

Active Mirror Crewing

It's vital

A Mirror without an active crew is only half alive. Everything lifts when skipper and crew are in harmony. The boat goes better; races are more memorable.

Expect these notes to give you, as crew, ideas for how to carry out tasks. But mainly expect them to encourage active contribution to a combined effort.

Responsibilities

- help get the boat set up properly on land
- keep the boat upright and lively
- carry out manoeuvres smartly
- get the most out of the sails
- provide an educated pair of eyes
- keep your skipper on task and provide options
- when you get back listen and discuss
- help put the boat away

Setting up

There's a part to play in getting the boat properly ready:

- undertake tasks
- check that nothing's overlooked (do you have an on-shore checklist - aircraft pilot fashion?)
- check that you are signed on

Make sure you know how to undo halyards from cleats and do them up again because you might need to do this on the water.

A lively upright boat

You are a living part of a complex water-ballet - much, much more than ballast.

It comes down to balance and feel. So, except in the lightest of breezes (see below):

- keep the boat upright (square to the water = faster)
- move with the boat; letting the boat move under you
- avoid sitting rigidly or bracing yourself - let the boat live in the water

In very light breezes:

- make yourself invisible (out of what breeze there is)

- help provide the amount of heel away from the wind that the boat needs
- don't move - moving around stops the boat

True art requires sacrifice. But you can stretch out again if the wind comes in, or after you get back on land.

Smart manoeuvres

You and your skipper will work out your own ways of doing tacks and gybes. Whatever you decide, you want them to be:

- effective: don't lose speed, don't lose distance to windward
- precise: tack (or gybe) through just the right amount
- reliable: get it right each time, even under pressure

Here are some common ideas for you to try. Check with your skipper for any special/favourite ways of doing things.

tacks

A neat tack is a beautiful thing.

- have a standard call from your skipper (for example the old "ready about" followed by "lee oh" or the more prosaic "tacking")
- free the jib from the cleats, but hold it on until it starts to lift as the boat heads through the wind, then
- release the old sheet and pull on the new, at the same time...
- move lightly across the boat to keep the lively balance (different skippers might suggest different ideas to try)
- trim the new sheet to the required position

Be able to do this without warning too, for example to avoid another boat or respond to a sudden windshift.

gybes (without spinnaker)

- have a standard call from your skipper (for example "ready to gybe" followed by "gybing!")
- put the centreboard down to give yourself room to move
- release the jib
- when your skipper calls, help pull the boom across, and at the same time...
- move smartly across the boat to keep the lively balance and...
- keep your head down!
- trim the jib to the new position

gybes (with spinnaker)

Different boats and different skippers will have different equipment and different styles, but in general it's like the gybe without spinnaker, but (with normal equipment) after you have moved to the new side the general idea is:

- unclip the pole from the mast
- clip the released end to the spinnaker sheet
- release the guy from the other end of the spinnaker pole (usually there is a rope on the pole to pull for this)
- clip that end to the mast
- clip the new guy (the rope from the end of the pole) to the "shy hook" on the side of the boat (if that is the system your boat has)

There are books that give detailed advice on how to do this. Discuss it with your skipper.

Powerful sails

jib

Wind hits the jib first, so if the jib is wrongly set, all the flow over the mainsail is upset and it's a big waste. It's your job to adjust the jib when on the water. Your skipper will have set it up when rigging the boat - and the crew should be part of that too.

On the wind (working/beating):

- pull it on to the right amount and cleat it
- have marks on the sheets so you can do it the same each time
- right amount depends on the wind
- wool tufts at the top of the jib can help (they say flowing 30 degrees down is good)
- generally more free in light winds, pulled more in with moderate winds, possibly eased in strong winds
- discuss it with your skipper

Off the wind (reaching/running):

- it's up to you to keep the jib at its best, and it will need adjusting all the time
- look at the wool tufts on both sides of the jib (sometimes hard to see the ones on the back, but they are important)
- aim to keep all tufts flowing - if the near one lifts pull on; if the far one (through the sail) flutters let the jib off

spinnaker

You'll need to work out how to share the tasks with your skipper.

putting it up

Check with your skipper. There are fancier systems (and better ones no doubt), but here's one possible order:

work out which side you will need the pole on (opposite the boom of course, but perhaps you gybed around a buoy just before and it changes from what you thought)

- have a standard call ("hoist spinnaker")
- crew clips end of pole onto spinnaker guy
- skipper hoists spinnaker while...
- crew helps spinnaker up and keeps it clear of forestay
- crew clips pole to mast, and clips topping lift/downhaul to centre of pole
- crew clips guy to shy hook on side of boat (if that's the system)
- during all of this...skipper is adjusting the sheet
- crew takes sheet
- skipper trims guy
- trimming

The idea is to keep the spinnaker full without it being too hard-on. There's black magic and feel in balancing the adjustment of guy and sheet. But if the guy is held in the cleat, then let the sheet off until the luff (side of spinnaker near the guy) starts to lift, and then pull it back on a little. Play it like this all the time.

bringing it down

Check with your skipper. There are fancier systems, but here's one possible order (assumes spinnaker chute):

- have a standard call ("spinnaker down")
- skipper pulls spinnaker down, while...
- crew detaches pole from guy, mast and topping lift
- crew tidies up any problems (for example, ropes caught under bits of boat, neaten away the spinnaker halyard)

mainsail

You might be expected to change some settings on the mainsail when you are sailing, for example, tighten or loosen the lacing or the downhaul. Check with your skipper, and anyway, learn how to do these things.

A lookout to be relied on

- regularly check for other boats and keep your skipper up to date
- know when you have right of way (port or starboard, windward or leeward)
- look for where wind is stronger
- look for gusts

Focus

Helms have a lot on their mind. Sometimes they can get so caught up on one thing that they get off track. A good crew can help.

- know the starting sequence and what the flags are
- keep track of where you are in the starting sequence
- know where the buoys are (or should be), and what they look like
- know the course and keep track of where you are on it
- know the blue and white flag for shorten course, and watch out for it (know what to do then too)
- learn as many of the flags as you can, and what they mean (you can get charts for this)
- know what the tides (if any) are doing

Jenny Armstrong, Olympic Gold medal winner at Sydney 2000, told us at Hunters Hill that if she and her crew weren't regularly discussing what was happening, then things were not at their best. But don't nag or whinge of course!

Possible forms of words that might not irritate your skipper:

The rest of the fleet is over there; do we need to cover them?

There might be more wind to port?

Debrief, listen and discuss

On shore:

- check about signing off, if it is required (specially at an away regatta - often signing off is required at National events)
- share the enjoyable moments with your skipper
- help others ashore
- congratulate your fellow competitors
- discuss with your skipper how to improve for next time

Tidy away

After the pleasure of the race, look after the boat that made it possible.

Emergencies

Protests

Not really an emergency, but it can feel like it. Depending on your club, you might never get into protests in normal club racing. But they do arise in major events. Know what you do if someone hails "Protest!" at you, or if your skipper shouts "Protest!" Discuss it with your skipper.

Capsizing

Make sure you and your skipper know what you will each do if you capsize.

Broken gear

Even in the best of boats things break. Be prepared. It helps if you know the names of parts of the boat and rig so that "The whipping has come undone, so we'll just make a bowline around the becket on the block" would make sense, even in a fluster.

Learn to tie the basic knots.