

Downsizing on the water

As RYA Dinghy Instructors, we always advise our students to reef ashore if they have any doubt about their ability to hold down the full sail. There will be times, however, when they either forget to do so or get caught out as the wind increases. **Simon Winkley**, RYA Coach/Assessor, looks at reefing afloat with guidance and top tips to help our students deal with this scenario away from the comfort of the shore.

Ashore

As reefing afloat requires specific actions to be taken, possibly under the pressure of time or inclement weather, reefing can be practiced ashore enabling students to become competent with the processes of putting the reef in and shaking it out without the pressure of the elements on the water.

Many of the latest training boat designs have a slab reefing system with lines inside the boom which take in the clew and the tack with a single pull, a variation commonly called Jiffy reefing. To set this up: uncleat the reefing line, pull it out from the end of the boom, pass it through the reinforced clew cringle first, weave it down through the flaking cringles and tie a running bowline around the boom (see photo). This allows the new clew to be pulled fully downwards and towards the end of the boom and the pressure is taken on the strong clew cringle and not the weaker flaking cringles.

The reefing line goes from boom-end to clew cringle, threads down and is secured around the boom with a running bowline.



Sailing under jib on a close reach is an alternative to heaving-to and gets the reef in quickly

Top tip

Avoid simply jamming the stopper knot at the end of the reefing line into the notch in the boom-end fitting as this does not produce the right direction of pull and can slip out, particularly when not loaded. Prepare the tack by taking the inner line up to the reinforced tack cringle, weave down through the flaking cringles (in the same sequence as the clew) and tie it off to a strong point on the gooseneck.

Students should be reminded to set it up like this every time they sail so they are ready to reef whenever the need arises.

On the water – planning and setup

Help students to identify where to reef to make allowances for the boat drifting sideways, especially in strong tides. An ideal place would be:

- » away from a lee shore;
- » away from any downtime obstructions;
- » in an open space with as few other vessels around as possible;
- » on starboard tack (under IRPCS a vessel is underway when it is not connected to the ground so rights of way must be observed even during reefing).

Commonly the boat is placed in the stable hove-to position during reefing. As an alternative, ask students to sail along on a close reach under jib while reefing. Here the boat will still be able to steer a little and the helm will tend to keep a better lookout. The boom will be lowered just by the gunwale where the crew is sitting (not over the water) which should make things easier and safer.

On the water – execution

Now it's time to:

- » release the kicker/vang;
- » release the main halyard, streaming it in the water to prevent tangles;
- » lower the mainsail until the tack cringle is about 5cm above the gooseneck, supporting the boom as it drops;
- » pull on the reefing line (or pennant) to draw the new tack and clew into position, making sure the new tack remains close to the mast;
- » tidy away any spare line;
- » re-tension the kicker and sail away.

Reefing ties may be available on training sails and will hang down both sides of the sail through cringles along the reefing slab (the horizontal line of cringles from new tack to new clew). These should be tied using reef knots around the folds of the sail (not around the boom if possible) to secure the flaked sail in position. Keeping the sail loose-footed after reefing allows the sail controls, especially the outhaul, to remain effective and keeps unnecessary strain off the sail across the middle of the reefing slab.

Have a go yourself

Why not take out a modern training double-hander with another instructor to discuss and practice all the elements of reefing afloat? You should discover subtle yet valuable differences with the boats at your club or centre. There's no reason for this not to be an enjoyable, relaxed session which will refresh your skills and improve your ability to deliver it to students the next time around. It's also great for instructor development and staff training.



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