



Crew Overboard

Three methods for rescue under sail

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Crew overboard under sail

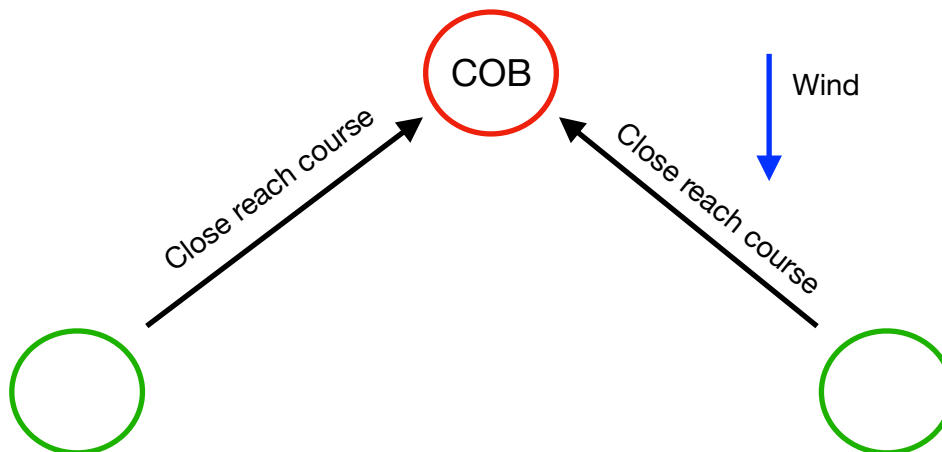
To rescue crew overboard (COB) under sail, the skipper must maneuver the boat to a stop next to the COB. There are a number of methods to accomplish that, each with its advantages and disadvantages.

All methods: Get boat to green circle in the illustration to rescue COB in red circle. The green circle is a point from which a vessel can sail on a **close reach** course toward the COB.

A close reach course is one where the mainsail can be eased to a complete luff allowing the boat to stop, or trimmed in to for speed, including adjusting for a potential header, without changing the heading of the boat.

After reaching the green circle...

- 1) Ensure mainsail can luff with boat pointed toward COB.
- 2) Trim mainsail as needed to maintain headway and control on close reach toward COB.
- 3) Ease mainsail to stop boat to windward of COB.



The rescue methods that follow are standard templates are about how to get the boat into the green circle. Each can be adjusted or changed to fit the situation.

The choice of which method to use depends on the skipper's skills and confidence with each method, the situation on the water, including obstructions and other hazards, the sea state and wind conditions.

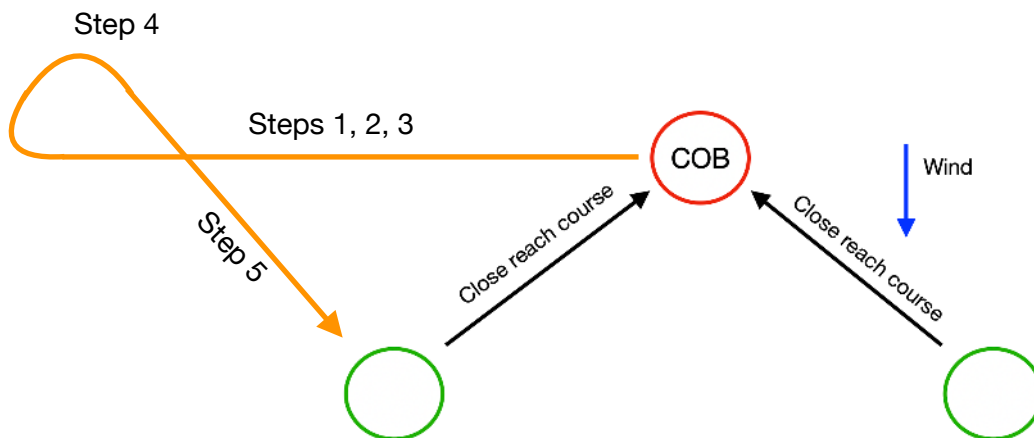
A prudent skipper has practiced at least one method to the point where his or her actions are relatively automatic.

Figure-8 method

- 1) Preliminaries: Alert crew, assign spotter, throw flotation.
- 2) Steer boat to beam reach (or slightly above), ease mainsail all the way.
- 3) Continue for five boatlengths.
- 4) Tack through your wake to a deep broad reach.
- 5) Continue until COB is abeam of the boat's mast.
- 6) Turn boat toward COB and continue with final steps.

After reaching the green circle...

