



# HOW TO WINDSURE 101

**The Beginners Guide to Windsurfing**

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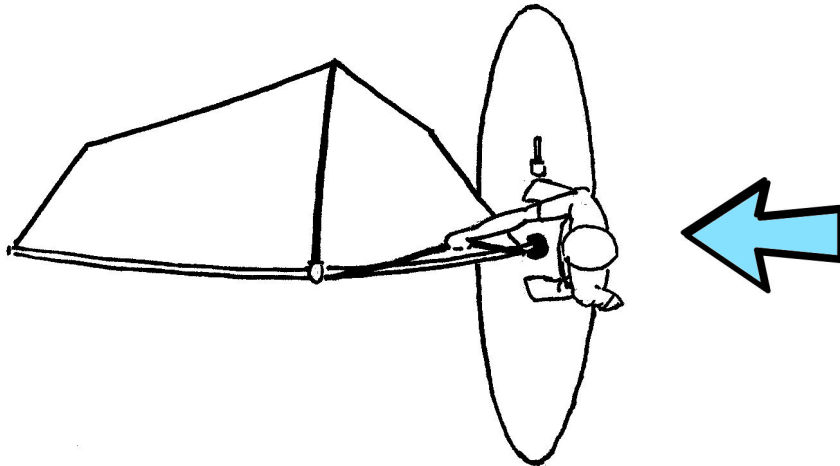
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## **Disclaimer**

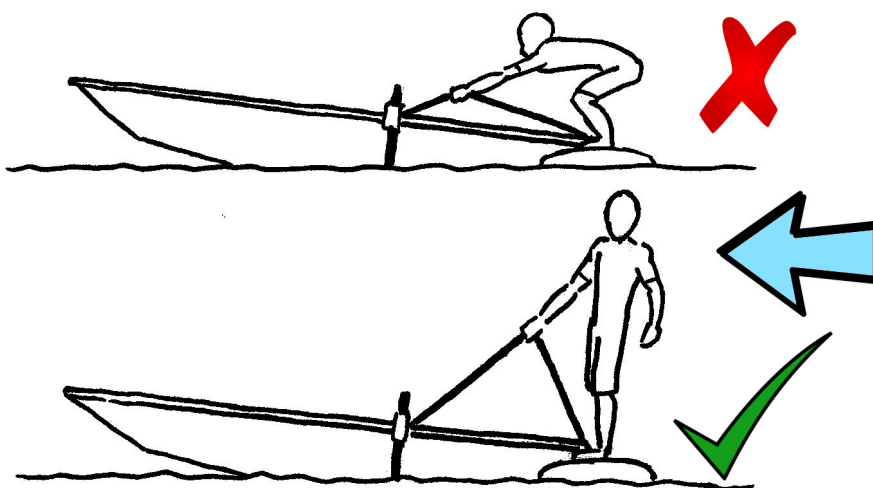
I believe I should strongly advise you to get an instructor to teach you how to windsurf. Especially if it's going to be your first attempt ever at windsurfing. Windsurfing is a very technical sport and you can make a lot of mistakes and go through a lot of frustration if you try to learn on your own or strain a friendship if you accept having a friend teach you. All the material I give away is intended mainly to serve as a refresh so you can correct any bad habits that might have sneaked in throughout the unsupervised sessions and hindering your progress.

## How to Start Windsurfing

Before we start, we must first determine the direction of the wind and adjust the board and sail position accordingly. The board and sail will be put into the T-position. This means that the board will be set out 90° to the wind, and the sail 90° to the board pointing downwind.



Now with one foot on either side of the mast-foot we grab the up-haul and making sure we stand up straight start pulling up the sail. Why the back straight? The sail can be anywhere from 2.5 to 6m<sup>2</sup> big, maybe even bigger. All that surface is filled with water which makes it very heavy. Trying to lift this through our back instead of the legs can and will hurt your back. Pressing up with your legs is a simple way to avoid pulling a muscle or doing other serious damage to your back. This factor is usually something we forget about quickly, especially as we get tired. Try not to forget! The easiest way to pull out the sail is to stand up straight and to turn our shoulders and move up the up-haul line with our hands until the mast is in our reach with the next shoulder turn.



We pull the sail up until the point where the sail is only just touching the water. As long as the sail

still has contact with the water, it has some resistance and gives us something to hold on to. This is especially useful if we are in a location with waves which are going to knock us off balance. This is our base position. Here we will control the board position, making sure that we maintain the T-position. The next step is a sequence of steps. Memorize these three words like a mantra for this moment: Mast. Feet. Boom

1. **Mast.** In one shoulder turn we grab the mast with the front hand just under the boom (if it is more comfortable to grab above the boom, your boom is probably too high). Important at this point is to make sure that the sail comes to us and not vice-versa. If we lean forward, our centre of gravity is no longer over the centre of the board and the sail will pull us forward and down. Later, as we get better, the hand will not go to the mast but directly to the boom.

