

New to Racing – What’s the course?

Before you launch your boat for a race, you need to find out what the course is so that you know which buoys you need to sail around. The course is indicated on the blackboard, e.g.

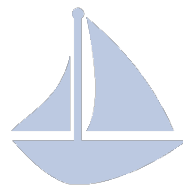
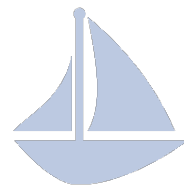
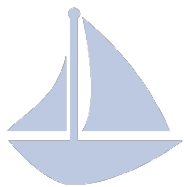
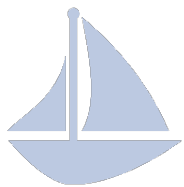
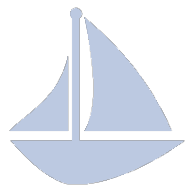
- 1 – R – S
- 2 – Y – S
- 3 – RW – P
- 4 – GY – P

This may look like a secret code, but unlocking that code is really easy. Before I explain the code, here’s a little bit of information about the buoys / marks. (In this article, I use the words ‘buoy’ and ‘mark’ interchangeably – a ‘mark’ is just a buoy which is being used to denote the course.)

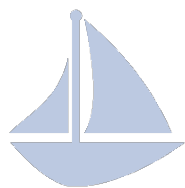
On our lake, we have 4 permanently-in-place marker buoys. These are the tallish triangular looking marker buoys which you can see on the lake at any time. The yellow one is close to the jetties, the white one is on the far side of the lake, the green one is near the hut (sometimes around the corner so not always visible from the clubhouse) and you can see the red one if you look down the right-hand side bank a fair way. They are referred to by their colour and sometimes known as “cardinal” marks.

When we are racing, we also use some of the smaller orange spherical buoys as intermediate marks and they are positioned by the Officer of the Day (OOD) and the rescue crew. If a spherical buoy is positioned between the yellow and green marks, it is called ‘yellow-green’ and so on. These marks are only in position during racing and at other times you can see them next to one of the jetties. If all the intermediate marks are used, the lake would look like the image below.

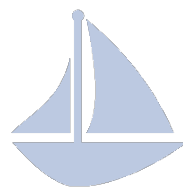




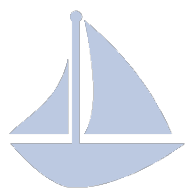
So now that you know where the marks are, how do you know which ones to go round and in which order? You find that information on the blackboard which will display instructions such as:



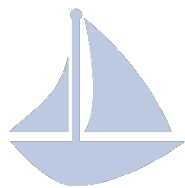
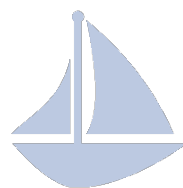
- 1 – R – S
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The “1, 2, 3, 4” is just the order of the marks on the course.



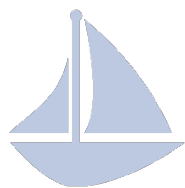
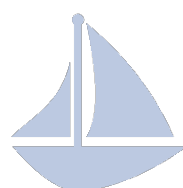
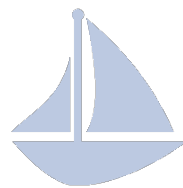
- For the course above, the first mark you will sail to is the Red triangular mark, abbreviated to ‘R’ on the blackboard. You will leave it to the starboard side of your boat, indicated by ‘S’. (If you stick your arm out over the right hand – starboard – side of your boat, your fingers would touch the mark, but please don’t touch the mark as that will incur a penalty!)
- The second mark you will visit is the triangular Yellow mark which you will also leave to the starboard side of your boat.
- The third mark is a spherical one between Red and White, called ‘Red-White’ and this time you leave the mark to Port, hence the ‘P’.
- Finally you sail round the spherical mark between Green and Yellow, called ‘Green-Yellow’ and leave it to Port as well.
- Then it’s off to red again and keep going until the OOD tells you that you have finished!!



