



Windward Mark Rounding

A good rounding of the windward mark requires a little forethought and tactical planning. The rounding can be broken down into three phases:

- Approaching the layline
- Setting up on the layline
- Rounding

Approaching the layline

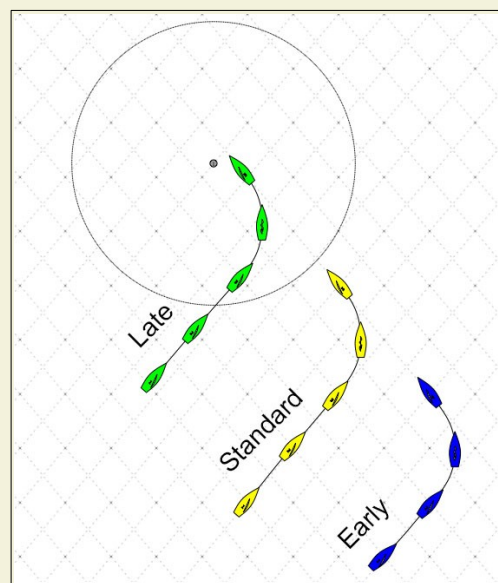
Use the final stages of the beat to plan the approach to the starboard layline. Boats will be starting to bunch as they near the windward mark, so:

- Stay in good breeze on the lifted tack for as long as practical.
- Maintain clear air.
- Sail fast.

It's about to get busy, so now is the time to make a plan for the downwind leg. Look around and think about where the pressure is, whether there is a favoured side for the downwind and how the competition are placed. Your options for the downwind leg are to go left, right, or down the middle. If you find yourself well placed up the beat, you may choose to go middle until it becomes clear what boats behind you are doing.

Setting up on the layline

Should you set up on the layline early, late, or somewhere in between? Lets look at a few scenarios.

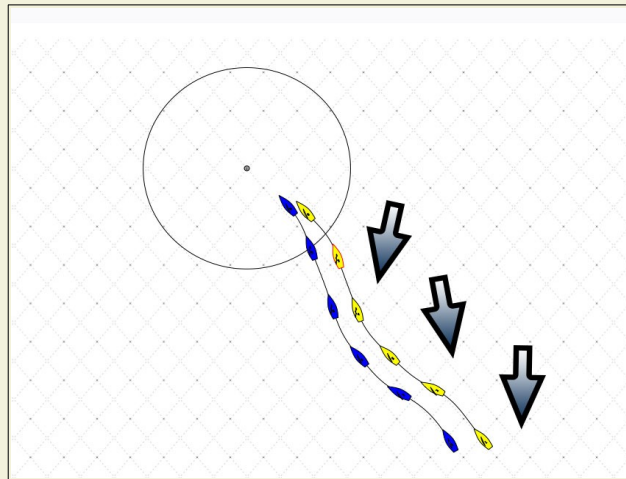


Setting up on the layline

Setting up early – As a general rule, avoid hitting the

layline early. The further away you are from the mark, the more difficult it is to judge when you are on the layline and should tack. The temptation is then to set up higher on the layline to be certain the mark can be laid. You have now sailed further than necessary and opened up space for a trailing boat to tack below you and be inside you at the mark.

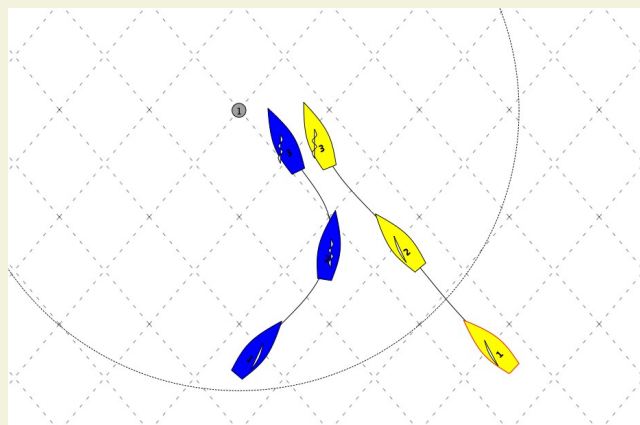
The biggest downside to setting up early on the layline is that once there, you have limited your tactical options. There is little benefit in a lift and you can't tack to take advantage of a knock.



Wind shifts on a long layline approach

Yellow sets up early on the starboard layline. Blue, level with yellow, tacks onto starboard below the layline. Both boats are knocked, causing blue to move ahead and closing the gap between them. If the lateral separation at the start was small, yellow may now be sailing in dirty air off blue. Yellow will not want to tack away, but needs a lift to lay the mark.

