



Small-Boat Sailing

Scouts BSA · Aquatics

Name

Started

Completed

Small-Boat Sailing teaches you to use the wind to move a boat where you want to go. You will learn the parts of a sailboat, read the wind, and sail with a buddy. Always sail with trained supervision and a life jacket.

Requirements

Every official requirement, in plain language. Check the official wording when you sign off (scouting.org/merit-badges/small-boat-sailing/). Tips and examples are ideas, not extra requirements.

1 Sailing safety and first aid

Tips for this section: Learn the main hazards on the water, like sudden wind and cold water, and how Safety Afloat keeps you safe.

Example for this section: Talk through real situations: a sudden gust that heels the boat over, falling in cold water, a sunburn after a long afternoon, or a hit from the boom. For each, say how to prevent it and what first aid you'd give.

- ☐ **1a** Explain to your counselor the hazards you're most likely to meet while sailing small boats and how to anticipate, help prevent, reduce, and respond to them

- ☐ **1b** Review how to prevent, recognize, and give first aid for these sailing problems: cold-water shock and hypothermia, heat illnesses, dehydration, sunburn, blisters, sprains, and strains

- ☐ **1c** Discuss Scouting America's Safety Afloat policy and how it applies when sailing small boats

- ☐ **2** Pass the Scouting America swimmer test before starting the rest of the requirements

Tip: Practice at a pool with a lifeguard, then ask your camp's aquatics staff when you can take the swimmer test.

- ☐ **3** Describe the boat you'll sail for these requirements, naming its major parts and what each one does

Tip: Walk around a sailboat with an instructor and point to each part as you say its name and job.

4 Before going afloat

Tips for this section: Check the forecast before sailing and learn which boat has the right of way in common situations.

Example for this section: Before each sail, check the forecast and look at the sky together with your buddy. Explain a rule of the road, like which boat keeps its course when two sailboats meet, and how Safety Afloat applies to your outing.

- ☐ **4a** Discuss the nine points of Scouting America's Safety Afloat plan

- ☐ **4b** Explain the general rules of the road on the water, plus any special rules or laws for your area or state

- ☐ **4c** Explain how wind strength, weather hazards, and water conditions affect your safety and how well you sail

- ☐ **4d** Discuss the signs that bad weather is coming and what to do if strong winds pick up or a storm approaches

- ☐ **4e** Prepare a typical float plan

- ☐ **4f** Discuss the right clothes, shoes, and personal gear for small-boat sailing in both warm and cool weather, and explain how good choices keep you comfortable and safe

- ☐ **5** Discuss with your counselor how to tell which way the wind is blowing and what wind indicators show, and explain why you check this before setting sail

Tip: Watch flags, ripples on the water, and telltales to see where the wind is coming from.

Example: Show your counselor three ways to find the wind: telltales on the sail or shrouds, a flag on shore, and the direction of small ripples on the water. Then point to where the wind is coming from right now.

6 Sail with a buddy, following Safety Afloat

Tips for this section: Start in light wind with an experienced sailor or instructor, and practice tacking and jibing until they feel smooth.

- ☐ **6a** With your buddy, get the boat ready to sail, including a safety check

- ☐ **6b** Leave from a dock, mooring, or beach

- ☐ **6c** Trim the sails correctly on a round-trip course your counselor approves that includes beating, reaching, and running (the basic points of sail), steering well throughout

- ☐ **6d** Change direction by tacking, and change direction by jibing

- ☐ **6e** Show how to get out of irons

- ☐ **6f** Show the safety position

- ☐ **6g** Show what to do when you capsize and how to rescue someone who falls overboard, with your counselor closely supervising and a rescue boat standing by (self-bailing boats are OK)

- ☐ **6h** Show what to do after running aground

- ☐ **6i** Accept a side tow or single-line tow and safely steer the boat being towed for 20 boat lengths

- ☐ **6j** Back at the dock, mooring, or beach, secure all gear, furl or stow the sails, and get the boat ready to be left overnight or longer

7 Marlinespike seamanship

Tips for this section: Practice the knots with a short rope at home, then use them on the boat to coil and secure lines.

- ☐ **7a** Show how to tie and use each of these: square (reef) knot, bowline, clove hitch, two half hitches, cleat hitch, and figure-eight knot

- ☐ **7b** Demonstrate heaving, coiling, and faking down a line

- ☐ **7c** Discuss the kinds of line used on sailboats and the fibers they're made from, and explain the pros and cons of each

- ☐ 8 Describe how you'd take care of a sailboat and its gear all year round

Tip: Help clean and store a sailboat after an outing and ask how it's cared for in the off-season.

Example: Help rinse the boat with fresh water after sailing, dry and fold the sail, check lines for wear, and store everything out of the sun. Then explain what extra care happens in winter, like covering the boat.

- ☐ 9 Go over sailing terms and the points of sail with your counselor. Discuss the kinds of sailboats used today and how they differ

Tip: Make flash cards of sailing terms and draw a simple wind diagram showing the points of sail.

Example: Draw a circle with the wind at the top and label the points of sail: in irons, close-hauled, beam reach, broad reach, and running. Add a few sailing terms you used, like windward, leeward, and luffing.