

Best Practice Guidelines to Achieve Keelboat Ratings

The ideal way to achieve keelboat ratings is to follow a step by step approach, focusing at each milestone on the task at hand, accomplishing a level of mastery and passing a test, before moving on to the next step. For generations, the Cal Sailing Club has encouraged becoming an expert dinghy sailor first, as preparation for expertise on keelboats.

Yes, of course you can practice both advanced dinghy and keelboat sailing at the same time, as many students do, but accept that doing so may prolong the process and dilute your study as you go.

This document describes the recommended path, with the recommended order to complete each of its steps successively. Completing each of these steps will better prepare you for the next step, and this way your milestones will be completed more expeditiously.

Along this path, setting your milestones as goals, such as ‘passing my practical dinghy test by September,’ will help channel your efforts; however, while working on these goals, do enjoy the sailing, your experience of learning, and the accomplishment of becoming a better sailor.

Before you do anything else, read the complete [Club operating rules](#), studying in detail the sections on ratings.

Junior Skipper Rating

Read the Club’s [Dinghy Manual](#). Get your Junior rating and practice a lot, managing crew in various conditions, and consider joining Sunday racing, as crew, or obtain your Racing skipper rating. The Club benefits and you will improve your sailing skills by teaching, but only when fully confident of your abilities, should you consider giving Open House rides.

Tip: Find a Club mate at your level who shares your ambitions; sail and study together, encouraging each other to achieve shared objectives.

Senior Skipper Rating

Senior Project

Demonstrate your commitment, to the Club and yourself, by completing your Senior project, but before making your choice, experience some keelboat activities, like a lesson or day sail, so that you might better consider an undertaking that supports the keelboat program.

Pick something of interest that takes at least 10-hours’ time; ideally, you will also manage other members to multiply the benefits to the Club. The project requires Executive Committee approval.

A common complaint is that it is hard to get help in this process. Getting help begins with asking for help; you can attend an Excomm meeting and ask for suggested

projects, or approach an individual Excomm member (*particularly the Rear, 1st, or 3rd Vice Commodore*), Senior, or Cruising skipper for advice.

Some of these skippers and Club officers can often be found on the Bench in front of the Clubhouse on any sunny day. Say hello and share your objectives. You will sharpen your own thinking by telling others what you hope to achieve, and they will respect you for it.

Keep in mind: You are not asking for any unusual help that these skippers did not receive themselves when in your shoes. They are often happy to lend assistance and guidance along your way, if asked.

Dinghy Practical Test

There is no better groundwork for becoming a skilled keelboat skipper than first becoming an expert dinghy sailor. From spring to late summer, avail yourself of the Monday Advanced Dinghy Lessons and Thursday evening racing (see the website for particulars).

In all seasons, introduce yourself to the best dinghy sailors you can find, and ask for their instruction, while also practicing sailing solo, including rudderless, challenging yourself with a variety of exercises. You might now read *Colgate's Basic Sailing*, by Steve Colgate, noting points that apply to dinghy sailing.

For your dinghy practical test, be prepared to demonstrate these **skills** in 15+ knots of wind on a boat chosen by the tester--a member of the Rating Committee qualified to give dinghy tests.

If you do not know any of these members, or if you have difficulty arranging a test, get help from one of the highly skilled dinghy sailors who has been working with you, as their recommendation will go a long way.

Passed your dinghy test? Bravo. You are now well equipped to begin your keelboat practical training in earnest.

(Click [here](#) to learn more about the Senior Dinghy skipper rating, requiring two practical dinghy tests.)

Senior Written Test

As you step up your keelboat training, study for your written test by reviewing *Colgate's Basic Sailing*, studying the Club Operating Rules, Keelboat Manual, and Navigation Rules and Regulations Handbook. Also, get yourself a chart of the San Francisco Bay.

Though not required to pass the written test, sign up for the Senior study group class if it's available. The classroom and book study will not only help you pass the exam, but more importantly, supplement your concurrent practice on the water--where your most valuable learning takes place.

