

A Beginner's Guide to Dinghy Racing

North Herts and East Beds Sailing Club

(Cribbed off Northampton Sailing Club Guide)



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When are races held?

A program is sent out to all members and is published on the club website and also on the notice board in the clubhouse.

What boat can I sail?

Virtually any dinghy may be raced. We use a handicapping system to allow boats of different types to race against one another and still let the best sailed one win!

How good at sailing do I need to be?

So long as you know what happens when you waggle the stick at the back, you're good enough! Racing is by far the quickest way of improving sailing skills and every one of us started off knowing very little and we've all got more to learn!

How do I let people know I'm new to racing?

One idea is to tie a coloured ribbon to your rigging.

What rules do I need to know?

- A boat on port tack (the wind coming from the left, the boom on the right) gives way to one on starboard tack (wind from right, boom on left).
- A boat on Starboard tack with right of way may shout "Starboard" if you are on Port tack and they think you are about to get in their way.
- A boat to windward (closest to where the wind is coming from) gives way to a boat to leeward (the boat further away from the wind) but only if they are on the same tack.
- At a mark, the boat on the inside, nearest the mark, will usually need to be given room to round the mark without hitting it or you!

These basic rules should prevent most collisions. There are many more and as you become more experienced it is worthwhile investing in the latest copy of the racing rules book. (e.g. The Rules in Practice by Bryan Willis, pub Fernhurst Books). Rules can be downloaded from ISAF website [http://www.sailing.org/tools/documents/ISAFRRS20132016Final-\[13376\].pdf](http://www.sailing.org/tools/documents/ISAFRRS20132016Final-[13376].pdf) If you're displaying your ribbon then the more experienced sailors will be prepared for the fact that you are not familiar with the rules.

What is the penalty for breaking the rules?

Of course if you do break the rules then there are penalties to be paid.

- If you hit a buoy, then at the earliest possible moment you must perform a 360 degree turn.
- If you hit another boat then you must perform a 720 degree turn.

How do I enter a race?

The officer of the day (OOD), who is in charge of that day's racing, will put a signing on sheet on the desk in the Race Box. Fill in your name and the class and sail number of the boat you'll be sailing.

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What course do I sail?

The OOD will set a course and display it on a board at the base of the Race box. The board will display the name of the mark to be rounded and the direction in which it is to be rounded. If marked with a P then pass the mark on the left side of the boat. If marked with S then pass the mark to the right of the boat. An approximate number of laps will also be displayed.

Take note, most races at NHEBSC require you to sail through the start-finish line at the end of each lap.

There is a large map at the base of the race box showing the approximate position of the marks. If you are still unsure, ask someone to point out the buoys' to you from the shore or even on the start line (We've all had this done for us at some point!). When on the water, follow someone who looks like he (or she) knows where (s)he's going!

How do I start?

The start line is a straight line that will be specified by the OOD. The limit buoy marks the outer end of the line.

The starting sequence goes as follows:

5 minutes to start – hoot of horn and 1st (warning) flag up.



4 minutes to start – hoot of horn and 2nd (preparatory) flag up. This will be a blue flag with a white square in the centre.



1 minutes to start – hoot of horn and 2nd (preparatory) flag down

0 minutes – The start – hoot of horn and 1st flag down and the race is on.

What about those horrible crowded start lines?

When you first start racing, you could hang back a bit at the start, crossing the line after all the keen ones have finished getting in each other's way. However there is another way.... Pursuit races.

What's a pursuit race?

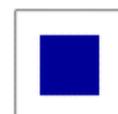
In the summer on Wednesday evenings and between race series we run a Pursuit series. Pursuit races are also known as Hare and Hounds races. Using the handicapping system, the boats taking part start in order of speed, slowest go first (e.g. Mirror) fastest go last (e.g. Devoti Zero) and everyone else is spread out in between. The aim of the race is to overtake the slower boats and to prevent the faster boats from overtaking you.

The starts because they are staggered, are much easier for the beginner. There will probably be only 2 or 3 other boats starting at the same time. The starting intervals are displayed on the notice board at the base of the race box.

How do I finish?

In Pursuit races, everybody finishes at once when the horn hoots, but keep sailing until the rescue boat notes your position. Your position is when the horn goes, so no overtaking afterwards please!

In Handicap racing, the finish line is normally the same as the start line. You'll either finish after the number laps on the course board, or if the race was going to take too long, after the OOD has sounded 2 long hoots on the horn and put up the shortened course flag (a blue square on a white background).



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Each boat that finishes received a hoot unless they were over the line at the start (OCS), have been seen not to have sailed the correct course, or have received outside assistance, that's to say you have been rescued!

How do I find out where I finished?

In Pursuit racing the results are as seen on the water – the boat in the lead wins the race. Handicap races, however, need to have calculations made by the OOD to make allowances for the different types of boat racing. This can usually be done on the day of racing. Results will then be available in the club house after racing. Results will also be made available as soon as possible on the website and usually a printed official copy will be posted on the results board in the clubhouse by the following race day. See Appendix A for some information regarding Personal Handicap currently being trialled (2015).

How do I qualify for a series?

Simply by sailing the number of races or more of a particular series detailed in the race calendar. e.g. 10 from 18 in the late summer. The best 10 results count.

Any other questions?

