

Going backwards

Simon Winkley, RYA Coach/Assessor, explains that in order to get an intermediate sailor improving their boat handling in a way that is challenging yet fun, teaching them how to sail backwards is the way forwards!

Sailing backwards and getting out of irons are intrinsically linked so here we will look at how dinghy instructors can fully unlock both of these manoeuvres.

Getting out of Irons

Introduced at the start of a sailor's training, this most basic of skills is delivered in the classic 'push-push-pull-pull' style. What needs to be understood though is exactly what we push and pull, when and in which direction.

- 1st push: to the boom which backs the mainsail.
- 2nd push: to the tiller – it's critical that it is pushed towards the boom, allowing the boat to spin into a position where the boom is over the leeward side and can be released.
- 1st pull: to the tiller to stop the boat spinning - the boat should now be across the wind.
- 2nd pull: to the mainsheet to allow the boat to set sail once again.

When things don't go according to plan...

Many students will at some point experience the troublesome version of the manoeuvre: the boom loads up with power during the spin and, with the sailor unable to hold it any longer, it swings violently across the boat. It does this when the tiller is erroneously pushed away from the boom instead of towards it, forcing the boom to end up over the windward side of the boat.

Even when a boat gets out of irons smoothly it often doesn't really matter which way it ends up facing. Sailing backwards, however may be a different story.

Sailing backwards

Get your students to imagine that they are sailing backwards

Support students in the early stages by holding them head-to-wind



Upon release, clear verbal coaching and hand signals may prove useful.



from the middle of a crowded pontoon with lots of open water on one side and a beach on the other. Obviously taking the risk of sailing up the beach is not ideal.

Technically sailing backwards can be done by pushing the boom over either side of the boat. At the start of this manoeuvre however, the boom must be pushed towards the open water. Then at the end, the tiller is pushed towards the open water too and the boat will spin to face the same way.

So, the simple question to ask the student before they start to sail backwards is 'Which way do you want to be sailing when you have gone backwards far enough?' They will point to the open water and you will remind them to start the manoeuvre by pushing the boom towards the open water. Then, when they are ready for the spin at the end, they will push the tiller towards the open water too. So the two pushes (as with getting out of irons) are towards the final direction the boat is to sail off in. Simple!

Other coaching points for sailing backwards can be linked to the 5 Essentials:

- » **Sail setting.** In the head-to-wind position, with the boat stopped, back the sail fully with

movements with the rudder or the boat will swerve around too much, possibly causing the final spin to occur too early. When it comes to the spin, the tiller must be pushed no more than 45° from the centerline.

Sailing backwards can be tricky to initiate, especially in open water. It's important to emphasize that the boat really does need to be fully

stopped in the water in the head-to-wind position. If not, the initial push can cause the boat to either slip back onto its original course or can make holding the boom out too much of a challenge.

To help students in the early stages, try getting them to come alongside your anchored powerboat

one at a time. Then you can stand at the back of the powerboat and give the bow of the dinghy a little corrective push to help it on its way. Additionally, you can extend your arms out to your side in short bursts to show them which way to push the tiller. Then, once they develop a feel for it, they will be able to do it independently.

Working creatively on these skills can help students to get out of a tight spot in style and can facilitate a greater understanding of sailing in the regular direction.

- a good firm push and hold it.
- » **Balance.** Keep the boat super-flat! Even in medium winds the boat may heel heavily as soon as the sail is backed, causing the boat to spin too early.
- » **Trim.** Keep helm and crew weight forward to avoid a flat or open transom forcing water into the boat.
- » **Centreboard.** Raise it by up to three quarters (less in lighter winds) to avoid the rudder snatching and pulling on the tiller.
- » **Course sailed.** Make tiny

