

Basic Skills of Dingy Sailing

version 1.0

The overall goal of dingy sailing is to sail in balance, so that safety, performance and enjoyment are enhanced. By learning and continually improving your skills in these seven basic skill areas, competent boat handling in a medium breeze is just around the corner, even for a complete beginner.

Skill Area	Exercises	Other Considerations
1. Hiking Driving position Basic hiking skills	Focus on sitting outside the gunnels. If there is not enough wind for boat helm and crew to hike out on the same side, the crew can practice hiking out on the leeward side. Try crossing feet and locking heel against the tank. Feet should not rest on centerboard trunk. Gunnels should be under thighs.	Hiking is a simple skill to learn. The important thing is to get comfortable sitting outside the boat, in all wind conditions, to be prepared for in stronger winds.
2. Footwork Crew Helm	Practice stepping across the boat without sitting and without looking at your feet. Feel for the edge of the tank. Ensure feet are always positioned to the outside of hiking straps. Practice stepping across the boat without sitting and without looking at your feet. Feel for the tank and for the thwart. Ensure feet are always positioned to the outside of hiking straps and that the foot closes to the bow is touching the thwart.	Effective footwork is both easy and important to learn. The important things here are to maintain an athletic stance, to stand during maneuvers and to feel for the boat with your feet, while keeping your head up and focusing on the water
3. Tiller Handling Tiller movement Tiller exchange	On a beam reach and looking ahead, bear off 10 degrees, head up 10 degrees...repeat, but with subtler direction changes. Helm must sit outside the gunnels, so that an appropriate angle is maintained between tiller and extension. Sail upwind, close hauled, tacking as soon as the boat is up to speed. Repeat at least ten tacks. Always look over shoulder to ensure there is room to tack. Now that you have worked your way upwind, bear off to a broad reach and then gybe. Watch the jib as you bear off. When it collapses/backwinds, gybe the main. Tiller mechanics are similar to tacking. Practice maintaining steering control through tiller exchange by doing "run-to-run" gybes while keeping the boat going in roughly the same downwind direction. Helm and crew should cross the boat, ending up on opposite sides to maintain boat balance.	Tiller exchange often presents the biggest initial challenge for new sailors, but it doesn't need to. The key to a simple and effective tiller exchange is to make the exchange after you have crossed the boat and are headed in a straight line again.
4. Sheeting Sheeting/Feathering Trimming.	In 6-10 knots, while hiking, practice sheeting in to make the boat heel a little, then sheet out to flatten...repeat a dozen time or so. On a beam reach, have the crew ease the jib in and out to discover how much the sail goes out to luff and how much trimming in it takes to stall the jib.	Sheeting is an ongoing process while sailing, as the wind is constantly changing, both in direction and velocity. Be sure to "re-power" in the lulls, not just depower
5. Wind Awareness Sensing wind direction Velocity changes	Without looking at indicators, estimate where wind is coming from. Look at birgy to confirm. While sailing upwind, crew and helm should look for wind on water. Estimate how many seconds until the puff hits. Count down. See who's estimate is closer.	Wind awareness is very much a "feel" thing and is the result of experience. Good sail trim is key to understanding the wind direction. Indicators on land are less effective.
6. Boat Knowledge Rigging and boat Set-up Vanging	Set everything medium. Magic box/rig tension should be snug but not super tight. Cunninghams should not be too tight either. Main outhaul must be loosened prior to releasing main halvard to avoid stretching the foot of the main sail. In medium conditions, some vang is necessary to stabilize the boom and avoid excessive sail twist. No vang tension is needed in very light wind.	A general knowledge of rigging and boat set-up is needed for balanced and well controlled sailing. There seem to be many ropes in our Albacores, but after rigging a few times using the "JTown Rigging Guide" rigging should be fairly straight forward.
7. Teamwork Helm and Crew positioning Helm/Crew coordination	Have crew move 6 inches left and right to discover impact on heel. Move 12 inches and see the difference. Maintain flat boat while having helm move around. Crew must move to off-set the effect of the helm's movement.	Teamwork includes verbal and visual awareness between helm and crew, as well as physical coordination between helm and crew to adjust to changes in sailing conditions and to execute maneuvers.