

Right of Way Rules

Rule number 1 is to always avoid a collision. If a collision occurs the Nav. Rules were not observed. The Coast Guard and Admiralty Court take the position that there are no accidents.

A watch (lookout) is required anytime that a vessel is under way.

The "Stand on Vessel" (the one that has the Right of Way) is required to hold course until such time that it is determined the "Give Way Vessel" or "Burdened" (the one that is yielding the right of way) is not going to Give Way. The Stand on Vessel is then required to avoid a collision. All maneuvers must be made early and clearly to avoid any chance of misinterpretation

No allowance is made by the Nav. Rules for novices. The rules assume that both the captain and crew know what they are doing and are competent at boat handling.

A Stand on Vessel MAY give up it's rights. However any maneuvers must be made early and obvious BEFORE it becomes Stand on to show the vessel that would be Burdened that it is not required to make an avoiding maneuver.

It is generally safer to duck or pass astern of the Stand on vessel in close conditions.

Unless directed by the Coast Guard you are not required to stay clear of racing boats. However it is a common courtesy to avoid racing boats and racing courses. If you are on a sailboat remember your sail has a large wind shadow (7x or more of the mast height) that can interfere with other boats.

Five or more blasts of a horn indicate immediate danger. If five or more blasts are heard you should immediately determine the source of the danger and take immediate evasive action if required.

Summary (Subset)

- 1) Power boats meeting head on: pass Port to Port (you move to Starboard – the same as on the street.
- 2) Power boats crossing each others path: Starboard vessel (on the right) is the Stand on Vessel over the Port vessel (on the left).
- 3) An Overtaken (ahead)(from more than 22.5° abaft your beam) is the Stand on Vessel over the Overtaking vessel. This includes sail overtaking power.
- 4) Two Sailboats meeting; Starboard tack is the Stand on Vessel over Port tack. If the tack of the other vessel can't be determined is shall be treated as if it is on Starboard Tack. If both boats are on the same tack then the Leeward boat is the Stand on Vessel over the Windward boat. Because the Windward Leeward situation is often confused some Windward sailors will give way to a Leeward Vessel even when the Windward Vessel has the right of way.
- 5) A vessel restricted to narrow channels is the Stand on Vessel over vessels under 20 meters or fishing or sailing.
- 6) A vessel that is in a traffic pattern (VTS) is Stand on over a vessel crossing the traffic pattern.
- 7) The Nav. Rules for vessels are arranged in a Hierarchy with the highest being the Stand on Vessel.

Overtaken
Not Under Command
Restricted in ability to Maneuver
Constrained by Draft (International Only)
Commercial Fishing (with gear in water)
Sailing
Power

Give way to a vessel that is above you on list # 7.

Adapted from COMDTINST M16672.2B. Refer to COAST GUARD RULES for specific conditions.