- 1) Ensure mainsail can luff with boat pointed toward COB.
- 2) Trim mainsail as needed to maintain headway and control on close reach toward COB.
- 3) Ease mainsail to stop boat to windward of COB.



Advantages of the Figure-8 method

- 1) It works in all sea states and wind conditions.
- 2) Most sailors have learned the method so it is likely to be familiar to any sailors on board.

Disadvantages of the Figure-8 method

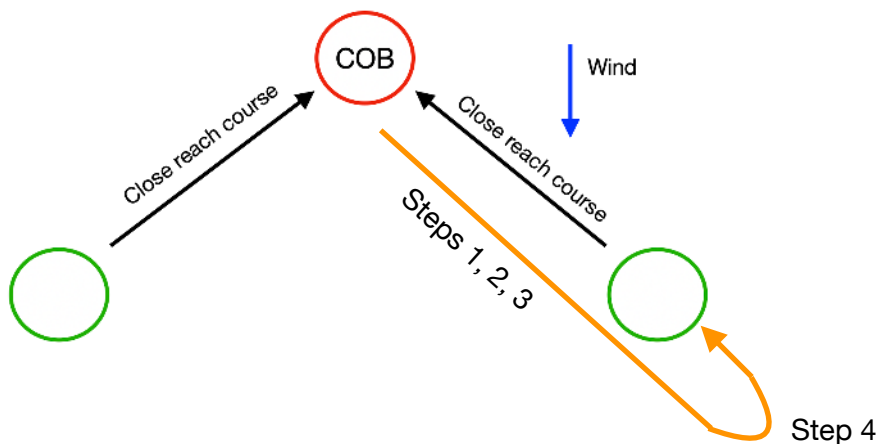
- 1) It requires that the vessel move a significant distance from the COB, risking possibly losing sight of the COB.
- 2) Estimating distance on the water can be complicated.
- 3) Not going far enough from the COB on the initial beam reach risks not having enough room to complete maneuver and stop the boat next to the COB.

Broad Reach - Close Reach method

- 1) Preliminaries: Alert crew, assign spotter, throw flotation.
- 2) Steer boat to a broad reach, ease mainsail all the way.
- 3) Continue until boat is two to three boatlengths from COB.
- 4) Tack 180°. COB should be dead ahead on close reach course. Continue with final steps.

After reaching the green circle...

- 1) Ensure mainsail can luff with boat pointed toward COB.
- 2) Trim mainsail as needed to maintain headway and control on close reach toward COB.
- 3) Ease mainsail to stop boat to windward of COB.



Advantages of the Broad Reach - Close Reach method

- 1) The steps are few and simple.
- 2) It's not necessary to sail as far away from the COB as with the Figure-8 method.

Disadvantages of the Broad Reach - Close Reach method

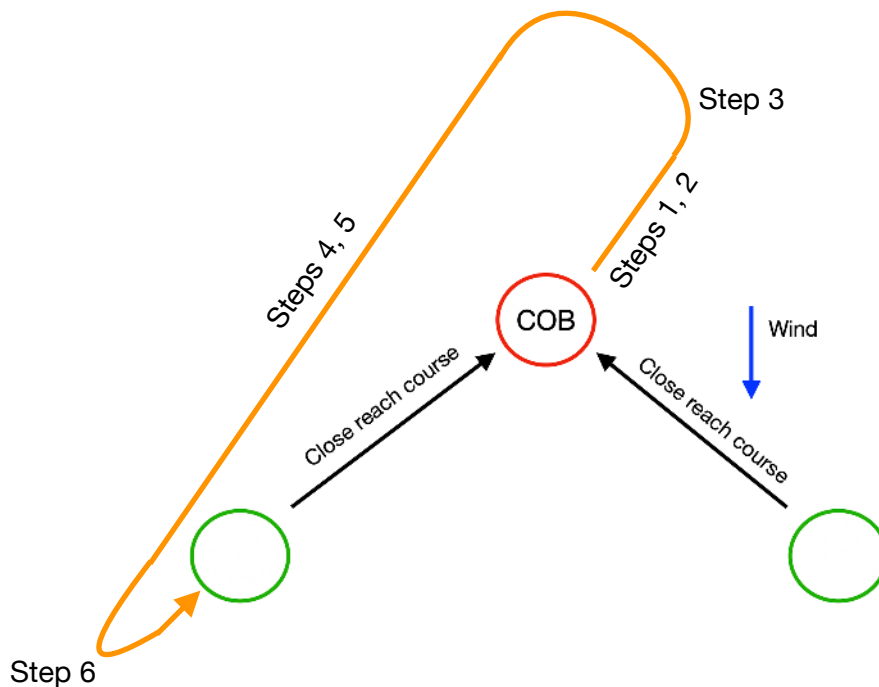
- 1) It requires the person at the helm have a very clear understanding of the boat's position relative to the wind and relative to the COB. The effects of apparent wind complicate using this method successfully.
- 2) This method is more efficient if the crew member went overboard while the vessel was on a beam reach or broad reach.

