

# The Easy Revision Guide to the COLREGs

A Cadet's Guide to Learning the Rules of the Road

By

The Eazy Cadet



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**Disclaimer:** This publication is a revision guide only and represents the author's own viewpoint. It is not intended as legal counsel or as a definitive guide to applying the rules. The master/captain/examiners are spoken about using male pronouns for continuity throughout the book. However, the rank of anyone within the merchant navy can be held by any gender and we at The Eazy Cadet support any person who wishes to join/advance their career in the merchant navy. Ships in the book are referred to by the female pronoun 'she' which is traditional legacy. This is not meant to offend anyone. We felt that it gave the information a more personal touch, rather than calling a ship 'it'. Automatic Identification System (AIS): this is not suitable to be used as a standalone piece of equipment for RoR situations, but it can be invaluable as a supplement to existing means of navigation.

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# Contents

<i>Foreword and Accolade</i>	8
<b>1 How am I Supposed to Learn the Rules of the Road?</b>	<b>9</b>
Understanding the Sections	10
The Breakdown of Learning	12
Breakdown Summary	13
Light Patterns	14
The Rules	15
<b>2 Let's Begin</b>	<b>16</b>
Rule 3: General Definitions	16
What Does This Mean?	20
Important Points	21
How to Learn This	22

**3 Lights and Day Shapes**

Definitions	24
Power-Driven Vessels	25
Sailing Vessels	26
Fishing Vessels	27
Trawling Vessels	29
Pilot Vessels	30
Not Under Command	32
Constrained by Draft	33
Restricted in Ability to Manoeuvre	34
Restricted in Ability to Manoeuvre with Obstruction	35
Vessel Towing	36
Submerged Objects	37
Vessel at Anchor	39
	40

Vessel Aground	41
Seaplane and Hovercraft	42
Mine Clearance	43
Wing in Ground	44
International Signal Flags	45
<b>4 Sound Signals</b>	<b>46</b>
Vessels in Sight of One Another	47
Power-Driven Vessels in Restricted Visibility	48
Other Vessels	49
Vessel at Anchor	50
Vessel Aground	51
Pilot Vessels	52
Table – Morse Code	53
Parts and Sections	54

<b>5 Rules</b>	<b>56</b>
Rule 1 – Application	56
Navigational Risk Assessment	60
Rule 2 – Responsibility	60
Rule 5 – Lookout	62
Rule 6 – Safe Speed	65
Rule 7 – Risk of Collision	69
Rule 8 – Action to Avoid Collision	71
Rule 9 – Narrow Channels	75
Rule 10 – Traffic Separation Schemes	79
Rule 12 – Sailing Vessels	84
Rule 13 – Overtaking	87
Rule 14 – Head On Situations	89
Rule 15 – Crossing	91

Rule 16 – Action by the Give-Way Vessel	94
Rule 17 – Action by Stand-On Vessel	95
Rule 18 – Responsibilities Between Vessels	98
Rule 19 – Conduct of Vessels in Restricted Visibility	101
Annex II – Additional Signals for Fishing Vessels Fishing in Close Proximity	105
Annex IV – Distress Signals	108
<i>Appendix</i>	<i>112</i>

## Foreword and Accolade

I have been teaching Rules of the Road and orals preparation courses for over 20 years now and welcome any contribution to the field that will make learning the rules more accessible to all. Understanding The International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea is a complex yet necessary legal hurdle for all future Deck Officers. This publication is a valuable brief introduction to both the rules and the beginnings of applying them at this level.

Jonathan Ward   
Waves & Means

Learning and understanding The International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea can, for some, prove difficult. This publication is a professional and informative guide providing guidance on the collision regulations, their meaning and what the examiner is looking for. It is written in an easy-to-understand format which will prove invaluable to all students.

Captain David A. McNamee AFNI, HCMM, MNM

## CHAPTER 1

# ‘How am I Supposed to Learn the Rules of the Road?’

(This is easily the most common question asked by cadets.)

The COLREGs can seem enormous and intimidating to learn, but it needn't be the chore that it is made out to be.

