

# Tackle the tack

This simple task can cause novices untold angst. We try our best to put their minds at ease by breaking down the skill and running pressure-free land drills, so that when the moment arrives they stand a fighting chance of succeeding.

Whether you are a windsurfing or dinghy instructor, help is on hand for those times when a little more help is needed

**First Lawrence West, RYA Coach and Trainer, gives us a shopping list of ideas for dinghy sailors.**

Training boats with aft mainsheets are less common now, but still have a valid place in the scheme. Students often find tacking with an aft mainsheet easier to master, as all the difficult 'hand swapping' business takes place in front of them before the tack, leaving them to concentrate on sailing the boat on the new course after the tack. The snag is that the student will momentarily be facing backwards, so won't be looking where they are going. A good look around beforehand and clear landmarks to aim for before and after the tack can rectify this.

Tacking a centre mainsheet boat provides students with a different set of problems. These may include a long tiller extension and the complicated business of steering the boat with the tiller extension

behind their back. Generally, people choose not to carry out any task with their hands behind their back, so it's little wonder that students can find it difficult.

Regardless of the type of boat, in addition to all the usual teaching points, you can help students tack successfully early on with a few key pointers. Try some ideas from the list below.

- » Use a land drill if the students will benefit from it.
- » Begin teaching beam reach to beam reach as there's no need to re-trim the sails on the new tack.
- » Ensure the dinghy has sufficient momentum to carry it through the wind and onto the new course.
- » Identify clear landmarks at either end of the beam reach course to give students a guide for when to straighten up after tacking.
- » When sailing towards the landmark, and not before, straighten the tiller. On tidal waters and to avoid confusion, watching for the sail to stop



No rush to change hands



Up and over the back shoulder

- flapping can provide a trigger for straightening up.
- » Extend the tiller arm, (the back one) away from the body. If it's not too cringe-making, describe this as the Superman stance.
- » Move across the dinghy with the back foot first, but try to move forward too. (Students seem to naturally move aft unless corrected).
- » Once on the other side, 'waving at the fishes' with the tiller hand can encourage the student to place the tiller extension into the correct position, clear of the gunwale with the end facing forwards.
- » The helmsman should sit on the new side, facing forwards and initially 'side-saddle' on the forward buttock (excuse the bluntness!).
- » Only change hands behind the back when sailing comfortably on the new beam reach course. There's no rush.
- » The 'old' mainsheet hand, which will become the 'new' tiller extension hand, should have the thumb pointing up the extension during the hand change.

- Many training boats are supplied with long tiller extensions, which allow the helm to hike comfortably but may cause problems during tacking and gybing if they won't fit through the gap aft of the mainsheet falls. This can be solved by the following variation, which is perfectly acceptable under the National Sailing Scheme 'method'.
- » Prepare for the tack by pointing the tiller extension up and over the back shoulder and holding it with palm facing up – a bit like opening a book.
- » While steering and crossing the dinghy, slide the tiller hand down the extension towards the universal joint but keep the extension low.
- » As the midline is crossed, rotate the extension towards the back of the boat and around to the new side.
- » Move to sit on the new gunwale, while sliding the tiller hand back towards the top of the extension.
- » Change hands in the usual way.
- » If the extension is too long even for this, once the mainsheet is in the 'new' front hand, take



Superman!

the extension over the back shoulder with the 'new' back hand.

The Instructor Handbook is probably the best source of information on the preferred tacking methods for aft or centre mainsheet dinghies. In addition, instructors can use some, all or none of the extra points above to help students tackle the technique of tacking. Whatever methods you use, providing they work, they should all be valid.

## Next, RYA Trainer **Sam Ross**, explains why tackling tacking in windsurfing is a slightly simpler process.

If you only ever had to learn one way of turning around on a board it would have to be the tack. In the early stages it's what keeps us upwind and able to get home, and this really doesn't change right through to advanced level. It's also a good measure of how comfortable we feel with a certain size of board and sail, or in particular conditions.

So, if it's a good measure of success, we want our students to be as successful as possible.

Although it's the first turn we ever teach, students don't always master it as the bright lights of other more snazzy moves are always there to draw their attention. Whether it's learning to carve gybe, freestyle or do something in the air, there is always something drawing them away from what, on the face of it, is quite a basic move.

Where it goes wrong comes down to a few similar faults at almost every level. We get stuck on the wrong side of the sail, the board loses all speed and the nose of the board doesn't go through the eye of the wind. Everything else is most likely a result of these initial problems.

So, if similar things go wrong at every level there must be a similar problem at every level. Ask anyone how they tack and the most common response will be 'lean the rig to the back of the board'. This specific statement could be



the downfall of our students when learning to tack.

If we lean the rig to the back of the board, yes it will turn into wind but it may also produce some unwanted side effects. The board will most likely lose speed and stall, trapping our sailor on one side of the sail. On a long beginner board the sail will feel very powered up and uncomfortable to hold in this position.

If we look at the actual coaching notes, the phrase 'lean the rig to the back of the board' doesn't really exist. Instead it says '*lean the rig back extending the back arm*'. If

we lean the rig back on a diagonal, we give the board time to turn, give ourselves time to move and can maintain the speed of the board through the turn. If the board has good speed it means it's still flat and therefore more stable.

So if you were to get rid of one phrase in your coaching it should be 'lean the rig to the back of the board' when teaching tacking. This

should give our beginners more time and success. It should also work with those progressing down the board sizes and heading out in stronger winds.

## RYA Go Windsurfing!

This is the seventh book in the RYA Go! series. It takes the reader from understanding the basics to starting to race or learning how to do tricks. Its informative but fun format is perfect for children wanting to become involved in the sport.

Order code: G76  
Retail price: £9.99



**Amanda Van Santen**  
Chief Instructor, Dinghy & Windsurfing

E-mail: [amanda.vansanten@rya.org.uk](mailto:amanda.vansanten@rya.org.uk)  
Tel: 023 8060 4179