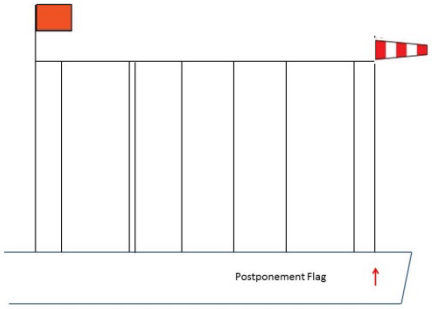
If one or two boats are early at the start, the Individual Recall (X) will be raised with 1 sound signal. Competitors may be alerted by radio if possible. The X flag will remain until the offending boat(s) have returned and restarted. If they do not return, then they will be scored OCS.



If multiple boats are early, then a General Recall (1st Substitute) will be raised with 2 sound signals causing a recall of all boats in the division. When all boats have returned behind the start line, the 1st Substitute will be lowered with 1 sound signal indicating that the warning will be raised again in 1 minute.

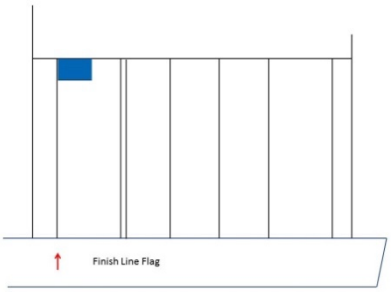
Postponement

Raising of the Answering Pennant (AP) with 2 sound signals may be done at any time during the start procedure and indicates a postponement for any reason, generally lack of wind, danger on the course or problem on the start boat. When ready to proceed, the AP will be lowered with 1 sound signal and the warning signal will be made 1 minute later.



The Finish

The finish line is denoted by the display of the Blue Flag



Some other Signals

The complete list of signal flags is shown in the Racing Rules of Sailing.

Other commonly used flags are :

 Flag Y (1 sound signal): All on board must wear a PFD

 Flag C (multiple sound signals) Position of the next mark has been changed.

Note: This document has been developed as a simple guide to starting procedures and does not intend to cover all starting situations. Refer to the Racing Rules of Sailing (RRS) of World Sailing for complete details on all aspects of starting a race.

Pursuit vs Scratch

RSYS runs two types of yacht races :-

- Club point score or regatta racing where all boats start together is referred to as a scratch start, and the handicaps are applied to the finish time for each yacht.
- Twilight races which are known as Pursuit races where the handicaps are applied to the start time for each yacht. The little boats start before the bigger boats on a designated start time.

The warning signal for twilight races is deemed to be 5 minutes before the start time of the first boat in the series, regardless of division. Always check the Notice of Race and the Sailing Instructions for the Start line definition and if there is a designated a prohibited area (obstruction) for boats that are not approaching the line to start. Usually, a boat not approaching the line to start must keep clear of a boat that is approaching the line to start.

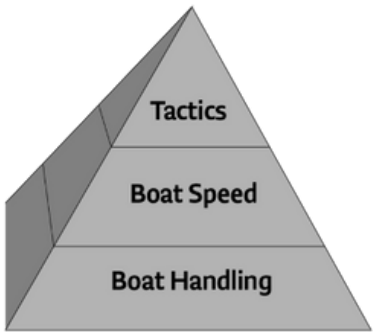
These rules preclude non starting boats from running the line to check wind and start angles as this activity may interfere with starting boats.

This is a safety issue and failure to follow these rules will usually result in disqualification without a hearing.

The Racing Pyramid

Ladies of the Sea
COACHING REGATTA

If you want to do well in sail boat racing think of the Racing Pyramid as the ingredients.These three things form a Racing Pyramid. Practice all three and you will find yourself getting closer to the front of the fleet. Break each element down and you start to build your skill set.



BOAT HANDLING
standard manoeuvres
mark-rounding manoeuvres
Starting manoeuvres
Close company manoeuvres

BOAT SPEED
equipment
rig set-up
trim
techniques
personal fitness

TACTICS
weather
tide
coastal effects
strategy
tactics
rules

Performance = (Skill + Commitment) – Distraction

The combination of skill plus commitment, MINUS distractions that ultimately gets you to where you want to go. The teams that can combine their sailing skill with their firm commitment, and who can then eliminate as many distractions as possible, are the ones who will consistently achieve good results.

BOAT HANDLING

Boat handling is the base of the racing pyramid and you need a good solid base to build the rest of your pyramid on. Every time you take your boat out, practice your boat handling skills, even on the way to the start.

