

WHAT TO DO WHEN THE STEERING FAILS

I'd recently read about practicing sailing without a rudder, but could it be done? Sure enough, I could beat, tack, and reach by alternately tensioning or easing the jib and main.

This is a valuable skill to practice, whether with a tiller or wheel. Many sailboat wheels operate the rudder through a complex system of quadrant gears and cabling. If a wire snaps, a skipper needs an alternate steering method. You do have that oddball emergency tiller crammed in one of those sail lockers, don't you? **But have you tried it out?** You may need to remove the wheel from the steering pedestal to get enough room to move the emergency tiller from side to side. Test this at the dock and underway.

With a bit of practice, you can steer, turn, tack, and jibe a boat with just her sails. In a small boat, make steering under sail more effective by shifting crew weight forward or aft. This raises one end of the boat higher than the other. The wind will blow against the higher end, moving the low end in the opposite direction. Follow these easy-to-learn steps:

1. **How to sail in a straight line.** Practice straight-line steering first. Sail onto a close-hauled or close-reaching course. Lock the wheel or lash the tiller amidships. Line up the forestay or bow pulpit on two distant objects. Try to stay lined up on your natural range.
 - **Heading up.** Trim the mainsheet and ease the jib or genoa sheet. Move the crew forward to lower the bow and raise the stern.
 - **Falling off.** Trim the jib or genoa and ease the mainsheet. Move the crew aft to lower the stern and raise the bow.
2. **How to fall off the wind**
 - **Sail Trim.** Ease the main and keep the headsail sheeted in. If needed, backwind the headsail to push the bow to leeward. If the boat refuses to fall off, reef the main or change to a larger headsail.
 - **Crew position.** Move the crew aft.
3. **How to head up toward the wind**
 - **Sail trim.** Sheet in the main and ease the headsail.
 - **Crew position.** Move the crew forward.
4. **How to tack**
 - **Sail trim.** Sheet in the main and ease the headsail. When almost into the wind, pull on the windward headsail sheet to backwind the jib and help turn the bow through the wind.
 - **Crew position.** Move the crew forward. After tacking, move the crew aft.
5. **How to jibe**
 - **Sail trim.** Turn the boat off the wind as described above (see step 2). With good momentum, you should be able to pass the stern through the wind. Just before the jibe, sheet the main flat amidships and let the headsail fly free. Quickly ease the main immediately after the jibe to prevent your boat from rounding up to windward.
 - **Crew position.** Move the crew aft.