

Running Aground (Advanced)

Running aground is terribly embarrassing and potentially dangerous and damaging to your boat, so you shouldn't do it. That being said, running aground happens on occasion. Here's how to get your self off.

First, check and see if everyone and the boat are OK. If there are not strange noises or water coming in or other signs of damage and everyone's fine, you can start thinking about getting off. If the tide's coming in, you're in luck, because you'll eventually float free. If the tide's going out, you'll have to act fast if you don't want to spend the next 8 hours stuck on a grounded boat leaning 25 degrees with its keel firmly stuck in the mud, waiting for the tide to come back in and float you off the ground.

One option is to immediately turn around and head back the way you came. This method works great if you only lightly grounded mud and are still moving. Once you've stopped, your rudder will be useless, because there won't be any water flowing against it. If you are stopped, you can try to use your sails to turn the boat (bring one in and dump the other out to help the boat pivot), or use your engine - boats with inboard engines can use the rudder with the engine in gear, but boats with outboards on the transom will want to try and turn the engine sideways when they put it in gear.

If you still can't get off, try heeling the boat. If your sails are up, over-trim them and try to get the boat to heel. You can get everyone on the leeward side of the boat, and you can even put people on a boom with a boom topping lift (have them wear lifejackets, of course) and let it out to leeward to help the boat heel.

If you're still stuck, you'll need another technique. If you have a dinghy, put your anchor in the dinghy with the bitter end of the line attached to the boat and dinghy out to deep water. Drop the anchor over the side and head back to the boat. You can bring the anchor line back to a winch and start grinding like crazy to pull the boat off the ground.

If there are motorboats around, perhaps they can help pull you off. Just make sure that you tie the tow line to something very strong, such as your mast. Motorboats can generate a lot of tension in the lines.

Perhaps one of these techniques will work, or perhaps you'll need to use a bunch of them at the same time. Remember, if the tide's going out, you'll have to get going fast, because every minute that you're aground, the water level's going down and it will be harder and harder for you to get off until the tide starts coming in again.