

Junior Practical Test

The Basics

To get your Junior rating, you need to pass an on-the-water practical test with a Senior in at least 10 knots of wind. The test typically involves 12 core maneuvers and typically takes 1.5 to 2 hours. In the test, you will need to demonstrate not only sailing skills (executing the maneuvers), but boat control, good judgement, sailing and Club knowledge (as it applies to Juniors), situational awareness, and good communication with an inexperienced crew. You also need to be in tune with the wind direction and have the boat set up for it at all times.

Every Senior administers the test his or her own way (that's the way the Club works). In the end, the tester is making a judgement about whether you are ready to go out in 10-15 knots of wind with 2-3 newbies as crew, and whether you can keep everyone safe, even if the conditions worsen. If the tester passes you, they are putting their name and reputation on the line that you are ready. You can execute the maneuvers flawlessly and still fail because of poor judgement, situational awareness, or communication. Conversely, you can pass even if you don't get all the maneuvers right the first time, provided your judgement and communications are good.

The Core Maneuvers

These are the required maneuvers:

1. Know the sailing circle and be able to sail a steady course on each trim:
 - Close haul
 - Close Reach
 - Beam Reach
 - Broad Reach
 - Run
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.
3. Come about from a close haul course to a close haul course.
4. Heave to.
5. Jibe from a run to a run or a broad reach to a broad reach.
6. Crew overboard and recovery.
 - Quickly take control of situation
 - Crew member points continually at COB
 - Come to stop right next to COB within 2 minutes
 - Explain how to retrieve COB
 - Standard club sailing technique for COB:
 - Immediately go to a broad reach
 - After a few boat lengths, tack around. You should be on a close reach
 - Slow sail to the COB, coming to a dead stop right next to him. Skipper should be able to retrieve the target

7. Docking.
 - Preparation including briefing crew
 - Centerboard and rudder check if tides low (tide awareness)
 - Setup for slow sailing and correct course to dock
 - Traffic awareness
 - Soft landing on dock
 - Communication with crew during docking
 - Abort and go-around if necessary
8. Departing the dock safely after checking for traffic and being able to sail backwards until clear of other boats.
9. Capsize and recovery.
 - Capsize prevention through weight balance (e.g. hiking out); steering (e.g. 'pinching up' or 'luffing up' in a gust); and sail trim (e.g. sheeting out);
 - Preventing masthead float from submerging (e.g. not climbing up inside of boat when submerged)
 - Directing crew to hold bow when capsized, if needed, to keep bow into wind
 - Use of righting lines on Bahia
 - Anchoring.
10. Anchoring
11. Reef underway.
12. Sail in circles around a buoy while trimming the boat properly. Sail trim and crew communications are important.

Are you ready?

The test is given in 10 or more knots of wind. You should have experience and confidence sailing in these conditions, and you should have practiced all the required maneuvers in these conditions. Remember that as the wind speed increases, things get harder exponentially.

You need to be aware of wind direction and have a good understanding of how to trim the sails for your course relative to the wind (and do it, and communicate it).

How do you get this experience? Lessons is one option, although not a very efficient one after you reach a certain level. To get the most out of a lesson, tell the instructor exactly what you want to work on and tell them you want to do it beyond the wind line. Also, remember that we're a club, a community. Don't be afraid to ask a Junior or a Senior to take you out and work on your skills. And ask for feedback, specifically whether they think you're ready for the test.

Some skills require some sailing theory and a mental picture that's often hard to acquire on the water. Good sail trim and man-overboard are examples of this. Sitting down with a good instructor on land and drawing pictures of these can help you get that picture. Again, don't be afraid to ask. Read books on sailing!

In the summer months, the best option is the Fast Track program, if your schedule permits. At least once a month from May through August, there is a week of intensive lessons (Monday through Friday) from 5pm to sunset. The program is designed to advance you toward Junior. As in any sport, you'll come out

of it a much better sailor than you were when you went in (after a week of intensive lessons), even if you don't get your rating.

Although you shouldn't ask for a test if you're far from ready, don't wait until you're 1000% certain you'll pass before you take the test. Go into it with the attitude that if you don't pass, you'll have learned something. Many testers will take the time to teach you if you don't do well on a maneuver, and many will give you several chances to do it. So the worst is that you come out of it with some very specific feedback on where you need to focus and some instruction on how to do it better.

If you're almost ready to take the test but aren't quite there on one maneuver, don't be afraid to tell the tester that and ask for some instruction before the test. Many testers will oblige.

The sailing skills are easy to work on. Judgement, situational awareness, and communication are not. And yet, they're the most important skills being evaluated. Try to go out sailing with experienced sailors and see what they do. See if you can model their behavior and ask their advice.

