

NAVIGATION RULES INTRODUCTION

Disclaimer: what follows is a description of the Rules. The Rules are over 100 pages long, excluding the Appendix, and in order to make them as brief and comprehensible as possible, we had to summarize a lot of information. As a result, this *should not* be used for navigation. It is recommended that you read the actual Rules to gain a complete understanding of them. If you have any comments, suggestions, or think something is not stated correctly, let me know.

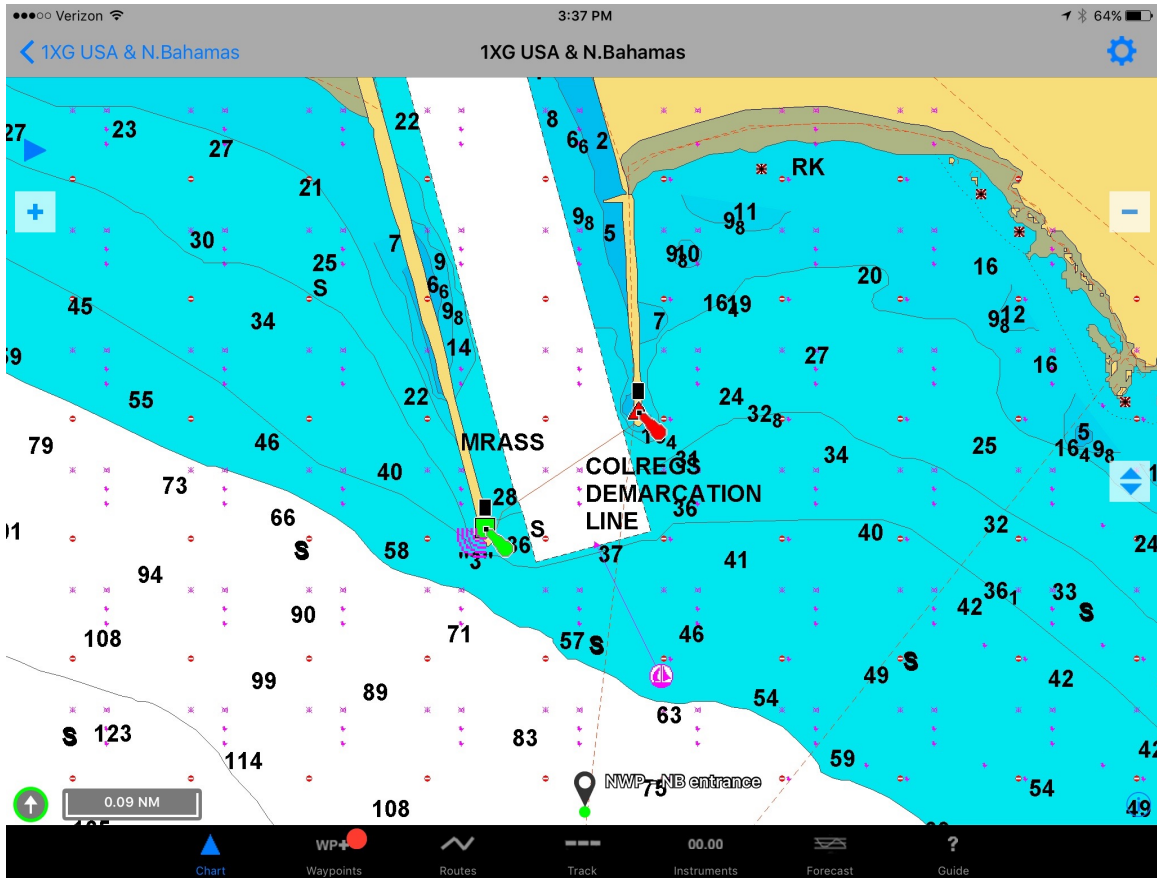
Understanding and applying the “rules of the road”, known as the Navigation Rules and Regulations or formally the COLREGS, as promulgated by the Coast Guard, are vital to the safe operation of any vessel (including things like kayak’s and paddleboards).