Things you will need to do without thinking while you are racing are:

- tacking,
- gybing,
- stopping the boat
- accelerating (ie getting it going again)
- Spinning the boat in a circle as fast as you can? (720 or 360 penality for infringing a rule or touching a mark)

Learning boat handling skills builds your racing pyramid base. Practicing drills strengthens that base and makes it easier to build the other bits of the pyramid. Never stop practicing your boat-handling skills.

SPEED

Speed is the next level of the pyramid and this is what is going to keep you near the front bunch. Always make sure you are going as fast as you can. Fast is easy when there are no other boats around right? Stay out of the back of the boat, keep it flat and make sure the sail is trimmed properly. Fast is not always easy when you are with other boats. Have you noticed the boats out in front seem to get further away and wondered why? It's because they are not sailing in a wind that has been chopped up by a bunch of sails; they are sailing in clear air, while you and all the boats around you are sailing in dirty air. Try to sail in clear air and in the right direction as much as you can, but always, always sail the boat fast. Remember; Flat, forward and trimmed.

TACTICS

Tactics are at the top of the racing pyramid. Tactics are to do with wind, current, the racing rules and positioning on the course. You can use tactics to try to catch the boats in front of you. At the basic level, check the weather forecast before you leave home in the morning. Spend time in the racing area before the race to get used to the wind and current so you can make a race plan. Know more than just the basic racing rules so you can use them to your advantage. Learn how to use wind shifts, lifts, knocks and wind shadows. Beware of getting caught up in boat on boat battles.

Remember - you can't control

- the wind
- the current
- the other boats (all the time).

But you can control your boat handling and speed, so spend lots and lots of time practicing these. If you are back in the pack, you will need good boat handling and good speed to make your way back to the front of the fleet. When you are at or near the front, tactics can help to keep you there.

Roles and Responsibilities

Defining roles and responsibilities onboard your boat creates a solid grounding for any team. The helm often carries a heavy load and is not sure what to give away or share, and with whom to share it. Usually, certain personalities are more suited to certain roles as well.

As well as identifying the physical roles (helm, main, traveller, port trimmer, starboard trimmer etc) think about the roles that can back up the skipper.Great teams across all sports plan for the 'What If' or some might call it the 'What could possibly go wrong list!'

Our list below is often the easiest ways that regattas are lost! Share the roles that back up the skipper:

- reading and understanding the Sailing Instructions in depth
- checking the notice board before leaving shore (note for this event our Notice Board is online too)
- knowing and checking flags during racing
- knowing the course and ensuring the skipper has some support in going the right way
- feeding information back to the helm; such as
  - height, speed
  - location of nearby boats
  - changing gears,
  - keeping a lookout to leeward,
  - calling the wind,
  - ensuring everyone on board has water, food, warm clothing
  - timing

10 things that require zero talent

- Being on time
- Work ethic
- Effort
- Energy
- Body language
- Passion
- Doing extra
- Being Prepared
- Being Coachable
- Attitude

Strategy vs Tactics

Strategy = how we would sail the course the quickest, in the absence of other boats.
Tactics = how we get around the course dealing with the other boats.

Strategy

- **Wind**

Three scenarios for wind conditions:

1. Oscillating
2. Persistent shifting / one side favoured
3. Random. Neither of above / unstable / 2 or more influences on wind ("lake" conditions) both sides favoured variably.

1. Oscillating – ideal to be inside (closer to rhumb line) the head of fleet. Stay in "phase". Best to be in the middle.
2. Persistent – ideal to be outside (towards favoured side) the head of fleet. Beware the head of fleet redeveloping with time – must reposition. Don't get caught closer to the middle.
3. Random - Lake conditions – ideal to be on the side from which the breeze is or will next be coming in comparison to the head of the fleet.Avoid the middle but OK to sail across rhumb line.

Scenario may change quickly from one to another.

- **Geography** – physical/shore/coriolis effects·
- **Tidal / current effects**

Starting

Ladies of the Sea
COACHING REGATTA

The start of a sailboat race is exciting, the entire fleet is forced to sail through a small area, and the potential for gain or loss is huge. You don't have to win the start to win the race, however it certainly helps to be in the front row. Doing this consistently requires tactical skill, boat handling expertise, sense of timing and strategic planning.

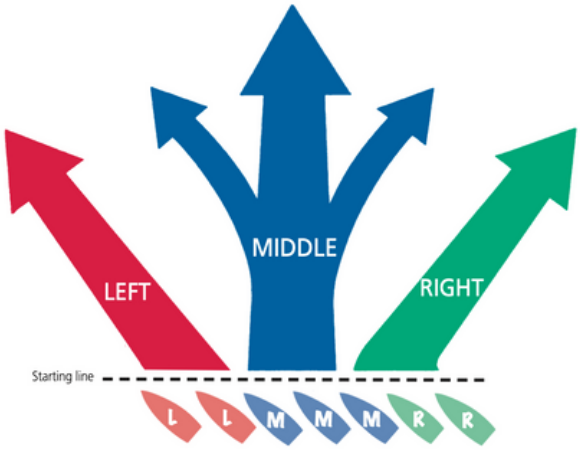
The goal of starting is to put yourself in a position so you can implement your strategy and get to the windward mark as quickly as possible.

