

# Cal Sailing Junior Test Guidelines

September 17, 2025

## Introduction and Objectives

The Junior Skipper rating is an important milestone for Club dinghy sailors, as it grants considerable freedom in the use of Club dinghies. The rating is awarded after a member passes a series of tests, the most important and difficult of which is the on-the-water practical test, administered by a Senior Dinghy Skipper.

The Club does not teach to a standard, unlike most sailing schools, and this is a unique strength. We recognize that there is generally no one “right” way to do many things, and we encourage students to find a technique that works well for them. Similarly, Senior testers have considerable latitude in how they evaluate Junior candidates, and the individual tester’s judgment plays an important role.

We do, however, have a set of skills that a candidate must demonstrate in specified conditions, and it is important that the tester evaluates these skills along with other factors, such as situational awareness, knowledge, and judgment. Correspondingly, it is important that candidates know what skills they will have to demonstrate and how. While testers have considerable latitude in how they test, wildly different expectations among different testers is not good for the Club or its members.

These guidelines attempt to set a common base of skills and expectations for testers to consider, and they are not intended to be a rigid standard.

## Test Requests

Tests are requested in several ways, from simply asking a Senior for a test to a formal request via Slack or the Self-Evaluation and Test Request system on the website. Giving a test is a significant commitment of time on the part of the tester, so you want to make sure the candidate is ready, to the extent this is possible. The self-evaluation provides some information, but its subjectivity makes it of limited use. A Junior can add an instructor recommendation to a test request. If the candidate has taken the test and not passed, the tester can add notes to the test request about the test, and these notes will be visible to other Seniors. During Fast Track, the session coordinators will recommend students for tests, which, of course, can be administered after the session is over.

Testers can see open test requests [here](#) (you have to be logged into the website to use this link). On this page, you can respond to test requests (send email), see comments from other testers, and post comments of your own.

## Test Format

What a test looks like varies considerably by tester. This section is a menu of possible approaches, but it is not exhaustive. Feel free to structure the test however it works for you.

- Test a “gateway skill” first to determine whether the candidate is ready, and end the test if they don’t do it sufficiently well. Launching and docking is one possibility.
- End the test if the candidate does not pass a particular skill.
- Turn the test into a lesson if the candidate isn’t ready.
- Do a “rolling test” over several days, possibly combined with instruction on deficient skills, picking up each time where the previous test session left off.

## Crew

The candidate should have one crew, who could be the tester or some other person. The tester may specify inexperienced crew.

The tester should not evaluate the candidate on instruction skills, as instructing is not a requirement for the Junior rating. However, the candidate should be able to talk through maneuvers and give basic directions to crew.

The tester should not create problems for the candidate to handle, such as equipment failures. Throwing the COB target at unexpected times is encouraged, however.

## Conditions

The ORs state that the test must be given in 10 knots of wind, but the tester is free to require a higher value. Many testers want the conditions to be closer to 15 knots, as that is a common condition in the Junior area in the windy season.

The tester may not test in less than 10 knots.

Since the tester is a Senior Dinghy Sailor, the test may be given when the Club is closed or outside of the Junior sailing area. Testers should use discretion in these cases, as they will not have Day Leader support in the event of problems.

## Feedback

When the test is completed, it is essential to give the candidate detailed feedback. If they passed, this should include how they could have done better.

If they did not pass, they need to know exactly why. Which skill was deficient and how, and how to work on improving that skill. This could be as simple as “get more instruction on this” or as detailed as a short lesson on it, depending on the tester’s interest and time. The tester should indicate their availability to do a retest if they are open to this.

## Junior Skills

The following is a list of skills for the Junior rating from the ORs, which is a discussion of each of them.

For each skill, it is important that the candidate do it adequately and consistently. Clearly there is a certain amount of judgment involved, but consistently means “almost always”. Getting it right one or two times out of five attempts is not doing it consistently. Missing it but explaining why (correctly) can be acceptable.

### Jr Skipper Sailing Skills Checklist:

#### 1. Know the sailing circle and be able to sail a steady course on each trim:

- Close hauled
- Close reach
- Beam reach
- Broad reach
- Run

The candidate must be able to quickly and reliably go to any point of sail on either tack, and the sails must be set correctly for that point of sail. Over- or under-sheeting is not acceptable, and they must use the power they can carry for their weight, hiking out as much as necessary (and having their crew do so). They must also understand the “no go zone” or “in irons” and recognize when the boat is there.

#### 2. Be able to sail on a close haul and close reach tack and be confident in sitting on the gunwale (AKA "Rail"), hiking out, and using the tiller extension.

The candidate must have the sails trimmed correctly for these points of sail and use weight and tiller extension correctly. No particular way of holding the tiller extension is required, provided it is effective. The mainsheet may be cleated, but it must be in their hand at all times.

#### 3. Come about from a close-hauled course to a close- hauled course.

This does not need to be terribly precise, but they shouldn't go down after the tack below a close reach.