2. **Feet.** As soon as we have the mast in the front hand our feet must move towards the back of the board. Leaving the front foot in front of the mast does two things. Firstly it hinders you going as far back with your weight as you actually need to. Secondly, it opens the possibility of falling in the water, your foot still on the board and the mast slamming down on your shin. Sounds pretty painful indeed. I haven't actually seen this happen yet but I was told this and I see a realistic possibility of it happening.

3. **Boom.** Once we are behind the mast-foot we only need to grab the boom with our back hand. I always recommend starting off using only two fingers to pull it towards you because what I have seen time and time again is that everything goes well until we close the sail too quickly and the sudden pull of the wind sending us flying forward. Close the sail softly and start getting used to the power in it increasing and decreasing as we close and open the sail. As we become more familiar with the effects of pulling and letting go we can do this more aggressively but first it is best to go easy on the back hand.



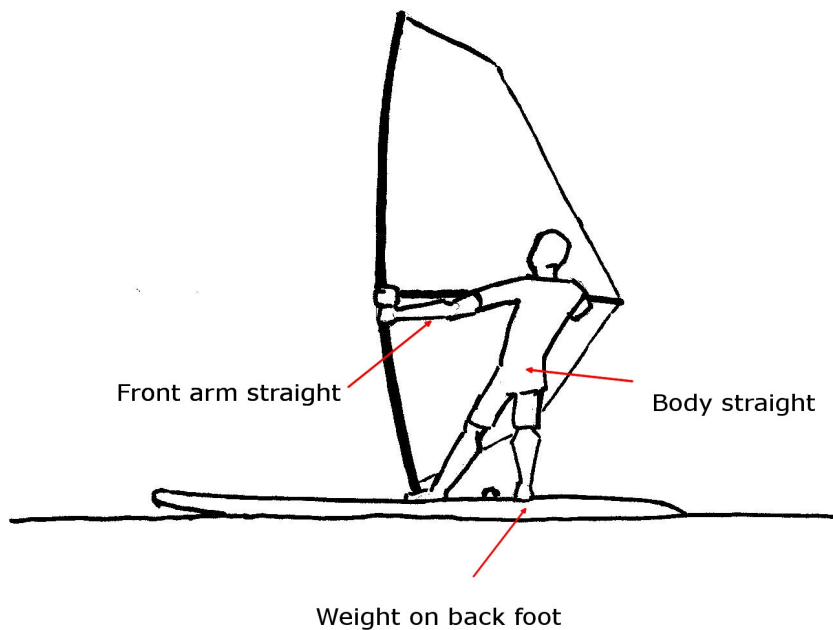
Why not move the feet after grabbing the boom? Mainly because once we have grabbed the boom, we will not be able to move our feet. At least at the beginning. This is for two reasons: On the one hand, once we have power in the sail, you are going to be constantly on the verge of falling over forwards, using a lot of resistance in the toes. This is because the pivot point (or centre of rotation) is the mast-foot which we are going to have between our feet. On the other hand, we are going to be quite concentrated on controlling the power in the sail and will not really have any concentration space left for focussing on the feet as well.

Now to the actual sailing position: There are three main things we want to focus on when windsurfing. These will remain true throughout all our windsurfing life, regardless of our level.

1. **Front arm straight.** This is the most important of the three and can be considered the golden rule of windsurfing. A lot of energy can be saved, and a lot of progress can be sped up if we follow this rule. I will explain in a future post why keeping the front arm straight is so important. For now, just trust me on this and don't forget it.
2. **Weight on the back foot.** With low winds this one isn't crucial, but as the wind gets stronger and we sail on any course but upwind, keeping the weight on the back foot becomes more and more important. I will also explain this in a future post.
3. **Keeping your body straight.** I see this one very often. Even people that have been sailing

for ages use this “monkey stance”. It has got to be the most ineffective sailing position and least aesthetically pleasing. I insist you keep this one in mind: your front ankle, knee, hips and shoulder should all be in one line. This helps keep your weight on the back foot and forces you to use your bodyweight to counter the pull of the sail. More on the correct body position while sailing.

To this I would add that we want to try and hold the mast so that it is perfectly vertical and our hips facing the direction we are moving in. These two are important but the first three are to be corrected first as we don't want doing them wrong to become a bad habit. One last thing: **Look forward!** Just as when we are driving, riding a bike, skating, skiing or whatever, we must see where we are going to avoid collision with others and obstacles.