One of the first things you must do is decide where you want to go after the start. If you like the left side, start near the pin. If you like the right, set up near the committee boat. If you want to play the middle of the course, or maintain the option to go either way, start near the middle of the line. The bigger the fleet and the longer the starting line, the more critical it is to match your starting position with your strategy for the first beat.

Which end is favoured?

When we talk about the "favoured" end of the starting line, we usually mean the end that is closer to the wind. The favoured end is not always the best place to start. It is usually crowded, and it may not be close to the favoured side of the windward leg. So you should consider your strategic plan to help determine your starting position.

However, if everything else is equal, the best place to start is near the end of the line that's more upwind.



Where to Start



Consider when you have one (or preferably more) of factors listed

The Pin (left) end

- Left side of the first beat is favoured
- This end of line is more upwind
- A starting penalty rule is in effect.
- It's hard to judge the middle of the line
- You have at least reasonably good speed and pointing. If you're slow, you'll have to tack and go behind all the boats to windward
- Current is going against the wind, pushing you to windward or it's running from the pin toward the boat end

The middle

- The wind is oscillating. Starting in the middle helps you avoid laylines and lets you play shifts all the way up the beat
- You have a good line sight
- The line is fairly square
- Your speed is pretty good
- You're not sure which side of the first beat is favoured
- You are looking for a conservative start, away from the crowds, where you have a good chance of being on the line with full speed and clear air at the start.

The Boat (right) end

- Right side of the first beat is favoured
- This end of line is more upwind
- A starting penalty rule is in effect
- Your relative speed and or pointing is not so good and you want the option to tack if you get a slow start
- It's hard to judge middle of the line
- It is a short beat and/or a steady wind and you want to be on the right with starboard-tack rights.
- You're sailing one of the smallest boats in a mixed fleet
- Current is going with the wind pushing everyone to leeward, or it's running from the boat end toward the pin.



Ladies of the Sea
COACHING REGATTA

Five ways to work out end is more upwind ?

1) Go head to wind to check the line

The most commonly used method is shooting head to wind in the middle of the line. When your sails are luffing on centerline, the favoured end is the one that's closer to the direction your bow is pointing. This technique is quick and can be used to check the wind direction continually during the starting sequence. Disadvantages are that it's not always too accurate, especially if a) the line is long; b) there are boats creating a lot of bad air; or c) you have a hard time judging perspective.

TIP: To avoid fouling other boats, always go head to wind from starboard tack. As long as you do not go past head to wind, you remain on starboard and keep the right of way.

2) Use your compass to figure out the geometry

The most accurate way to find the favoured end is by using your compass. Go head to wind and get a compass bearing.Then go outside one end of the line (the pin end is usually better) and line up the two ends of the line. With your bow pointing right down the line, read your compass. Now use simple geometry to figure out which end is favoured and by how much.

For example, say that the wind direction is 125. You find that the line bears 200 (or 020 if you are looking from the committee boat toward the pin). For the line to be "square," the wind direction would have to be 110 (90 degrees to the line). Since the wind is actually 125, this means the starboard end is favoured by 15 degrees.

3) Run the line on both tacks and compare the trim

Sail from the committee boat toward the pin, and trim your sails so they are right on the verge of luffing. When you get to the pin, tack or jibe around it, keeping your sheets trimmed (cleated) exactly as before. Now look at the front of your sails. If they are luffing, you know the wind is coming more from ahead, so the committee boat end is favoured. If you can ease your sheets further without the sails luffing, then the pin end is favoured.

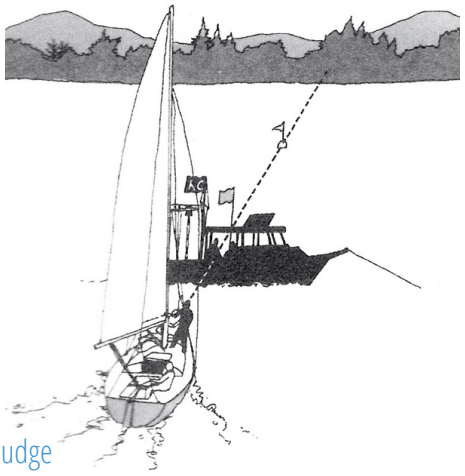
4) Find a buddy and test from both ends.

