

COLREGs Lights and Shapes Quick Reference

A compact Day Skipper revision aid for rules of the road, lights, shapes, and sound signals.

Core rules to keep fresh

Day Skipper candidates need fast recall of the situations that decide who gives way and what action is expected.

- Rule 5: keep a proper look-out by sight, hearing, and all available means.
- Rule 7: use all available means to decide if risk of collision exists.
- Rule 8: take early, positive, and clear action to avoid collision.
- Rules 12 to 18: sailing vessels, overtaking, crossing, head-on, and vessel responsibilities.

Vessel hierarchy reminder

A simple memory order from most restricted to least restricted.

- Not under command.
- Restricted in ability to manoeuvre.
- Constrained by draught.
- Engaged in fishing.
- Sailing vessel.
- Power-driven vessel.

Sailing vessel give-way basics

Use these as quick prompts, then revise the full rule wording separately.

- Port tack keeps clear of starboard tack.
- Same tack: windward vessel keeps clear.
- If unsure whether the other sailing vessel is on port or starboard, keep clear.
- An overtaking vessel keeps clear even if it is sailing.

Navigation lights to recognise

Practise identifying the vessel type and aspect from the lights shown.

- Sidelights: red to port, green to starboard.
- Stern light: white light visible from astern.
- Power-driven vessel: masthead light plus sidelights and stern light.
- Sailing vessel: sidelights and stern light, with no masthead light when only sailing.
- At anchor: all-round white light, with extra requirements for larger vessels.

Day shapes and special lights

These patterns are common revision traps.

- Vessel not under command: two black balls by day, two all-round red lights by night.
- Restricted in ability to manoeuvre: ball-diamond-ball by day, red-white-red by night.

- Vessel constrained by draught: cylinder by day, three all-round red lights by night.
- Fishing vessel: two cones apex together by day, red over white for fishing other than trawling.

Sound signal prompts

Memorise these as prompts and revisit the full COLREGs tables during revision.

- One short blast: altering course to starboard.
- Two short blasts: altering course to port.
- Three short blasts: operating astern propulsion.
- Five or more short blasts: doubt or danger.
- Restricted visibility: practise the vessel-specific signals separately.

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