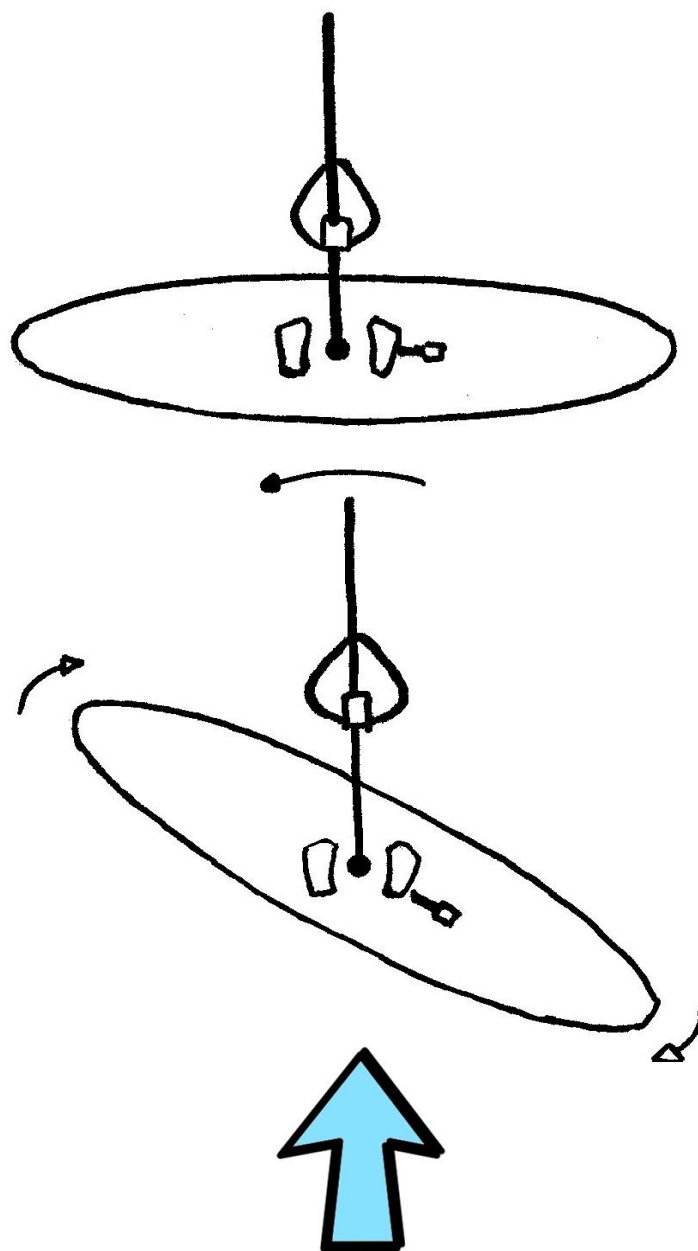
Recap important notes:

- Back straight when pulling up the sail.
- Sail must come to you, not vice-versa.
- The order: Mast. Feet. Boom.
- [The Golden Rule](#): Front arm straight.
- Weight on the back foot.
- Keep your body straight.
- Look forward

## How to turn

At some point we need to turn to get back to where we came from. So let's get down to explaining how to control the board with the sail from the T-position:

By pulling the sail to the left or right we are able to turn the board clockwise or anticlockwise (when looked at from above). The sail will always try to position itself in line with the wind so when we shift it to the left, the board will turn clockwise so that the sail can continue being in line with the wind. Another way of looking at it is to think of the sail as a stationary object which we are holding on to while we turn the board with our feet: we can either pull with the left foot and push with the right foot to make it turn anti-clockwise, or pull with the right and push with the left to turn it clockwise.



## **Sail over the front vs. Sail over the back**

### **Sail over the front**

This method is easier as we do not need to move our feet around the mast. We only need to turn over our own axis. The downside: we drift downwind more.

### **Sail over the back**

This way is a little more complicated as we need to move around the mast with our feet while the sail is pulled over the back of the board (where we were standing a moment ago). The advantage is that we do not lose much gained reach.

Initially I recommend to pass the sail over the back of the board since if we pass it over the front, the board will point downwind and we will lose some gained upwind reach. Once we consistently hold the closed reach course (more on this in the next post) we can sacrifice a little gained reach by passing the sail over the front.



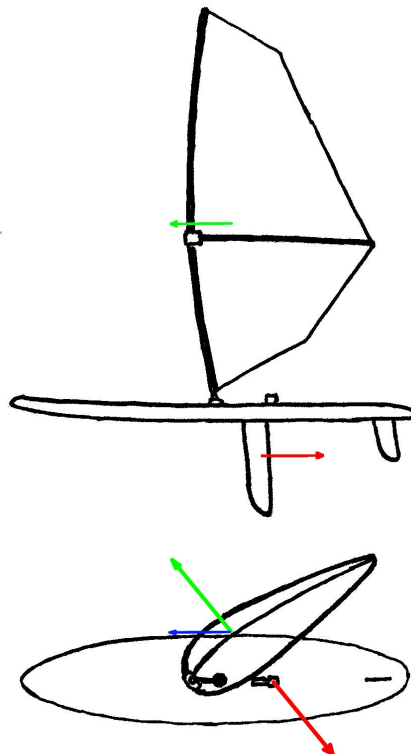
**A small tip:** Always position your feet so they are facing in line with the mast. If you ignore this little detail you will fall in more times than necessary.