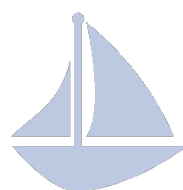
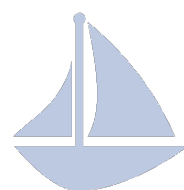
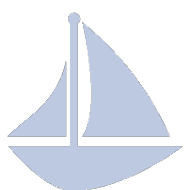
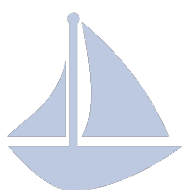
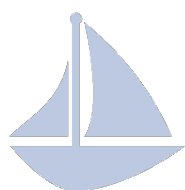
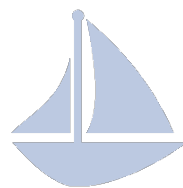
So that is the key to unlocking the code; there are also some other helpful things to know:

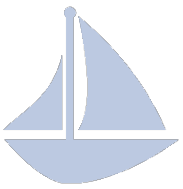
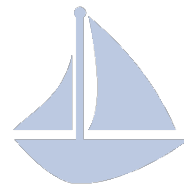
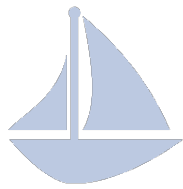
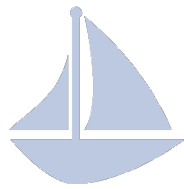
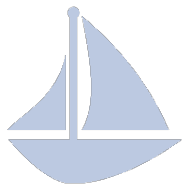


- For any particular race, the buoys being used for that race will have a flag denoting their colour, i.e. the yellow and red triangular buoys will have a yellow and red flag respectively. One of the orange spherical buoys will have a red and white coloured flag; the other will have a green and yellow coloured flag. (In this example, the red and green triangular marks will be in their usual positions but will not have a flag as they are not part of this race.)
- The first buoy of the course will usually (but not always) be upwind of the start line, i.e. you will need to beat to get there.
- Look at what the other boats around and ahead of you are doing.
- Some helms write the course on a piece of white masking tape which they then stick on their boat so they can see it during the race but it won’t fall off, and then dispose of it before the next race.
- Some helms (of plastic boats) use a charcoal pencil to write the course on the hull of the boat, e.g. near the mast, then rub it off before the next race.
- It often helps to visualise the course from the shore, i.e. look at red, then yellow, then red-white, then green-yellow to trace the course in your mind.
- Think about which mark(s) of the course will involve a gybe – we all know gybes can cause capsizes if not undertaken carefully! In this example, there will be a gybe at red-white.