**The best way to start** is to look at the rules objectively and break them into manageable sections. These are a little hard to spot initially as they are not split evenly across the whole document. We at The Eazy Cadet have split them up for you. This book will tell you how to learn the Rules of the Road, explain the wording of the rules and give you examples of possible orals scenarios.

Key	
	<b>Tips and useful information to remember</b>
	<b>Typical orals questions and advice</b>

## Understanding the 'Sections'

This is a critical step. Go to the contents page of your rule book and learn the sections and parts as they are written. This is as simple as 'Rules 1–3 "Part A – General", Rules 4–10 "Part B – Steering & Sailing Rules", "Section 1 ... vessels in any condition of visibility"'. This may seem like a non-step, but it is very important as it will allow you to avoid one of the biggest pitfalls in orals.

 When answering a question in orals you can assure the examiner that you know what you are talking about by casually mentioning the section/part that applies in the situation you have been given. For example, in a head on situation you need to know whether you can see the other vessel or if you are in restricted visibility. When you are told this, you can insert 'I will use part B section III Rule 19 because I am in restricted visibility'. **Do not do this for every question**, as you only want to show an understanding of parts and sections, not boast about your amazing memory.

 **Take your time when answering questions.** When you are navigating a vessel correctly, you have the time to make informed decisions about your manoeuvres (excluding all emergencies); there are no snap navigational decisions at sea, so why make a snap decision in orals?

## The Breakdown of Learning

Begin by reading Rule 3. This may seem counter-intuitive, but it provides a very good primer for the rest of the rules.

**Rule 3** is concerned with definitions. It gives meaning to all of the terms you are going to encounter while reading the COLREGs. Understanding the difference between vessels early on will help you exponentially when reading the rest of the rules.

Every vessel type has its own light and shape pattern plus sound signal. These are described in **Rules 20 to 35**. This may seem like a large amount of work for 'nothing', but all the other rules just slot into place and become almost obvious when you understand what a vessel is and does.

Rule 3 can be a favourite starting point for examiners. By getting candidates to identify vessels and then define them, the examiner is assessing the base level of their knowledge. It is also a nice easy run in for the rules section at orals, but this will only seem easy if you know the definitions.

## Breakdown Summary

<b>Rule</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Rules</b>	<b>20–35</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>Parts &amp; Sections</b>
<b>Rules</b>	<b>1 and 2</b>
<b>Rules</b>	<b>4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10</b>
<b>Rules</b>	<b>11, 12, 13, 14 and 15</b>
<b>Rules</b>	<b>8f, 16, 17 and 18</b>
<b>Rule</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Rules</b>	<b>36, 37 and Annex 4</b>
<b>Annex</b>	<b>1 and 2</b>
<b>Rule</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Rules</b>	<b>39, 40 and 41</b>
<b>Annex</b>	<b>3</b>



**Do not try to learn the rules alone.** You will quickly become frustrated, bored or disillusioned with the whole process. Always try to **make it a sociable event** with other cadets or willing family members and you will find the task much easier.

## Light Patterns

Learning the lights, shapes and sounds for all the vessels should be much easier when you know your vessel definitions. **Lights, shapes and sounds should not be an entirely reading-based section.** Use flash cards, a Lightrule,<sup>1</sup> Google image searches, apps and any other techniques that can assist you with vessel light pattern identification.

★ You may be aware of ‘**Rule of the Road boxes**’ that contain a blackboard and coloured magnets for light recognition. These are **exactly what your examiner will use** so be sure to practise with them.

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<sup>1</sup> The Eazy Cadet recommends the high-quality training resources that are available at [www.wavesandmeans.co.uk](http://www.wavesandmeans.co.uk).

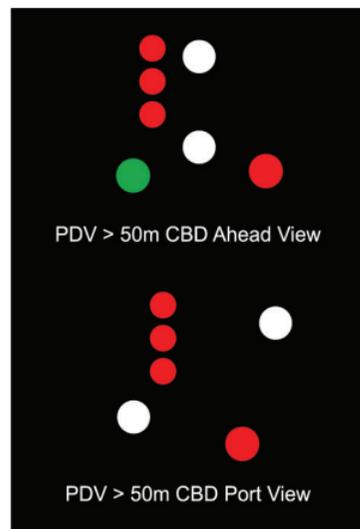
## The Rules

It is **finally time to begin with the actual rules.** You have done all of the preparation work and you can start to put the rules into context properly.