Quick-Stop method

- 1) Preliminaries: Alert crew, assign spotter, throw flotation.
- 2) Steer to close-haul course, trim main in all the way.
- 3) Tack — leave jib in heave-to position or trim to new side if there's crew available.
- 4) Bear away — DO NOT EASE MAIN.
- 5) Continue downwind on broad reach until it'd be possible to approach COB by gybing onto a close reach course.
- 6) Gybe and continue with final steps.

After reaching the green circle...

- 1) Ensure mainsail can luff with boat pointed toward COB.
- 2) Trim mainsail as needed to maintain headway and control on close reach toward COB.
- 3) Ease mainsail to stop boat to windward of COB.



Advantages of the Quick-Stop method

- 1) The boat never needs to be more than one or two boatlengths from the COB.

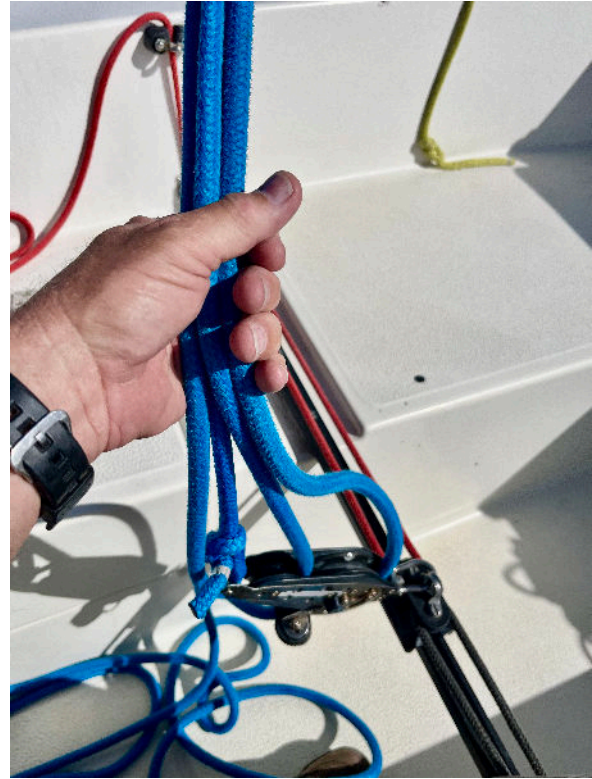
Disadvantages of the Quick-Stop method

- 1) It requires a gybe. In light to moderate wind, this isn't a problem because the main is trimmed in completely.
- 2) This method is difficult or impossible in stronger wind because some boats can't bear away with the main trimmed in completely.
- 3) As with the Close Reach - Broad Reach method, the person steering must have a clear understanding of relative positions and apparent winds.

Final approach to COB

The final leg toward the COB from the green circle is sailed on a close reach course. Use mainsail trim control the boat's speed.

On smaller boats like the Merit 25, one can trim or ease the mainsail most quickly by grasping the falls — the group of mainsheet lines between the lower and upper blocks.



Trimming the mainsail using the falls is much faster than trimming in the standard method.

Important tips:

- 1) The boat must be kept moving fast enough so that the person steering the boat as rudder authority to turn the boat as necessary. Furl or luff the jib unless it's needed for boat control.
- 2) It's not necessary to trim the mainsail all the way in.
- 3) Ease, or even backwind, the mainsail to stop the boat beside the COB.
- 4) When approaching the COB from the green circle, it's usually best to aim slightly upwind of the COB as a slow-moving sailboat's actual motion through the water will be somewhat downwind of the boat's heading.

As a final note: Particularly on larger boats where starting the engine is a simple process, it's a very good idea to start engine as part of a COB rescue. The engine can be used as necessary.

- BE VERY CAREFUL TO ENSURE NO LINES ARE IN THE WATER.
- BE SURE THE PROPELLER IS STOPPED WITH THE ENGINE IN NEUTRAL OR OFF WHEN THE BOAT IS NEAR THE COB