## How to Steer

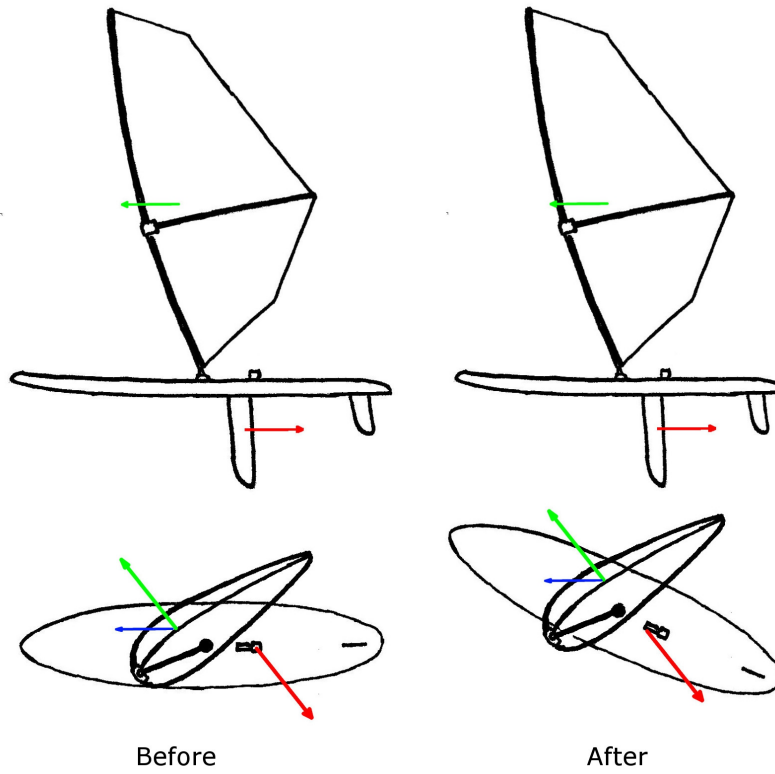
So we are now able to sail in one direction, maybe even in both. Now we want to know how to windsurf towards a specific point. Before we start it is important to clarify that we will not be using the terms right or left as this will change depending in which direction we are sailing in. We will be using towards the “front or back of the board” and “into/towards the wind” and “away from the wind”.

First we must understand why we move forwards in the first place. When we look at the windsurfer from the side and from the top we see this.

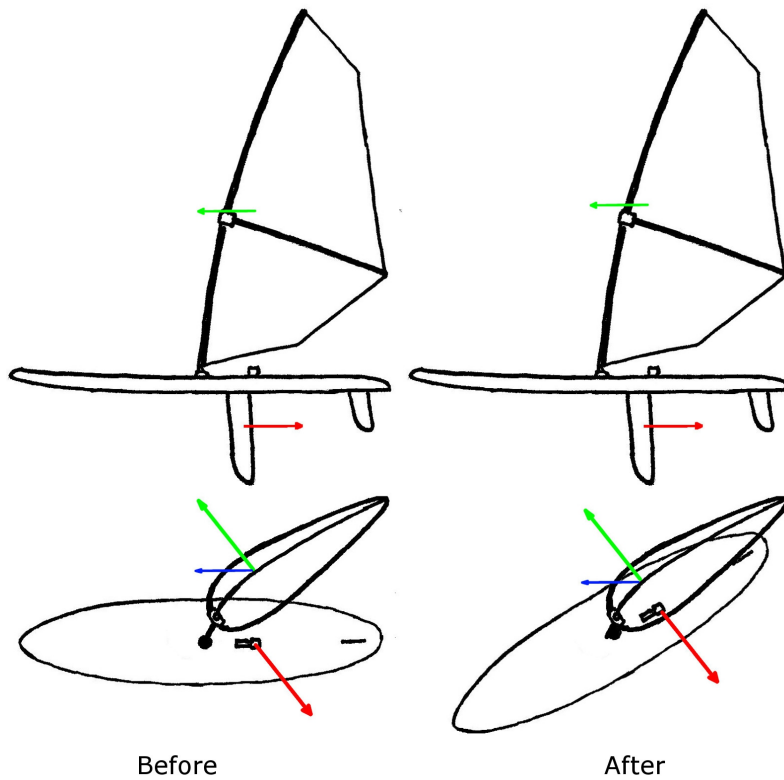


The sail has a general pressure point. The arrows are forces. The green one is the wind pushing the sail which is our propulsive force. However, if we didn't have the counteracting force (red arrow) acting through the centre-board (and later on only the fin) we would just drift downwind. Since both arrows are in line, the board stays on course and only moves in the line of the blue arrow. However, if we were to incline the sail forward (or slightly towards the wind), the arrows are no longer in line. This causes a lever which turns the board downwind so that both arrows are lined up again.