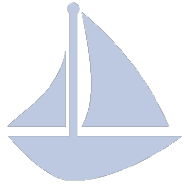


There is another example on the next page:-

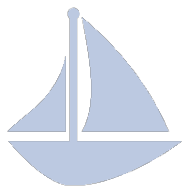
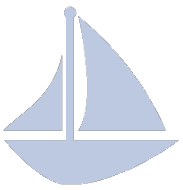
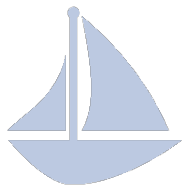
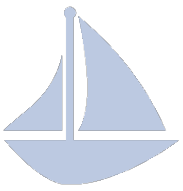
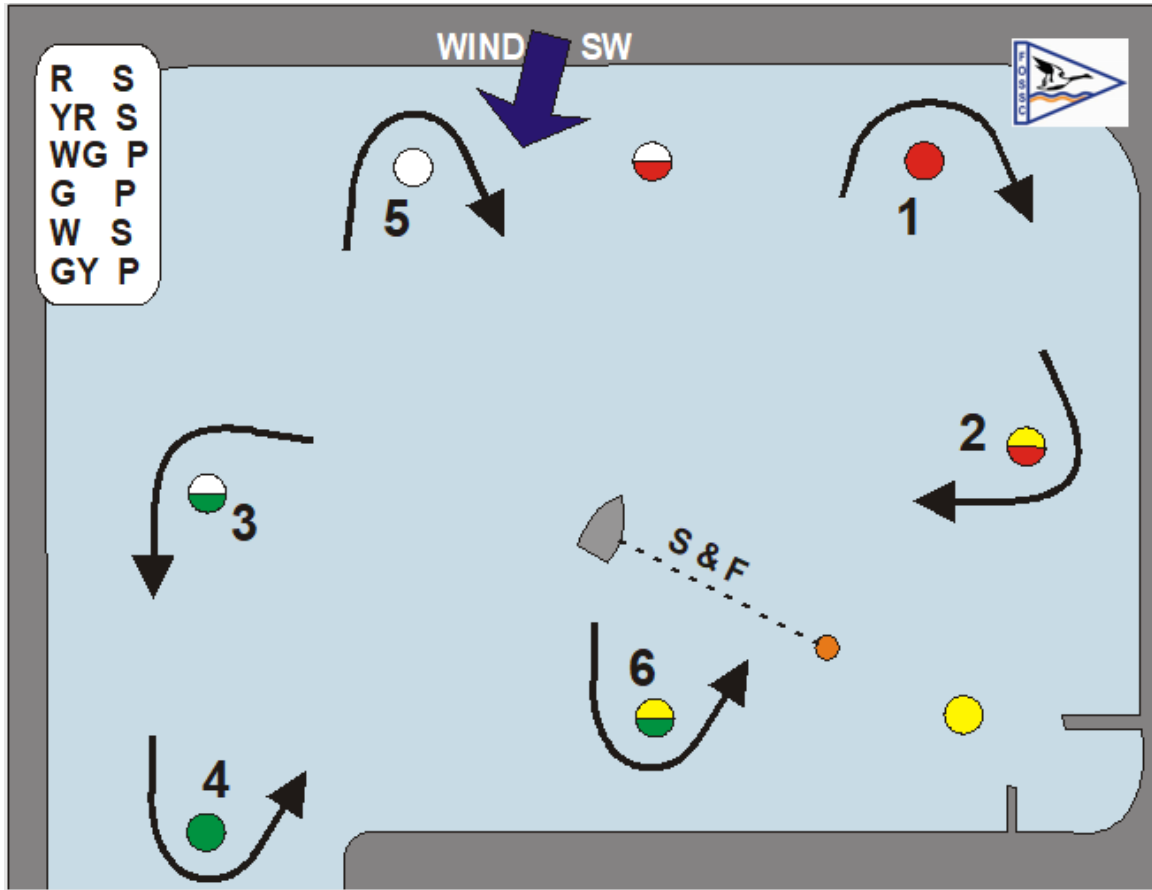
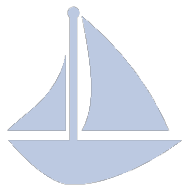
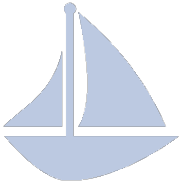




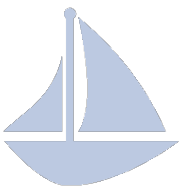
This is a more complex course (noting the diagram is in a different orientation from the picture earlier). 'S&F' indicates the start and finish line. The course code is in the white box in the top left corner.



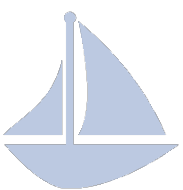
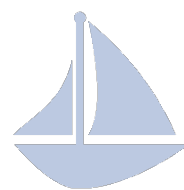
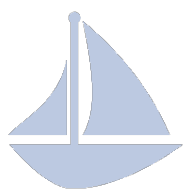
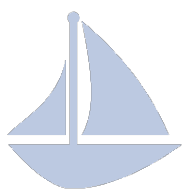
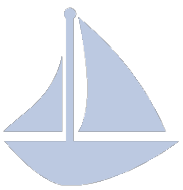
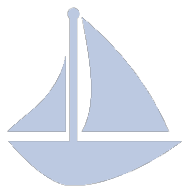
There are two beats on this course, and two gybes – can you decide where they are?



The beats are from green-yellow to red; and from green to white.
The gybes are at red-yellow and at green-white.



One more picture on the next page.....



Finally, here is a photo of the blackboard, which very unusually uses the hut in place of a mark, and the start line is between the two jetties. This is because we had restrictions on using the committee boat during covid. (Ignore the '100' for the number of laps – that's just a joke!) However, you can get the general idea and follow the course either using the code in the bottom left, or by following the diagram.

If you assume that the wind is blowing from white to yellow (a beat on the first leg), think about which mark(s) you will gybe around.