Just talk to anyone on the Sailing Committee, any of the race officers or ask anybody dressed in sailing gear at the club! They'll help if they can. Promise!

Appendix A - Trial of personal Handicap System for NHEBSC

What is a Personal Handicap?

A personal handicap is an adjustment to the standard boat's Portsmouth Number, calculated to give everyone an equal chance of winning. If the personal handicap perfectly reflected your skill, and everyone sailed to their average skill level, the result would be everyone finishing first equal.

Applying a personal handicap across a series of races means that the winner will be the person who improves the most over their performances leading up to the series. Someone who is at or near the back of the fleet based on their actual skill level, could still win on personal handicap if they show the most improvement. At the other end of the fleet skill level, the sailor who is at the top of the fleet based on their actual skill level, could finish low down the results based on personal handicap. Indeed it is probably harder for the good helm to finish high up in the personal handicap results as it will probably be harder for them to make the same proportionate improvement as can be made by the relatively unskilled sailor.

A personal handicap is also a means to see how your performance compares and changes compared to others of similar skill. If your personal handicap reduces by 3 points and your competitor's reduces by only 2 points then you have shown the most improvement.

How often does my Personal Handicap get updated?

There are two aspects to calculating a personal handicap:

1. A personal handicap is calculated for every race that is sailed as a handicap race, i.e. all boats start together and each boat is timed as it crosses the finish line. This personal handicap is the handicap you needed for that specific race such that everyone in the race would have had the same corrected time. [This corrected time is the actual finish time corrected for the combined boat and personal handicap.]
2. For a personal handicap based series result, a fixed personal handicap is used to process all the races in the series. This personal handicap is based on your performance up to the start of the series. It is an average of your individual race personal handicaps described in 1) above. Currently it is an average of your best 9 results out of your last 10 races. Your worst result is discarded so that a bad day does not distort what is a fair personal handicap.

Information on the personal handicap values for a series is available in the Personal Handicap Database spreadsheet on the website.

How is my Personal Handicap affected if I sail more than one class of boat?

Your skill may be very different when you sail a different class of boat. Personal handicaps are calculated for each class of boat sailed. So at the start of a series you may have multiple personal handicaps that are used as required, for example one for a standard Laser, one for a Laser Radial and one for a Solo. Each one will have been calculated based on your previous results in just that one class.

You also have an 'All Classes' personal handicap based on all classes you have sailed (in the last 10 races). This value will be used when you first sail a new class, so there is no information for your skill in that particular class.

What if I have not got 10 completed handicap races before the start of the next series?

The records have been processed back to the 25th May 2014 – the start of the Spring 2014 series. If you have not sailed and completed 10 races since 25th May 2014, then your personal handicap for a series will be based on however many races you have completed, ignoring the worst of these results.

What if I have not completed any handicap races before the start of the next series?

You will be considered to have a personal handicap of 0, i.e. sail to the class Portsmouth Number.

What happens to the races when I am OOD/AOOD?

The personal handicap series results will give the standard credit for an OOD duty – the average placing of the best completed races for the minimum number of races needed to qualify for the series, after allowing for the number of OOD races, i.e. OOD on 3 races in an 18 race series (which requires 10 results to qualify) means the OOD points are the average of the best 7 completed race results. The OOD points for the personal handicap series results will be based on the personal handicap derived positions, and not the main class based positions. There will thus be two different OOD points – one for the series results using class Portsmouth Numbers, and another for the personal handicap series results.

What happens to my Personal Handicap when the Portsmouth Number of the class is updated by the RYA?

Your personal handicap is combined with the class PN to give your total personal handicap number. That does not change just because the RYA has decided the class PN should be adjusted. So if the RYA increase the class PN, then your personal handicap adjustment is reduced by the same amount to keep the total unchanged.

How is the Personal Handicap calculated within a given race?

For each race sailed as a handicap race a term known as the Standard Corrected Time (SCT) is worked out. Various algorithms could be used to calculate the Standard Corrected Time. One of the recognised algorithms is that the SCT = average of Portsmouth Number (PN) corrected times of top 2/3rd finishers. If number of finishers to count is a fraction, the number of finishers to be included is rounded up to next whole number.

For each helm that finishes the race the Percentage change PI to the standard boat class PN is calculated such that the resulting corrected time will equal the Standard Corrected Time. Thus:

$$PI = [(\text{helm time corrected for class PN}) / (\text{Standard Corrected Time}) - 1] * 100 \text{ percent}$$

The PI is also expressed as the equivalent increment (PH) to the class PN, rounded to a whole number:

$$PH = PI / 100 * (\text{class PN})$$

The values of PH in each race are shown on the race results, and saved in a database to be used to calculate the fixed average personal handicap used for the personal handicap based series results

Is this method of calculating and using Personal Handicap common across other Sailing Clubs?

There is no RYA recommended method, or single method in use by clubs that have at least some form of personal handicap. Further the different 'standard' programs used by other clubs, e.g. Sailwave, have different options for personal handicap calculations.

So at present we are using a system based on past recommendations from the RYA plus a bit of common sense for what should work at NHEBSC. At present the algorithms for calculating which finishers are to be used to calculate SCT, and the averaging of PH data over a number of races, should be considered representative but subject to change, in part in response to any feedback provided by club members.