How you can ace your test

1. Be in control from before the start and communicate.

Show that you're the skipper from the start. If you think you should reef, tell the tester that at the dock. They may want you to go out with full main, but if you do and you feel over-powered, tell them you want to heave-to and reef.

Plan each maneuver ahead and verbalize what you're thinking. "OK, we're 70 yards out from the dock. We'll furl the jib, tell the crew what to do with the bow painter and how to step off. I'm thinking to get halfway between the two docks and head up late, as the wind is more out of the south". That kind of thing.

Also, communicate with your crew from before they get on the boat - your tester may play your crew, or they may bring someone else. You will probably have an inexperienced crew (or a "fake inexperienced" crew, and the tester may just sit on the Princess Seat). Talk them through what they need to do, as briefly as possible, just before they need to do it. Remember, you're not teaching your crew how to sail, you're telling them what they will need to do in the next maneuver.

2. Always stay one step ahead of the tester. Show your situational awareness.

Call out potential problems when you see them. "Starboard tacker 70 yards closing. I'm bearing off now to duck behind him". If your tester says "You know, we're getting awfully close to the restaurant. Don't you think you should tack?", you just lost some points on situational awareness and judgement.

If you don't understand what you're being asked to do, or if for whatever reason you need to take a "time out" (e.g., to explain a complicated maneuver to your crew), heave to.

3. Cut the small talk

You should be laser-focused on sailing and the maneuvers you're doing.

4. Be prepared for the unexpected

Let's just say the tester isn't going to say "OK, let's do a man-overboard". As in real life, it will happen when you're doing a difficult maneuver. And it may happen more than once during the test.

5. Use your crew

Don't try to do everything yourself – you're not being evaluated on your ability to single-hand. You'll get more points for directing your crew properly than for doing everything yourself. You can use your tester if they allow it (some do, some don't).

6. Abort if necessary

If a maneuver just isn't working, announce "Abort" and tell your tester what you think went wrong, and ask to try it again. You will get points for recognizing the problem and not pushing ahead on a failed maneuver.

7. Prepare for docking early

You'll have a lot to do with an inexperienced crew, so start on it early. Have a plan, verbalize the plan, and instruct your crew (as briefly as possible).

8. Capsize Recovery

How you direct your crew and how you anchor (if you're told to or if you decide it's wise) are more important than how fast you get the boat up. Keep your crew calm and connected to the boat and make sure they know what to do as the boat comes up. Taking four or five tries to get the boat up in the waves is not a problem. Drifting toward the rocks is, as is a crew member drifting away from the boat.

After the Test

Whether you passed or not, the test is a valuable learning experience. Make the most of it. Get specific feedback from your tester on what you need to work on and how. Your tester may make themselves available for one-on-one instruction, so don't hesitate to ask.

Typical Problem Areas and How to Deal with Them

A common problem area is wind awareness and sail trim. It's very easy to orient yourself geographically (since the wind frequently comes from a certain geographic direction). Don't do it. Go out in different wind directions and do exercises where you pay no attention to the geography. Have your sailing partner randomly assign you points of sail and tacks, and go to them and trim the sails correctly. You will need a sailing partner who can evaluate your results.

A very common problem is over-sheeting (sheeting the main too tightly). Some think that you power up by sheeting it in (which is true, but only to a certain point - the point where the sail is trimmed correctly). If you over-sheet leaving the dock in a west wind, you could end up banging into the second dock, just getting pushed sideways.

Typically, the two most difficult maneuvers in the test are the Crew-Overboard and Small Circles. They are difficult for different reasons.

To execute the Crew-Overboard, you need to have a picture in your head “from above” of what you’re trying to do in the maneuver, or you won’t be able to do it. If you have difficulty with this maneuver, work with an instructor on land to develop that picture, then work with them on the water. Study diagrams in sailing books.

To do small circles in place or around a buoy well, you need to do fast upwind and fast downwind turns (among other things). To turn fast upwind, sheet in fast on the main as you start the turn (you can pull in on the falls, or better on the “fall line” that goes to the last block on the boom - the closest one to where the mainsheet is secured). To turn fast downwind, sheet out quickly on the main and get a lot of weight out to windward. Some like to let the main fly on the first downwind turn and control the main from the falls after that. Small circles is a skill that is best learned with practice on the water. But remember, it’s not practice that makes perfect, it’s perfect practice that makes perfect. So practice with someone who’s skilled at it.

After you’ve passed

Each rating is a learner’s permit. This is clearly true for Novice, but it’s also true for Junior and for Senior. For each of these ratings, you’ve demonstrated your skills and judgement in a certain range of conditions, so now you can go out and become a better sailor in those conditions. Congratulations, and go do it.

Acknowledgements

This document is based loosely on a similar one written by Joel Brand several years ago.