While the Coast Guard only requires vessels 12 meters or more, or engaged in passenger for hire to have them on board, everyone should have a copy. The Rules are now available either in printed or electronic form available on the USCG site: www.navcen.uscg.gov. In addition, you can purchase an electronic copy on Amazon. There are also apps which cover the Rules. The USCG app has a section on the Rules also.

In addition, there is a “cheat sheet” or key card published by the Maritime Institute which summaries most of the rules on a couple of pages. It is a handy reference and it is recommended you have one on board.

Before we get into the Rules themselves, there is something important to understand. Many people incorrectly believe the Rules give a boater the “right of way” over other boats. In fact the Rules *do not* grant rights, they impose *responsibilities* for boats to act in a specified way to avoid a collision. (The word right of way only appears once and for a specific situation on an inland river). Instead, the Rules use Stand On and Give Way. As we will discuss, Rule 8 states you must take any and all action to avoid a collision, including *violating the rules* if necessary.

If you look at the Rules, you will notice the page on the left discusses International Rules, and the page on the right Inland. So, how do you know if you are operating under International or Inland Rules? If you look at a chart, you will see magenta lines called the *COLREGS Demarcation Lines*, which are printed on all NOAA charts and can also be found in the Coast Pilot (for Dana Point, the line is at the harbor entrance between the red and green Aids). If you are seaward of the line, you are under the International Rules; landward of the line, Inland Rules apply. The majority of the Rules are the same for each, but that are some differences which you probably should be aware of. In this summary, we will be discussing International Rules as that is where we spend most of our time. If the Inland Rules are different, we will point that out.



Above is the entrance to Newport Harbor. BTW, at Catalina, there are NO Inland Rules.

Let's start with a few of the most fundamental rules that everyone should be aware of. This section applies to all vessels in all situations. This can be found in part B, Section I.

Rule 5: Maintaining a Proper Lookout

Rule 6: Safe Speed

Rule 7: Risk of Collision

Rule 8: Action to Avoid Collisions

Rule 5: Every vessel must maintain a lookout using sight and hearing as well as all other means.

This may seem obvious, but its importance cannot be overstated. Whenever you are out on the water, everyone (not just the helmsman, whose primary job is helming the boat) should keep a sharp lookout. We rely so much on technology these days that it is easy to get lazy and assume it will alert you to a potentially dangerous situation. Nothing beats our good old senses.

Rule 6: Every vessel shall proceed at a safe speed so that she can take proper action in a timely fashion

So what is a safe speed? To make that determination, one needs to take into account the following factors: visibility (fog, darkness), traffic density, the maneuverability and draft of the vessel, state of conditions of sea, wind, and current, and the proximity of hazards.

Rule 7: Every vessel must use all available means to determine if a risk of collision exists.

And how do you make that determination? Well, you can make use of things like radar, AIS and other similar aids (if you have them). Another important aid described in the Rules is “constant bearing, decreasing distance”. That is to say, if another vessel stays on the same relative bearing but is getting closer, it is a good indication that you may be on a collision course.

Rule 8: Any action taken to avoid a collision

This is a pretty long section so I suggest you take a look at it, but to simplify: any course alteration should be large enough to be readily apparent and in due time. So, if you think the risk of collision is high, don't make one or series of small course changes and do it early. You will do little more than confuse the other boat.

We will get into which vessel has right of way later, but if you are the Stand-On vessel, you are required to maintain course and speed while the Give-Way vessel must get out of your way. However, in the event of an imminent collision, even the Stand On vessel *must* take action to avoid hitting the other boat. Avoiding a collision is the fundamental reason for the Rules and one of the most important responsibilities an operator has.

Rule 10. Traffic Separation Schemes

These are what we refer to as shipping lanes. The closest ones are between here and Catalina about 12 miles out. It is another fairly long section but the important point is the lanes are for larger, commercial ships to be able to safely navigate to a port such as LA/LB. You can find the lanes on a chart.

Vessels under 20 meters and sailing vessels shall avoid the lanes as much as possible. You are allowed to cross the lanes but must do so without impeding the larger ships following the traffic lane. So, cross at as close to right angles as possible and get across the lanes as quickly as you can. Some of the ships are very large with limited maneuverability and may be moving at high speeds so be careful.

The only exceptions as emergencies.