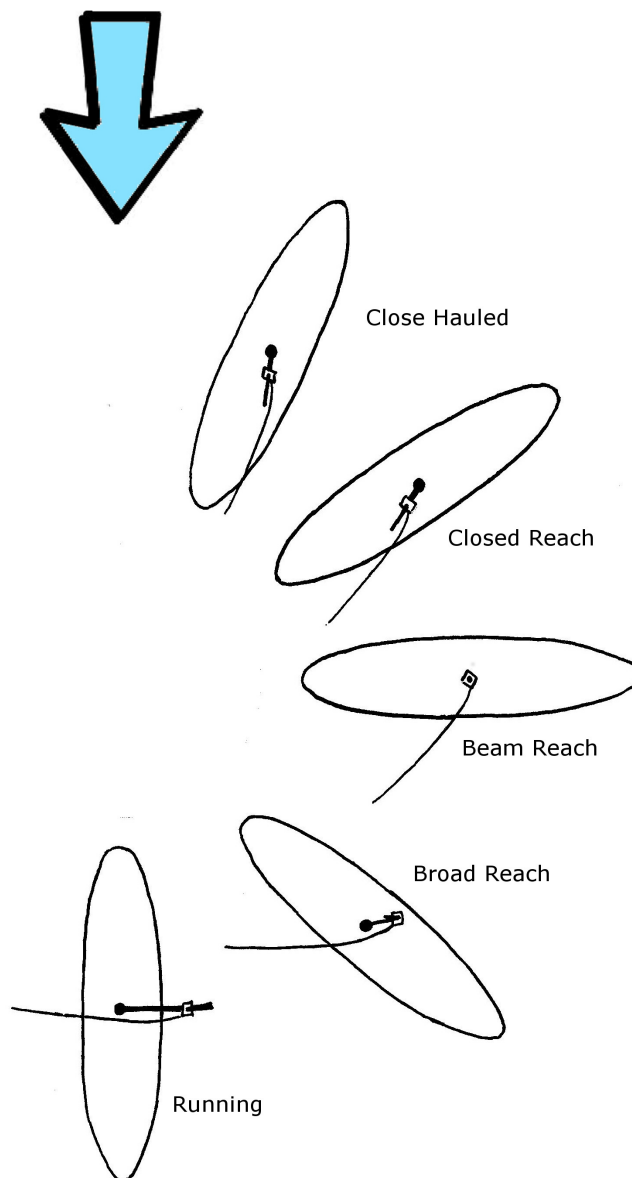
The same thing occurs when we lean the sail back (or away from the wind). Only that in this case the board turns into the wind as the arrows are disaligned in the other direction.



## The Courses

Now let's get to the individual courses

- **Close hauled:** This is the course going closest to the wind. If we turn any more into the wind, we stall and lose speed until we stop completely and fall in backwards due to lack of power in the sail.
- **Closed reach:** This is anywhere between close hauled and beam reach. We are sailing upwind in any case.
- **Beam Reach:** Here we are sailing  $90^\circ$  to the wind direction.
- **Broad Reach:** This course includes any angle between beam reach and running. In any case we are going downwind.
- **Running:** This course describes going downwind or close to it. We are sailing in the direction in which the wind is blowing.



