

Roll Tacks & Roll Jibes

Tacking is slow. A tack will cost you 4-5 boatlengths of lost distance. However, a good roll tack will only cost you 2-3 boatlengths of lost distance. Which type of tack would you prefer

Before we start talking about how to perform a roll tack, you should first read Sailing without a Rudder. That will help you understand some of the thinking behind roll tacks and jibes. Also, the rules prescribe that you can't come out of a tack faster than you went in to the tack, so forget about trying to roll tack your way to the windward mark when there's no wind. To roll tack, follow these steps:

1. If there isn't much breeze, heel the boat slightly to leeward to help start your turn (called pre-roll). You don't want to move your whole body to leeward, so just put weight on your leeward foot or lean in a bit. As the boat begins to heel to leeward, allow the tiller to fall to leeward as well. If your main isn't in all the way, bring it in all the way at this time to help push the stern down away from the wind. Careful, don't turn the rudder too much - a little bit goes a long way!
2. As your boat reaches head-to-wind, you lean back and hike out towards the old windward side as you continue turning with the rudder. At this time, ease your mainsheet out a few inches as it luffs.
3. When the sails begin to fill (you'll still be heeling to the old windward or the new leeward side), you want to jump across to the new windward side and flatten the boat in a quick, smooth motion as you bring your sail in to their upwind position. You want to flatten the boat as you trim your sails in.

Since you can do a roll tack, why not a roll jibe? Roll jibes are a bit easier, because they eliminate any need to heel the boat to leeward with a pre-roll. To roll jibe, follow the steps below.

1. Hike hard to windward to heel the boat to weather. This will help your boat to bear away for the jibe.
2. As your sail gets close to coming across, grab the mainsheet as high as you can and pull the main across the boat.
3. After the main crosses over and begins to fill, the boat will start heeling to the new leeward side (old windward side), which you are sitting on. At this time, jump across the boat and flatten the boat in a quick, smooth motion as you pull your sail in a bit.

You'll notice that you come out of roll jibes a lot faster than a tack, so be careful about your boatspeed coming out of the jibe. Remember, you can't end up going faster than you started.