The class will expand your overall knowledge and make you a better sailor; you will meet student peers, and learn from knowledgeable skippers who may help you along your way, inside and outside of the classroom.

Written Test passed? Good job.

Keelboat Practical Test

Now is a good time to review, "[Do's and Don'ts: Properly Putting Away Club Keelboats](#)". Always leave our boats in better condition than you found them.

In order to prepare for the keelboat sailing test, practice as much as possible, beginning with the Club's decades-long tradition of Wednesday night lessons; skippers also teach occasional organized lessons on weekends. Consider joining official Club [cruises](#), where you'll often have the chance be an active crew member, including time at the helm.

Another opportunity is volunteering to crew on keelboats for the Club's open house events; even lending a hand at the dock gives you an excellent vantage point to learn a challenging docking.

Once you have become more proficient, seek out instructors for additional, individualized keelboat practice. How do you find skippers to practice with? By now, you have already engaged with some at the Bench, regarding your Senior project, your dinghy test, during Wednesday night lessons, and other Club activities.

Petition not only the ones you know for help; ask *them* to also introduce you to other skippers. Yes, taking such initiative is part of the process.

When truly ready for your keelboat practical test--your mentors can help advise you here-- seek out the testers on the [Rating Committee](#). Be persistent.

You will be examined on *usual and unusual maneuvers*, determined by the tester in 15+ knots of wind. [Here](#) are typical evaluated test skills.

Passed your Senior keelboat practical test? What an accomplishment.

Achieving this milestone opens an important door; now your true keelboat practice begins. It is a very different exercise once you sign out the boat yourself as a Senior and alone are responsible for crew safety, using communally shared equipment.

Consider giving Open House rides only after much practice, and when you become a more accomplished Senior skipper, also consider teaching others, assisting them the same way others assisted you to get this far.

Cruising Skipper Rating

The single most important preparation to become a Cruising skipper is to log a lot of sea time, managing a variety of crew, as a Senior skipper. Having gained this experience and confidence, you may now pursue the Cruising rating, which allows you to sail Club boats on the wider bay.

Written Test

Study for the written test by reading *The Annapolis Book of Seamanship*, by John Rousmaniere, studying your SF Bay chart along with the publication *U.S. Chart No. 1: Symbols, Abbreviations and Terms used on Paper and Electronic Navigational Charts*, reading the [*Navigation Rules and Regulations Handbook*](#), and reviewing the Club Operating Rules pertaining to Cruising.

Though not required to pass the written exam, you will benefit greatly by taking a Cruising study class, if one is offered by the Club.

Certainly, your cruising studies will help you pass the written test, but more importantly, these studies, undertaken at the appropriate time, are intended to help you prepare for your test cruises and actual challenges you will soon face at sea.

Passed the Cruising written test? Hurrah.

First Aid Certification

At this point, take your required first aid/CPR class and get certified. The Club occasionally offers these sessions at no charge, or pay for it on your own.

Test Cruises

Ask three separate Cruising skippers, whom you have sailed with before, to supervise your trial cruises. If they see you have become a seasoned and conscientious Senior skipper, they may consent to supervise one of your test outings.

For each test cruise, the candidate is responsible for pre-cruise planning and management on the water. The Cruising skipper is an observer, only chiming in as necessary, primarily for safety. Test cruise supervisors then recommend to the Executive Committee for or against the candidate.

Executive Committee Approval

Once ExComm receives three positive recommendation letters, and your first aid certificate, they will then consider to approve you as a Cruising skipper.

ExComm approved? Congratulations.

(Click [here](#) to learn more about the Cruising Dinghy skipper rating).

A Final Note

These advanced ratings are not solely for your personal enrichment and pleasure; from the Club's perspective, you are granted these greatest privileges, and responsibilities, with the understanding that you will contribute on a much higher level to the enjoyment and advancement of your fellow Club mates.

Further questions? Just ask.

Best of luck!

Revised 6/15/17

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