#### 4. Heave to.

The candidate should be able to do this on the current tack and on the opposite tack quickly and efficiently. If on the current tack, the boat should not tack during the maneuver.

#### 5. Gybe from a run to a run or a broad reach to a broad reach.

This should be done with minimal round-up after the gybe and controlled boom movement across the boat.

#### 6. Slow sailing:

- crew overboard and recovery
- docking

## Crew Overboard

The boat should come to a stop next to the target. There is no specified maneuver to do this, and any maneuver that the candidate can do consistently to get this result is acceptable as long as the final approach is slow sailing.

It is permissible (actually, encouraged) to toss the target without warning, especially during some maneuver such as a tack and a gybe. It is encouraged to do it both upwind and downwind.

If the candidate misses an attempt but understands why, quickly corrects, and gets to the target at a stop afterwards, this should be considered successful. Multiple misses followed by a success are not acceptable.

## Docking

The boat should touch the dock gently. Banging into the dock is not acceptable.

Only techniques that would work on a crowded dock are acceptable. In particular the approach must be bow to the dock and the boat must remain under control the whole way. Neither a sideways approach, nor shooting head to wind are acceptable

### 7. Sailing backwards from the dock.

Candidate should use tiller, boat lean, and mainsail (if necessary) to steer the boat backwards properly, looking backwards to avoid other boats, swimmers, etc. Should not power up too soon, and sail should be trimmed correctly when leaving the dock area (in particular, not over-sheeted and getting pushed into the middle dock).

Some testers ask the candidate to single-hand the boat and do successive dockings, gently touching the dock each time, and then backing out to do it again (nobody steps off the boat).

### 8. Capsize and recovery.

- Capsize prevention, by releasing mainsheet and jibsheet as needed, hiking out
- Preventing crew from climbing cockpit when masthead float is submerged
- Directing crew to hold bow when capsized, if needed to keep bow into wind
- Talk through safety and dangerous situations (e.g., boom in the air on windward capsize)

#### Key elements:

- Checking on crew
- Telling them what to do (how to stay connected to the boat and how to get in)

- Keep the masthead float on the water, not submerged
- Climb up using the mast as a step, not the hiking straps, or go around and climb onto the centerboard
- Use an appropriate line, if necessary, to pull the boat up

#### 9. Anchoring, especially while capsized

If the candidate has a Novice rating, it is not necessary to do this.

#### 10. Reef underway.

Key elements:

- Heave to on proper tack
- Centerboard up on Quest
- Reef sail properly with tight luff and leach, and clew as close to the boom as possible
- Vang on after reef
- Proper cleanup of sail and lines

#### 11. Sail in tight circles

This is a problem area, as there are two different small circle maneuvers taught. One is around a buoy at a more or less fixed distance, and the other is as tight a circle as possible around nothing in particular. The second is sometimes called “rudderless” although the rudder is not up during the maneuver.

The standard is to test a circle around a buoy, and this is what instructors will be teaching and students practicing.

Circle around a buoy:

- Downwind turn followed quickly by a gybe
- Immediately go to close hauled and hold it
- Tack to close hauled to clear the buoy upwind
- Repeat

#### 12. Right-of-Way Rules

Describe the rules for the following situations in the South Basin for two vessels on a collision course:

- Sailboat and powerboat
- Exceptions where powerboat has right of way
- Two sailboats on different tacks
- Two sailboats on the same tack
- Sailboat and windsurfer
- Common sense exception to sailboat and windsurfer in the novice area

## Other Skills

If the candidate does not have a Novice rating, they should demonstrate skills from the Novice test that are not included in the above Junior requirements.

This includes basic single-handing skills, such as tacking, gybing, upwind and downwind sailing. This can be done in moderate winds in the Novice Area. The tester may choose to be on the boat, in which case the tester should keep their weight in the center of the boat and not assist the candidate in sailing the boat. It is acceptable to sail main only.

It also includes capsizing, anchoring while capsized, recovering the boat, and retrieving and storing the anchor properly.

## Other Knowledge

Candidate should be able to describe

- Boundaries of the Junior Sailing Area
- When a Junior is allowed to take a boat out
- How many people can they bring with them, and do these people need to be Club Members

## Other Important Factors

There are some soft factors that are extremely important to evaluate: situational awareness and judgment.

Situational awareness includes clearing the area before a tack or gybe, awareness of other boats, boards, swimmers, etc. in the vicinity, and awareness of traffic around the dock when departing and docking.

Crew communication is another important factor. Again, the candidate is not being evaluated on teaching their crew but on directing their crew during the maneuvers.

Judgement is much harder to evaluate, as creating situations to test it is not encouraged, nor is presenting scenarios for the candidate to discuss. However, the tester should be able to recognize instances of bad judgment.

Common examples:

- Departing/returning to dock with heavy traffic rather than waiting.
- Overly deferential collision avoidance (rather than respecting the right of way)
- Not reefing when overpowered (having to luff sail to cope with wind)
- Getting too close to rocks/objects unnecessarily. Related, not paying attention during capsize or reefing underway to lee shore/drift.