This is good for longer lines when it is not clear which end is better. At a pre-arranged time, have friend start at the RC Boat end on starboard while you start at the pin end on port. Sail close hauled until one boat crosses the other. This will show you which end is favoured and by how much.

5) Watch the classes that start before you

If you are not in the first start, sit just outside either end and watch the fleet(s) before you. As the fleet comes off the line, look to see which end seems better.

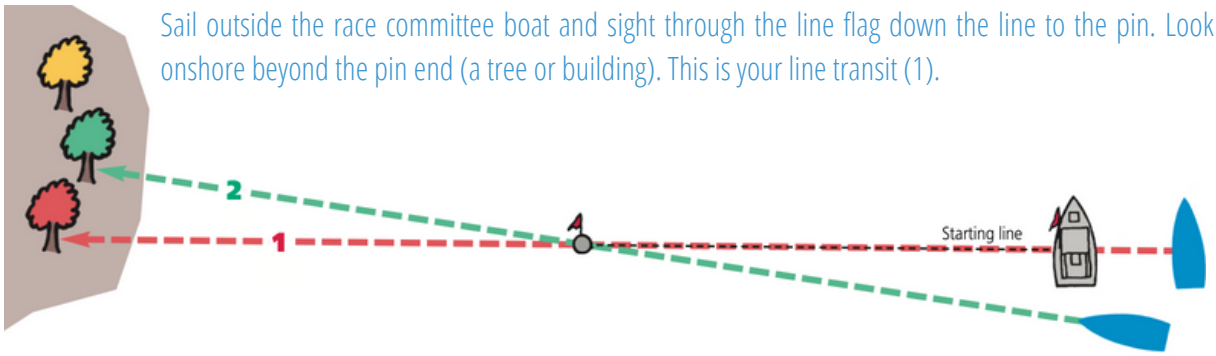
How to know where the line is



At the start, it's important to know not only where you are between the ends but how close you are to the line itself. It's always better to be as close to the line as possible; in order to do this (and not be over), you have to know exactly where the line is. Here are some techniques that will help you find the starting line . Use as many of these as you can at each start. There are a lot of good instruments today that will tell you exactly where you are on the line. If your fleet allows these, 'ping' each end of the line before every start. If you don't have instruments, you'll have to rely on other techniques.

Using a transit (or line sight)

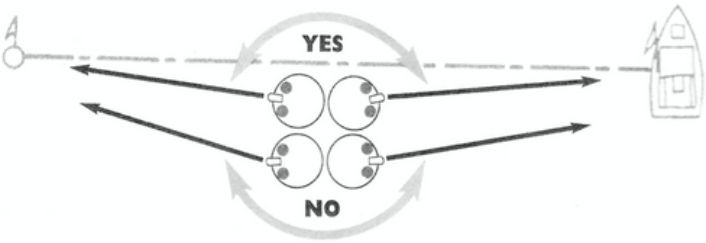
Using a transit is a great indicator of where you are relative to the line. Without a transit it is easy to judge a long line when close to the pin or the committee boat, but much more difficult in the middle of line.



Sail outside the race committee boat and sight through the line flag down the line to the pin. Look for a recognisable feature onshore beyond the pin end (a tree or building). This is your line transit (1).

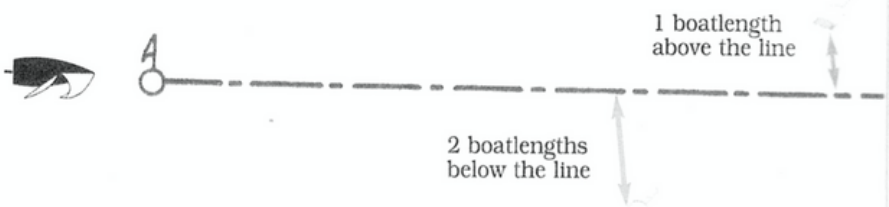
Get a Two Line Sights

Find a 'safe transit' by lining up about two boats lengths behind the committee boat. In the example above the Green tree has been handily located on our shoreline. Two boats lengths at the committee boat equates to one boat length at the mid point, less as you start closer to the pin. The line transit frequently becomes obscured close to start time. Lining up alongside nearby boats will give an average start, but if there is a line bulge, an OCS. If there is a sag, we are giving away ground to those at the ends of the line. *Line judging skills come with practice!.*



Judge the line by looking to windward.