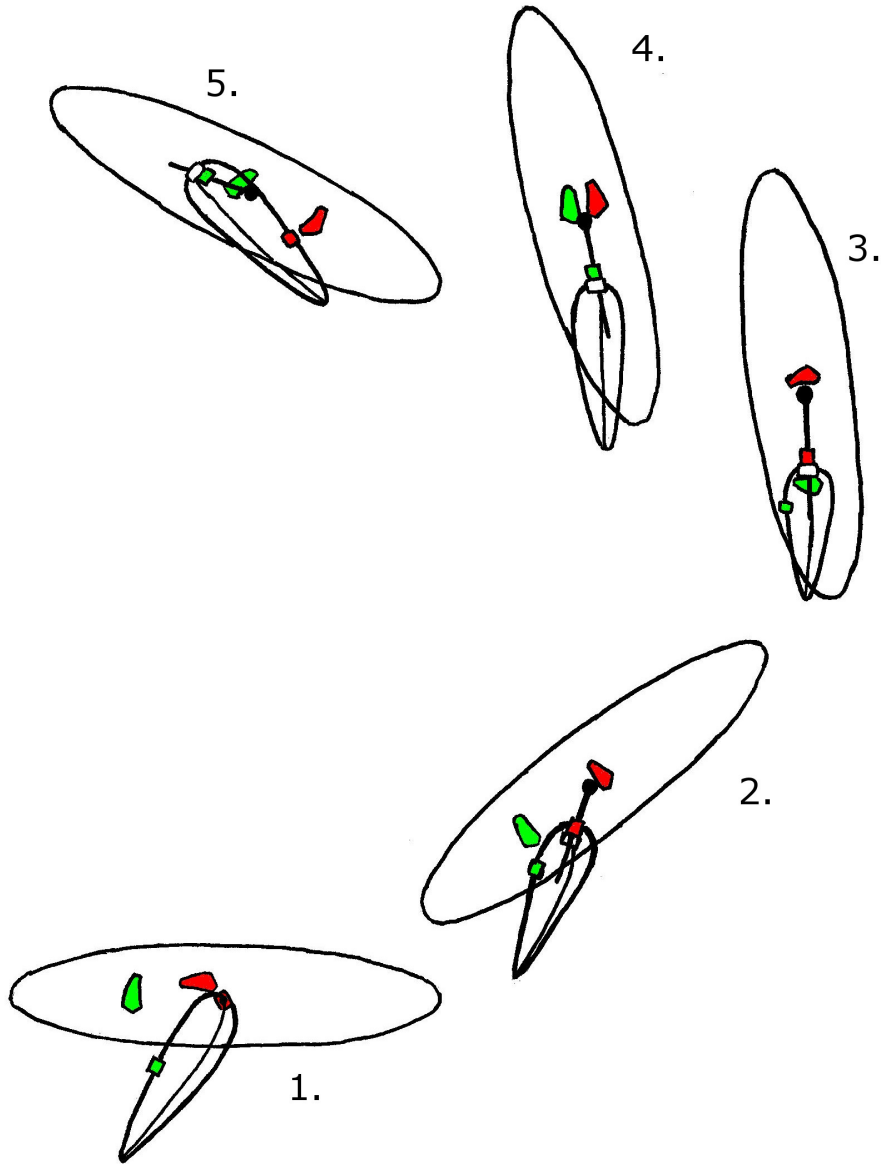
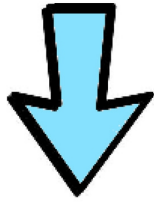
## How to Tack

Being able to turn around quickly without falling in is a pretty useful thing to know how to do in windsurfing. However, I would like to note that it is not essential to know in the initial stages of windsurfing. “Why?” you may ask. Well, basically, the way we tack and jibe with big boards and small sails is different to the way we tack and jibe with small boards and big sails and until then we can simply use the basic windsurf turn. With big boards we are going to rely a lot on the spare volume that allows us to float and have stability even when the board is not moving. This is not going to be possible when windsurfing with small boards. These boards won’t have any reserve buoyancy and so won’t float when standing still which means that the technique in tacking and jybing is very different. That being said, it is a useful thing to know how to do and a good thing to practice as we solidify the foundations of our windsurfing technique. After all, it all builds the sensitivity required for the sport.



So let’s get to it. Before we start we want to keep in mind that throughout the whole manoeuvre we want to keep wind power in the sail. We want to try to keep equilibrium not by balancing on the board but by using the wind in the sail. To do this we want to keep one hand on the boom at all times, before and after changing sides. Let’s have at it step by step:

1. From the normal sailing position (1.) we put the front hand on the mast just below the boom and the front foot moves to just in front of the mast. As we do this the sail is lowered to the back of the board (or away from the wind) (2.) Important to note, we move and keep our weight on the front foot throughout the whole manoeuvre.
2. The board starts turning into the wind. We continue holding the foot and hand positions until the sail is on the new side. A good indicator is when the foot of the sail (the lower edge of the sail) is touching our shin (3.).
3. Right then we need quick feet. The longer we take to get from one side with pressure in the sail to the other with pressure on the new side, the more likely it is that we lose balance and fall in.
4. We bring the back foot forward to where the front foot was. At the same time the back hand replaces the front hand on the mast. We keep the sail low all the way until this moment (4.).
5. Now we simultaneously move the previously front foot to the back and bring the mast forward to bear away from the wind (5.). The weight is transferred on to the foot that is now in front of the mast.
6. The board will bear away. As it does this we must start to transfer the weight on to the new back foot gradually and open the sail (sheet out) gradually so that the wind doesn’t build up too much pressure in the sail as we bear away.