Right of Way



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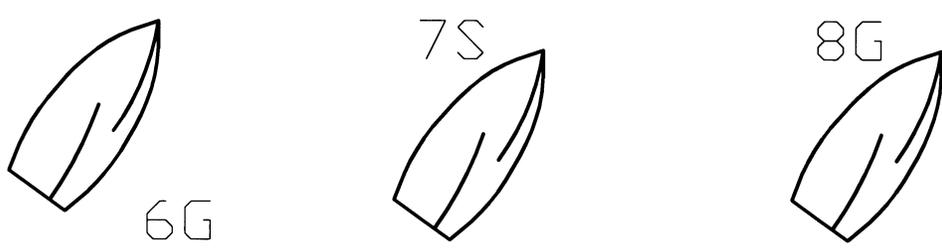
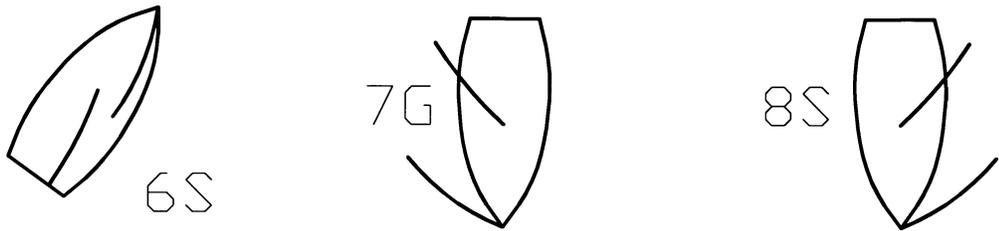
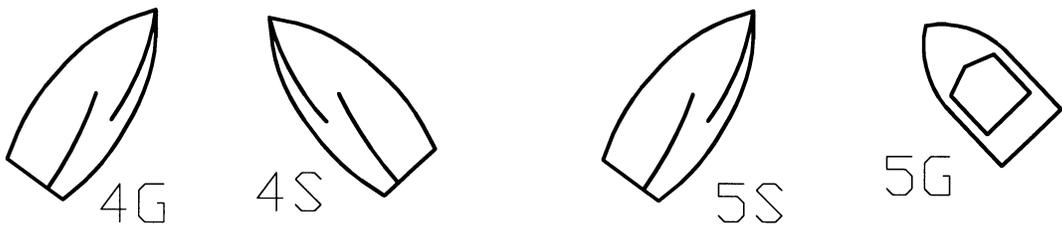
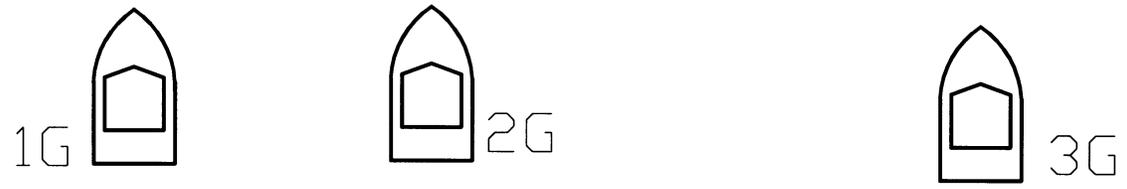
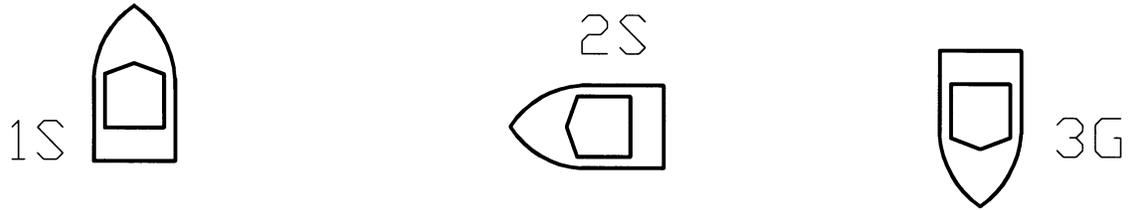
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Right of Way



Right of Way Examples

The spacing of the drawings have been made very close to make the examples easier to understand. In actual on the water conditions maneuvers should be made early and at a greater distance than shown on the illustrations. The illustrations are a simplified two-boat example; many cases on the water will have more than one other boat involved so caution is always needed.

- A) 1S is the Stand on vessel, 1G is the Burdened or Give Way. The vessel that is overtaking is required to stay clear of the vessel that is being overtaken. The rule is the same for sail, power or any combination of sail and power.. 1S as the Stand on vessel is required hold its course.
- B) 2S is the Stand on Vessel, 2G is the Burdened or Give Way. 2S should hold course and 2G should avoid 2S.
- C) Both vessels are Burdened. Both vessels should turn to Starboard (right) and pass each other on their Port side (left). Each should sound a single horn blast to indicate changing course to Starboard. This is the same as passing on the highway.

Sometimes passing Port to Port is not advisable or possible. The vessels can pass Starboard (Right) to Starboard (Right). Two horn blasts should be sounded to indicate changing course to Port (move left).

CAUTION: Many recreational boaters do not use sound signals. This places additional burden on vessels to make early and distinctive maneuvers to insure that there is no room for misinterpretation.

- D) 4S (Starboard Tack) is the Stand on vessel, 4G (Port Tack) is the Burdened vessel. 4S is on Starboard Tack, 4G is on Port Tack.
- E) 5S (Port Tack) as a sailboat is the Stand on Vessel, 5G as a powerboat is the Burdened vessel. If 5G the powerboat is constrained by its ability to maneuver, constrained by draft or following a recognized traffic patten 5G can have right of way over a sail vessel.
- F) 6S (Port Tack) is the Stand on vessel, 6G (Port Tack) is the Burdened vessel. 6G is required to stay clear of the vessel it is overtaking (6S). 6S is required to hold its course. The rules are slightly different in some racing conditions.
- G) 7G (Port Tack) is the Burdened vessel, 7S (Port Tack) is the Stand on. Same tack the Windward vessel is required to keep clear.
- H) 8G (Port Tack) is the Burdened vessel, 8S (Starboard Tack) is the Stand on. 8S is on Starboard Tack giving it right of way over the Leeward Port Tack vessel. This is frequently confused so many experienced skippers in 8S will alter course early and Give Way to 8G which is the Burdened vessel and required to stay clear. If a vessel that has the right of way maneuvers to avoid another vessel it must make it very clear to the other vessel what is happening.

A Port Tack vessel that is not able to determine the Tack of the Windward vessel is required to keep clear of the Windward vessel.