

o1 Introduction - What is racing

Sail racing is a form of competition that revolves around completing a set course in the shortest possible time, where direct competitors all start at the same time. Racing is not always about being the fastest, sometimes it is about finding the shortest course and the best angle to reach the marks or the waypoints. It requires precision in sail adjustments, precision in tacks and gybes, and in rounding marks, which is what makes it an excellent way of playfully developing and refining sailing skills. In this group we will be covering the basics of racing in terms of rules and skills, and each session will have one or more exercises at the end that you can practice on the water.

It can involve boats of the same class (fleet racing), or different types of boats, in which case a factor specific to each boat type needs to be multiplied by the racing time to equalise different performances; this factor is called Portsmouth Yardstick. For example: J80s have a current yardstick of 876, and J24s have a yardstick of 935 (2024 RYA values). This means that, on absolute time, a J24 will tend to be slower than a J80, and therefore its performance is compensated by the yardstick factor, which allows different boats to race together on a relative time.

Racing courses can vary, depending on weather conditions and type of race. An inshore race will mostly revolve around marks, specifically placed on the day depending on the wind. An offshore race will have a broader course, and it will use landmarks like islands and capes as turning points.

As a rule of thumb, marks are to be left on port (match-racing and gates are an exception, but every race will have a skipper briefing in which the course is thoroughly described). We can safely say that there are two fundamental components to racing:

- Start
- Race itself

Especially in fleet regattas, the start is worth 50% of the race, you're extremely unlikely to end up first if you start mid fleet.

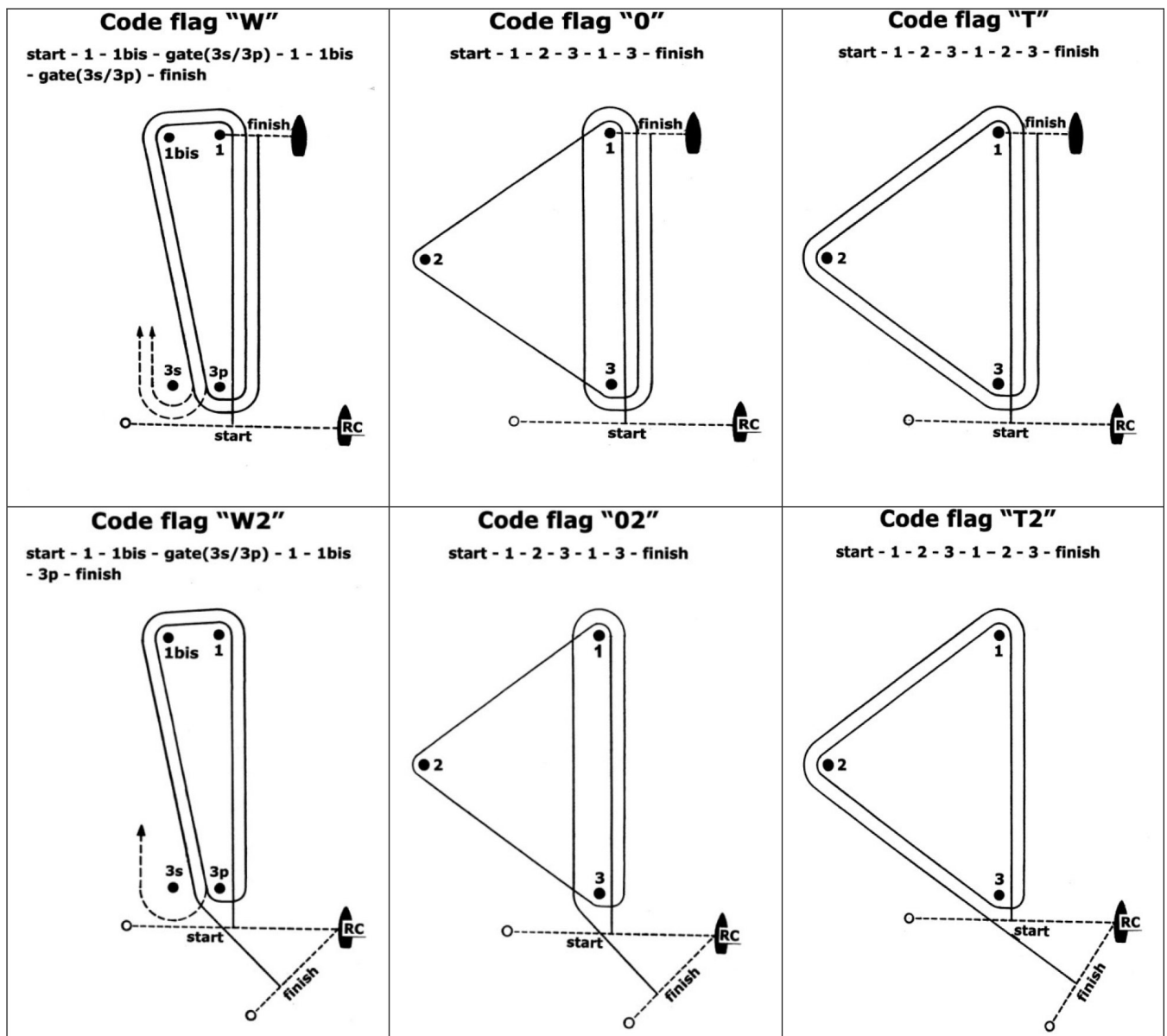
Starting procedure

As you will have noticed, boats don't start like cars, therefore race starts are not a gun, they're a 5 minutes procedure. In some cases the countdown is longer but the 5 minutes are the universal ones that are indicated by the committee boat through horns and flags. The start is given along an imaginary line that runs perpendicular to the wind direction, between a mark (pin) and the committee boat. Normal priority rules apply: starboard tack (right side of the boat is the windward one) over port tack, and leeward boat over windward on the same tack. We will cover the starting procedure more in detail in the future.

Racing

Once we've started, we need to follow the established course (the first leg will always be upwind), respecting priority rules and managing the boat in order to find a balance between the optimal speed of the boat (vmg, velocity made good) and the shortest route we can take. This will depend on our ability to read the course, understanding wind shifts etc. Since the course will always start by going upwind, we can start giving ourselves reference points that we want to reach, tack/gybe around, and focus on repeating the course with the proper sail adjustments. A fundamental aspect, especially at this initial level, where every group is still figuring out who has which roles: TALK TO EACH OTHER. Look at the sails, give feedback, use all of the indication Robin is giving in the sail control group, express your thoughts, it doesn't matter if it's wrong or inaccurate, but talking about how to trim the sails, when to tack, which mark would be best as an upwind mark, it's all part of the game. It doesn't just stop at "the tell tails look fine", there should be a constant exchange.

A few examples of typical racing courses:



Exercise 01.1

When you're out sailing, whether it's in Dublin Bay or in the harbour, check for marks and use them as a reference points, set to yourself a course that will cover all points of sails, particularly close hauled and broad reach, and try to follow it rounding the marks and leaving them to port. See following page for the marks placed in Dublin Bay. You can also use lobster pots but would recommend leaving a three boat lengths margin.

Exercise 01.2

Whichever target you pick to be the upwind and downwind mark, make sure you get at least 5 tacks and 5 gybes (you'll notice that if marks are always left on one side the number of manoeuvres will always be odd). Get into the mindset that tacks and gybes are not an exceptional event, repeat the movement until you don't have to think about it anymore. When you want to tack, the helm goes "ready about", everyone responds, then "lee oh" right before tacking. "Gybe oh" for downwind. This is, in my experience, what most crews will use on their boats.

