

Shelley Sailing Club Inc.

Notes for informal catamaran training course,

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Disclaimer - These notes are based on my experience sailing Windrush 14 catamarans over a number of seasons. I'm only a middle of the fleet sailor when it comes to state champs etc. – to really learn, you need to go to the championships and talk to the experts, but this should at least get you started!

Part 2: Tacking

Newcomers often have trouble tacking, especially sailing cat rigged. I certainly did when I started! Once you get the hang of it you can tack quite quickly without totally losing your forward speed.

Cat rigged

The general idea is to use the back end of the original windward hull (ie the one you are sitting on before the tack) as a pivot around which the boat turns. Here's how:

1. Sail close hauled (ie. with the main sheeted on hard as you normally would sailing to windward), and make sure you keep the speed up.
2. Push the tiller away from you firmly so the rudders are hard over.
3. Keep the main sheeted on hard and stay on the original windward side of the boat. If you were sitting well forward then move aft (go easy on this in strong winds – I've capsized backwards before now!) but don't move across the boat yet! (If you grew up sailing monohulls like I did this is completely counter-intuitive.)
4. Wait until the boat is head to wind. At this point let the mainsheet out a few metres.
5. When you are sure the boat is bearing away on the new side then move quickly across the boat, flipping the tiller extension over as you go, but making sure the rudders stay hard over the way they were. The mainsheet should still be eased well out.
6. When the boat has borne away so it is about 45° off the wind, straighten the rudders, and then sheet in the main. Away you go!

Sloop rigged

This is a lot easier to get the hang of because you can use the jib to push the head of the boat around. The first two steps are the same as above. In step 3 keep the main and jib sheeted on hard, but you can start to move across the boat.

Once the boat is head to wind, ease the mainsheet about half a metre, but keep the jib cleated on its original side until the boat has borne away so it is almost 45° off the wind. At that point get the crew to quickly uncleat the jib and haul it in and cleat it on the new side. At the same time sheet the main in hard. Away you go!

What to do when it doesn't work

Every now and again, you'll mess up a tack. This can be due to an unfortunate wind shift while you are tacking, a wave stopping the boat, or you doing something wrong. Whatever the cause, you'll find yourself stuck head to wind (in irons) and the boat will start going backwards.

As soon as you notice the boat going backwards, reverse the rudders – i.e. put them hard over the opposite way to the way they were – and let the mainsheet out a long way.

The boat will slowly back around so it is pointing in the direction you want to go in, about 45° off the wind. When it gets there, straighten the rudders, then pull in the mainsheet and away you go. It is vital that you straighten the rudders before sheeting in the main, otherwise as soon as the boat starts to move forward it will turn back into the wind again, and you are back in irons!