



COLREG Rules 1–41

All 41 rules in one place, Parts A to F, each with a short plain-language summary to help you study.

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Scan for every rule with explanations and practice questions

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HOW TO USE IT

Rules are grouped by Part, as in the Convention. Each line gives the rule number, its short title and our summary of what it asks of you. Tap a title (or scan the code) to open the full rule page with the source text, examples and a quiz.

A FREE STUDY SUMMARY

This is not the official text of COLREG. The summaries are written by IALACOLREG to help you learn; for the exact wording, always check the official publication.

Official text we cite: [U.S. Coast Guard — International Navigation Rules \(2024\)](#)

IMO convention page: www.imo.org/en/About/Conventions/Pages/COLREG.aspx

A General

1–3

1 Application

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-1

COLREG applies to all vessels on the high seas and in connected waters navigable by seagoing vessels, subject to closely conforming local special rules and IMO-adopted traffic separation schemes.

2 Responsibility

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-2

Nothing in these Rules shall exonerate any vessel from the consequences of neglecting these Rules or neglecting any precaution required by ordinary practice of seamanship.

3 General Definitions

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-3

Defines key terms used throughout the COLREGs including vessel, power-driven vessel, sailing vessel, restricted visibility, and more.

B Steering & Sailing Rules

4–19

Section I. Conduct in any condition of visibility

4 Application

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-4

Rules in Section I apply in any condition of visibility.

5 Look-out

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-5

Keep watch at all times with your eyes and ears, and use radar, AIS and every other means on board to judge the situation and the risk of collision.

6 Safe Speed

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-6

Always go slowly enough that you can still avoid a collision and stop in time, judged against visibility, traffic, manoeuvrability and conditions.

7 Risk of Collision

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-7

Every vessel shall use all available means to determine if risk of collision exists. If in doubt, such risk shall be deemed to exist.

8 Action to Avoid Collision

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-8

When you act to avoid a collision, act early and make the change large enough for the other vessel to see, then check that it is working.

9 Narrow Channels

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-9

In a narrow channel, stay on the starboard side as far as it is safe, and don't block vessels that can only navigate inside it.

10 Traffic Separation Schemes

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-10

In a traffic separation scheme, follow your lane in the direction of the traffic, cross it at right angles if you must, and keep clear of the separation zone.

Section II. Conduct in sight of one another

11	Application	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-11
Rules 11 to 18 cover vessels that can see each other with their own eyes, not only on radar.		
12	Sailing Vessels	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-12
When two sailing vessels approach, the one with wind on port side keeps clear. When both have wind on same side, the windward vessel keeps clear.		
13	Overtaking	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-13
If you are overtaking, it is your job to keep clear of the vessel ahead until you are past and well clear, whatever type of vessel you are.		
14	Head-on Situation	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-14
When two power-driven vessels in sight meet on reciprocal or nearly reciprocal courses with risk of collision, each shall alter to starboard to pass port to port.		
15	Crossing Situation	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-15
When two power-driven vessels are crossing, the vessel which has the other on her starboard side shall keep out of the way.		
16	Action by Give-way Vessel	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-16
As the give-way vessel, make your move early and make it big, so you pass at a safe distance and the other vessel can see what you are doing.		
17	Action by Stand-on Vessel	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-17
The stand-on vessel shall keep her course and speed, but may take action when it becomes apparent the give-way vessel is not acting.		
18	Responsibilities Between Vessels	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-18
Rule 18 sets the basic responsibilities between vessel types. Constrained-by-draught vessels receive special consideration but are not simply another rung in a fixed hierarchy.		

Section III. Conduct in restricted visibility

19	Conduct of Vessels in Restricted Visibility	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-19
Rule 19 governs vessels not in sight of one another in or near restricted visibility: safe speed, radar assessment and qualified avoiding action.		

C Lights & Shapes 20–31

20	Application (Lights)	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-20
Show your navigation lights between sunset and sunrise and whenever visibility is poor, and day shapes during the day.		
21	Definitions (Lights)	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-21
Defines masthead light, sidelights, sternlight, towing light, all-round light and flashing light.		
22	Visibility of Lights	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-22
Specifies minimum visibility ranges for lights based on vessel length.		
23	Power-driven Vessels Underway	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-23
Power-driven vessels underway shall exhibit masthead light(s), sidelights, and sternlight. Vessels 50m+ require two masthead lights.		
24	Towing and Pushing	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-24
Vessels towing or pushing display additional masthead lights and a yellow towing light. Three masthead lights if tow exceeds 200m.		
25	Sailing Vessels Underway and Vessels Under Oars	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-25
Sailing vessels show sidelights and sternlight. May optionally show red over green all-round lights at the masthead.		
26	Fishing Vessels	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-26
Fishing vessels show green over white when trawling, red over white for other fishing, and sidelights plus sternlight when making way.		
27	Vessels Not Under Command or Restricted in Ability to Manoeuvre	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-27
NUC shows two red all-round lights vertically. RAM shows red-white-red all-round lights vertically.		
28	Vessels Constrained by Their Draught	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-28
A vessel limited by her draught can add three red all-round lights, one above the other, or a black cylinder by day.		
29	Pilot Vessels	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-29
A pilot vessel on duty shows white over red all-round lights at the masthead. When underway, also sidelights and sternlight.		
30	Anchored Vessels and Vessels Aground	ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-30
Anchored vessels show an all-round white light forward and another aft (lower). Vessels aground additionally show two red all-round lights.		

31 Seaplanes

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-31

Where it is impracticable for a seaplane to exhibit lights of the exact characteristics, it shall exhibit lights as closely similar as possible.

D Sound & Light Signals

32–37

32 Definitions (Sound Signals)

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-32

Whistle = any Annex III-compliant sound appliance. Short blast ≈ 1 s. Prolonged blast = 4–6 s. Get the duration wrong and the meaning changes.

33 Equipment for Sound Signals

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-33

Whistle from 12 m, bell added from 20 m, gong added from 100 m — and the gong's tone must not be confused with the bell's.

34 Manoeuvring and Warning Signals

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-34

One short blast means starboard, two means port, three means astern propulsion, and five or more rapid blasts mean doubt or danger.

35 Sound Signals in Restricted Visibility

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-35

In restricted visibility, power-driven vessels making way sound one prolonged blast every 2 minutes. Vessels not making way sound two prolonged blasts.

36 Signals to Attract Attention

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-36

To get another vessel's attention you can use a light or sound signal, as long as it can't be confused with any signal the rules define.

37 Distress Signals

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-37

When in distress and requiring assistance, vessels shall use the signals described in Annex IV (red flares, SOS, MAYDAY, DSC, EPIRB and others).

E Exemptions

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38 Exemptions

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-38

Vessels which comply with earlier regulations may be exempted from certain requirements for specified periods.

F Verification of Compliance

39–41

39 Definitions (Verification of Compliance)

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-39

Defines the terms used by Part F: audit, Audit Scheme, Code for Implementation and audit standard — the vocabulary of the IMO Member State Audit Scheme.

40 Application (Verification of Compliance)

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-40

Contracting Parties shall use the Code for Implementation when carrying out their obligations and responsibilities under the Convention.

41 Verification of Compliance

ialacolreg.com/en/colreg/rule-41

Every Contracting Party is subject to periodic IMO audits verifying its compliance with and implementation of the Convention.

THE FOUR ANNEXES

The Convention also has four Annexes with the technical detail behind the rules:

I Positioning and technical details of lights and shapes

II Additional signals for fishing vessels fishing in close proximity

III Technical details of sound signal appliances

IV Distress signals



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