

Teaching Roll Tacking: beyond the RYA method?

A little while ago my family spent some time at an RYA Centre overseas. We had a wonderful time, but I noticed that whereas at the start of the week, someone was good at roll tacking the boat, when we raced together later she was unable to do so.

Whereas before, she had tacked the boat with her feet tucked under herself, standing up when the boom had crossed over her head, now she was stretching her back foot across the (centre mainsheet) boat before the tack, making it very difficult to wait for the boom to cross

the boat before moving. The Coaching Handbook G14/03 (Session 6 Afloat page 56) suggests that good tacking is based on balance and foot placement:

“For example, students who step across too soon will be unable to roll tack (allowing the boat to roll over and the boom to cross before crossing the boat) at a later stage.”

If one starts by teaching sailors to tuck their feet under them before the tack, roll tacking becomes an easy and rewarding skill to teach. It can be introduced at a surprisingly

basic standard of competence. I suggest five stages:

1. Look, ‘Ready About’, tuck feet under self
2. Ease the tiller away, allow the boat to turn into wind
3. Pay out the sheet as the sail crosses the boat, and allow the boat to heel towards the helm, who is still crouching on the side
4. The boom has eased and the gunwhale is nearing the water surface; stand up, smoothly step across and hike your

weight over the opposite side

5. As the boat slowly comes upright smoothly sheet in, re-establishing airflow over the sail and accelerating the boat.

The manoeuvre should be smooth, not violent – it may help to pause and steer for a moment before the last stage.

Perhaps the most common faults are to chicken out of the initial roll, or to pull the boat upright too hard or too soon.

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