## How to Jybe

As with tacking, in my opinion, this windsurfing manoeuvre is unnecessary since our turn will be quite different as soon as we start planing/gliding. However, to get to that level we need time on the water and until then we want to be able to turn around with style without getting wet. I will get around to writing a guide for the carve jybe in the future but this is all I have here for now. So here goes:

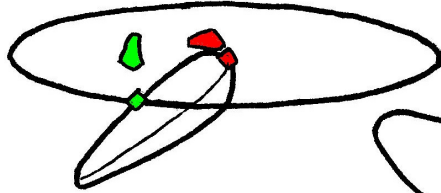


1. We start on beam reach (1.). We put the back hand further back on the boom and start to lean the sail forward (towards the wind) (2.).
2. As the board starts to bear away, we move our front foot behind our back foot and place all our weight on it (3.).
3. We keep leaning the mast forward and down towards the water.
4. We pass through the downwind course and continue sailing clew first in the new direction.
5. At this point we move our feet forward so that the new front foot is next to the mast and the new back foot a shoulder width behind (4.).
6. As soon as the feet are in place we shift the sail remembering to bring the mast forward quickly as it shifts.
7. We bear up again so we get back to half reach again on the new side (5.).

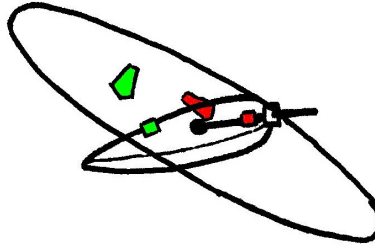
Important throughout the whole manoeuvre is to really lean into the wind as we are going to have the whole area of the sail available to the wind and therefore a lot of power in the sail.



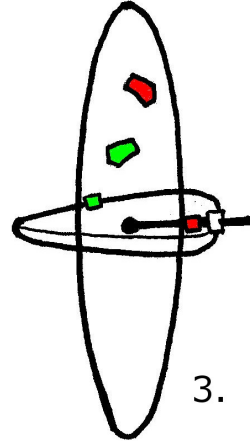
1.



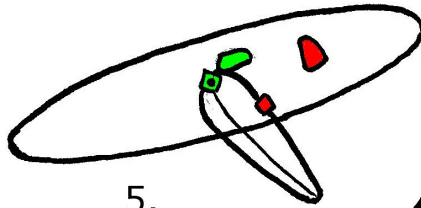
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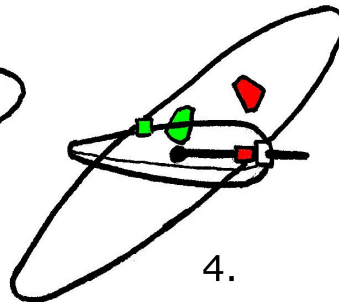
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5.



4.



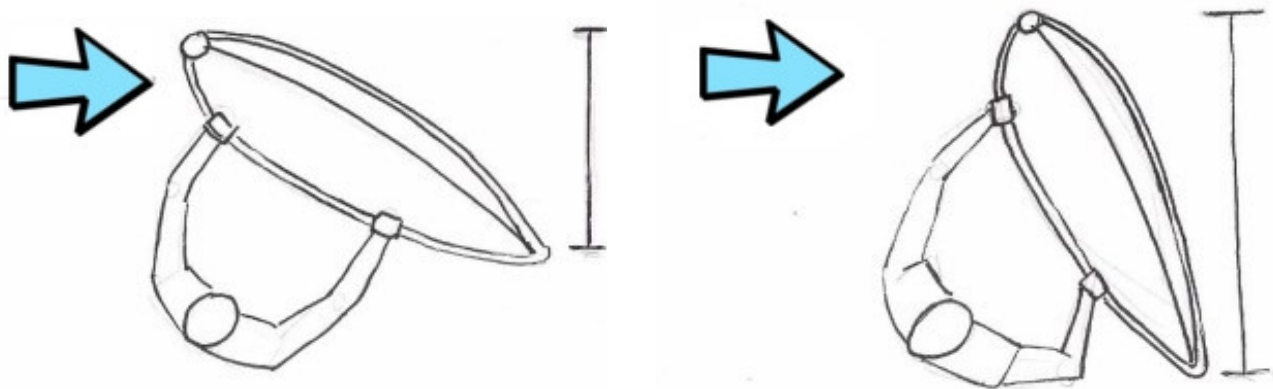
## The Golden Rule

In the first post on how to windsurf I mentioned and insisted on the fact that keeping the front arm straight is an essential element in windsurfing. Keeping this rule in mind will help us in the basic windsurfing position, doing the beach-start, the water-start, the jybe and many other manoeuvres. I would even go as far as to say that this is the golden rule of windsurfing. Let me explain why:

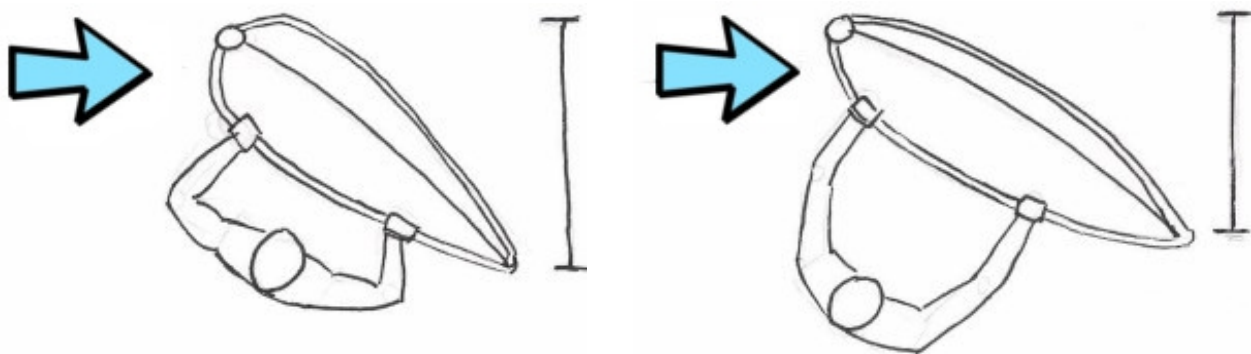
Your front and back arms leading to the boom are the equivalent to the clutch and the accelerator of a car. Naturally the angle of our body with respect to the sail has an impact on this statement but in general it is true.

Back hand = accelerator

This is a no brainer really. We pull the back hand to our body, the sail offers more surface to the wind, we get more power in the sail.



Front arm = clutch

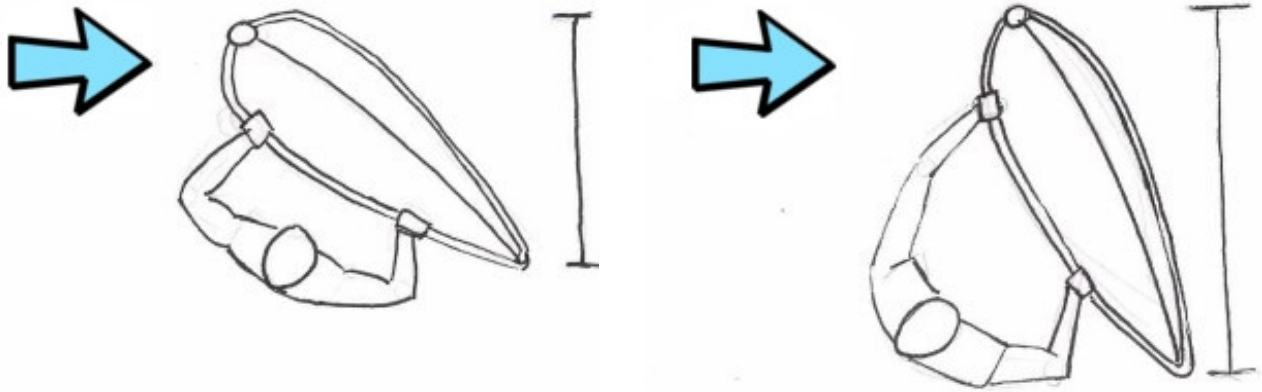


If you hold down the clutch of your car, what happens if you step on the accelerator? Nothing. You can tread on that gas pedal all you want, as long as the clutch is held down you will not move an inch. The same goes for us if we hold the mast hand close to our body. It is basically the equivalent of opening the sail with the difference that we do not have the option of closing it with the back hand. In order for the sail to catch the wind we must offer some surface to it which is not the case if we pull the mast close to our body (depending on our course).



Having the front arm bent is nearly the equivalent of opening the sail, power-wise. This might be what we need if we need to take power out of the sail and we can't open it with the back hand. An example of this is when we are hooked in the harness and we hit a gust. In that case it is easier to pull the front hand to our body than push with the back hand.

Now check out what a difference it makes to keep the front arm stretched:



## About the Author



Hi there! My name is Arne Gahmig. I have been a windsurf instructor on and off since 2004 and been on a windsurfing board since the age of 5. I am a passionate waterman meaning that I alternate between windsurfing, kiteboarding, surfing and SUPing depending on the conditions. In general I am more of a waves guy, which is hardly surprising having grown up in El Médano, Tenerife (Spain) and so I am most addicted to windsurfing, only recurring to the other disciplines when the conditions are too soft for a 5.7 wave sail.

I have decided to set up my blog ([howtowindsurf101.com](http://howtowindsurf101.com)) as a way of putting into writing all of the steps necessary to start with windsurfing and to keep advancing through the stages in the least amount of time while still having loads of fun.

Everything that I post here will be based upon my own

experience that I have obtained and will continue obtaining in my sailing sessions and in my lessons.

I hope you get as much out of it as you can ;)