Setting up late – Remember that RRS 18.3 gives no rights to a boat that tacks onto starboard in the zone. So unless you are far enough ahead (or behind) that you don't have to consider other boats, you would normally avoid such a late setup on the layline. Getting knocked as you head on port into the zone (a lift for your starboard competitors) means you have to duck the stern of any close competitors, because you can't risk them needing to change course to avoid you.

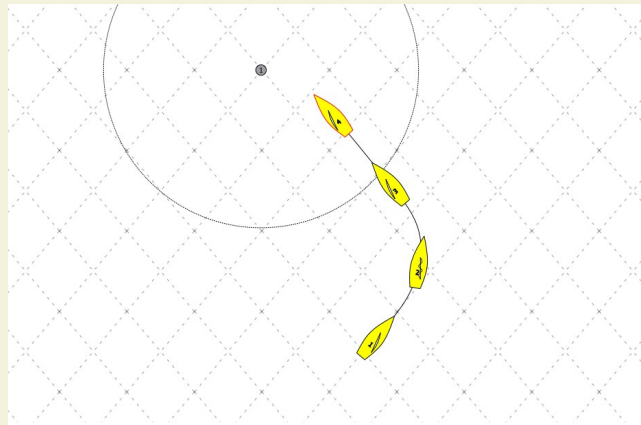


Setting up late and tacking in the zone

Beware the close-packed fleet advancing up the layline

with no gaps big enough to squeeze through. The only option now, is to bear away and sail down the layline looking for a hole to nip through. Suddenly your handily placed mark rounding has turned into a back of the fleet mark rounding. The worst scenario for a late setup on the layline is finding yourself in dead air below the crowds already on the layline and offset leg.

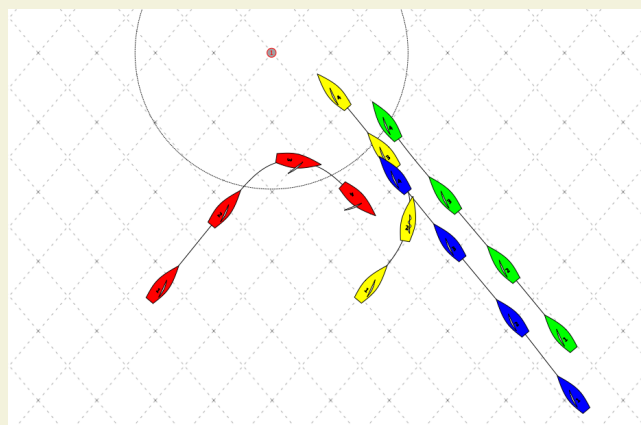
In Between – The Standard Approach – Plan to tack onto starboard for your final approach around 6 – 8 boat lengths from the mark. This establishes you on the layline coming into the zone with full rights. You will have had the freedom to play the shifts up the beat and if the final approach to the mark requires you to sail a knock, at least it's short and the damage minor.



The standard approach

The standard approach works best if you are well positioned in the fleet and there are still gaps up the layline for you to tack into.

Approaching the Mark in a Crowd – If there's likely to be a crowded procession up the layline to the mark, your only option may be to set up on the layline early. It often pays to over-stand the layline a little to keep the boat sailing in clear air. It may also help you to sail around any ruckus that develops at the mark as boats converge.



Approaching the windward mark in a crowd

Layline tactics – Once you are on the layline, protect your position:

- Lee bow and pinch up on boats behind and to windward.
- Sail down if boats behind and to leeward threaten to pass.

- Sail down on boats threatening to tack ahead of you

Thinking ahead – As you approach the windward mark, think ahead:

- Some ROs will set the separation mark quite high, so check the lay of the short offset leg in case you need to sail past the windward mark to fetch it.
- Is the course to the leeward mark dead downwind or skewed? Was there a favoured side on the beat to windward? Which gybe will be favoured for the downwind leg?
- Are you lifted or knocked approaching the mark? Which gybe will therefore be favoured for the downwind leg?
- Is the bottom mark a single buoy or a gate? Which side of the course do you want to protect on the downwind leg? Should you gybe early to protect the left side and an inside berth at the leeward rounding?

Rounding

The rounding is where you start executing the tactical plan for the downwind leg. Execute the bear-away manoeuvre smoothly, accelerating through the turn. A well executed bear-away will open up a little bit of space on competition whose boat handling skills are not quite as sharp.

It's always nice to have an inside berth at the rounding mark, but if your downwind plan is to go left, an inside berth is a must-have. If you feel strongly enough about your plan to hold the left side downwind, you may even be prepared to ease off up the layline to clear the stern of an inside boat that could prevent you going left.

If your downwind plan is to hold centre or go right, having an inside berth at the turn is not so critical. Emphasis needs to be on executing the bear-away smoothly, maintaining boat speed and staying in clear air.

OK, you have made it around the windward mark, but this is no time to relax. The downwind leg is the hardest of all to gain places.