One of the best ways to figure out where you are on the line is simply looking at it and using your best judgment. At many starts this is the only technique that will work, and it's a skill you can improve with practice. When you are judging the line, look back and forth from one end to the other by turning your face to windward. If you swivel your head to leeward, you won't get an accurate reading and you will usually be too far to leeward. You can also practice this on shore.



Practice Drills for better starts

Time & Distance

Knowing how long it will take you to move from one place to another is critical for getting good starts, especially in heavier boats that don't stop and start quickly. You can practice your timing skills easilv with just a watch and a buoy. Set your watch for a rolling two-minute countdown. Your goal is to be at the buoy, close-hauled on starboard tack at full speed every time your watch hits zero.

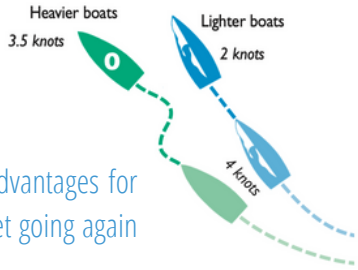
Start by sailing away from the buoy and then accelerating or slowing down as necessary to be near the buoy at full speed after 2 minutes. Practice this many times. Once you are good at it try starting on either side of the bouy (as if it were the pin or RC boat). To acceleration. Use a one-minute rolling countdown and try to see how late you can be stopped and still get to full speed at zero.

Luffing in place

One of the most important skills for almost any start is the ability to stay in control of your boat at very slow speeds. To practice this, find a mooring or other mark and try parking your boat right next to it. Time yourself to see how long you can stay in the same place.

One rule is you must always be in control of your boat. That is, you have to be able to turn in either direction or accelerate forward at any time.It is no good if you get caught head to wind in irons. To practice this, set your watch for a 1 (or 2) minute count down and then don't look at it. When your watch goes off, you must trim in and accelerate to full speed as quickly as possible.

Maintain speed while killing time



When you're approaching the starting line and you see you are going to be early, the most common reaction is to luff your sails and slow down (blue option).

This works OK for lightweight dinghies and sports boats that can re-accelerate quickly, but it has two disadvantages for heavier boats. First, it takes a while for your boat to slow down. Second, once you slow down you have to get going again and that takes time, especially if the wind is light or there's chop.

If you have a little room around you, you can avoid these problems by wiggling instead of luffing. Use your rudder to turn the boat slowly left and right so you kill time by sailing a longer course (green option). The effect is immediate, and you can maintain most of your speed as you approach the start.

Sailing Routine

All good starters have their own favourite routine. As with any complicated task, a checklist, breaking the task into manageable portions, makes the whole procedure less daunting. Starting the first race of the club or world championship becomes straightforward.
If it helps, write it down. For example:

- Practice beat
- Practice run
- Wind pattern (Oscilating / Persistant / Random
- Is your boat set up for the conditions?
- Check shrouds, forestay, lowers and jib cars.
- Tide/current?
- Course?
- Beat strategy
- Which spinnaker/which bag?
- Line transit / Line bias
- Start objective
- Identify the relevant starboard lay line
- Weed check
- Bias check
- I flag? Black flag?
- Where are boats lining up?
- Final decisions
- Final line up
- Check Cunningham, outhaul, vang.

Starting Tips:-

- Know right of way rules for start lines
- Know flags used for starting sequence
- Read Notice of Race (NOR) and Sailing Instructions (SI)
- Check if there are any last minute amendments to the SI's - code flag L
- Charge hand held VHF before, confirm correct racing channel, locate in cockpit to be heard easily
- Report to start boat if required
- Identify the correct course and post it up if possible
- Set up sails for 1st leg and optimise trim
- The whole crew needs to be totally focussed on their job
- Only relevant and if possible minimal communication
- Check start line for bias and let crew know where you plan to start
- Check speed to line
- Time keeper to get warning signal, followed by 4 minutes & 1 minute signals & flag drops. Calls the time to the start increasing frequency as it gets closer
- Helm/tactician watches whole field and communicates all intentions eg gybing / tacking
- Trimmers concentrate on boat moving seamlessly or slow down when asked
- Leeward spotter only gives relevant information
- Bow person communicates with hand signals (know these)
- Keep clear of instruments so they can be seen clearly
- Keep legs in the boat until after the start

Finishing Tips:-

- Know the Right of Way rules for finishing lines
- Know what the finish line looks like. EG Which side the bouy is or which fixed points mark the finish
- Work out the favoured end and the fastest route to the finish
- Helm to let crew know of any course changes
- Check other boats and anticipate and let everyone know their manoeuvres
- You can win or lose by seconds so concentrate until you have crossed the line
- Thank the crew and the start boat
- Positive debrief (including a plan to repair any damage or broken equipment)