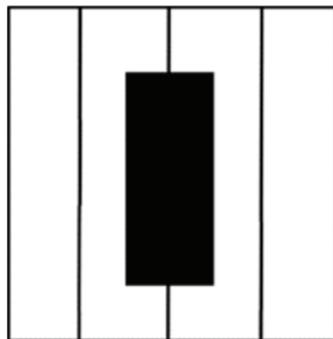
★ The advice here is **not to rush.** Take your time over each part and learn the rules properly. Take each part and spend a week committing the main themes to memory. Some sections you will find easier than others and some sections will confuse you. **Use small models** or cut out paper ships and try to **apply the rules as written.** This should help cement the knowledge by seeing the rules applied.

## Constrained By Draft

A Vessel CBD will exhibit:



- A PDV Constrained by her Draft will show a Black Cylinder in the fore part of the vessel where it can best be seen.

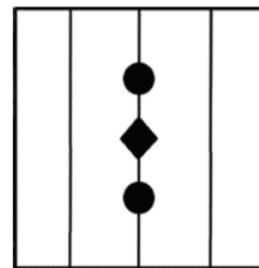
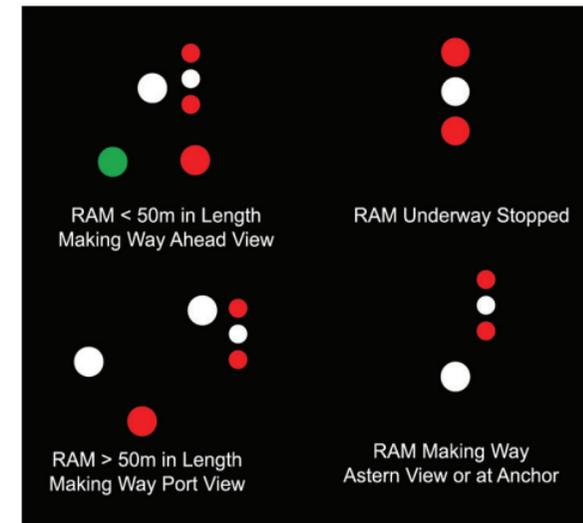


- The lights for a PDV of her size and, in addition, three All Round Red Lights, one above the other, where they can best be seen.

## Restricted in Ability to Manoeuvre

A Vessel RAM exhibits:

- An All Round Red Light above an All Round White Light above an All Round Red Light.
- If making way, Mast Head Lights, Side Lights and a Stern Light.



- A Vessel RAM by day will show a Black Ball above a Black Diamond above a Black Ball.
- If at anchor a RAM vessel will also show a single Black Ball in the forepart of the vessel where it can best be seen.

If an examiner asks about RAM vessels in a TSS they will be looking for you to mention these words:

**‘... to the extent necessary to carry out their work ...’.**

## Rule 12 – Sailing Vessels

(a) When two sailing vessels are approaching one another, so as to involve risk of collision, one of them shall keep out of the way of the other as follows:

- (i) when each has the wind on a different side, the vessel which has the wind on the port side shall keep out of the way of the other;
- (ii) when both have the wind on the same side, the vessel which is to windward shall keep out of the way of the vessel which is to leeward;
- (iii) if a vessel with the wind on the port side sees a vessel to windward and cannot determine with certainty whether the other vessel has the wind on the port or on the starboard side, she shall keep out of the way of the other.

(b) For the purposes of this Rule the windward side shall be deemed to be the side opposite to that on which the mainsail is carried or, in the case of a square-rigged vessel, the side opposite to that on which the largest fore-and-aft sail is carried.

**Rule 12 (a)** requires **gauging the wind direction relative to your vessel** and any other vessels involved with you in a risk-of-collision situation.



‘... the windward side shall be deemed to be the side opposite to that on which the mainsail is carried ...’.

- This is not a common (but no less important) rule to come up in orals; there are a few examiners that are renowned for their love of Rule 12. This is usually because they enjoy yachting.