

Navigation Lights & Signals Checklist

Recognition · Display · Sound & Distress Signals
COLREG 1972 — Rules 20–37 & Annexes I, III, IV
USCG Navigation Rules (33 CFR Part 83)

Foundational Principles — Always Prevail

VESSEL IDENTIFICATION (Status & Intent)



Power-Driven Vessel Underway
Masthead, Sidelights, Sternlight



Sailing Vessel Underway
Red/Green Sidelights, Sternlight



Trawling
(Green over White)



Day Shape:
Two Cones
(Apexes Together)



Fishing
(Red over White)



Not Under Command (NUC)

● Two Vertical Red Lights
OR
● Two Vertical Black Balls

VESSEL TYPE [_____] **VESSEL NAME** [_____]

MMSI ID [_____] **DATE** [_____] **TIME (UTC)** [_____]

AREA / PORT [_____]

- ▶ No item on this sheet relieves the Master of the **duty of good seamanship** and of any special circumstances Rule 2
- ▶ **Lights** are shown **from sunset to sunrise** and in **restricted visibility**; day shapes are shown by day Rule 20
- ▶ **Distress signals** are used only to signal distress; their misuse is prohibited

PART I · NAVIGATION LIGHTS

Navigation lights and day shapes let mariners recognize a vessel's type, size, and status at a glance, and then determine right-of-way before acting. This section covers the lights you must display yourself and how to read those of others at night, ensuring every approach is identified early and collisions are avoided.

Section A — Displaying your own lights

Lights and shapes your own vessel must exhibit underway, at anchor, or aground. Display the correct set for your vessel type and length so that others can recognize you instantly and act accordingly. Check each fitting before getting underway, confirm the right combination for the night's conditions, and carry spare bulbs and fuses so a single failure never leaves you unlit.

1. **Show lights at the right times**

Exhibit navigation lights from sunset to sunrise and in restricted visibility; show day shapes by day. No other lights that could be mistaken for these.

COLREG Rule 20

2. **Sidelights — color & sectors**

Green to starboard, red to port, each covering 112.5° , from right ahead to 22.5° abaft the beam; ranges per vessel length.

COLREG Rule 21(b); Rule 22

3. **Masthead light(s)**

White, 225° , over the fore-and-aft centerline. A power-driven vessel ≥ 50 m shows a second, higher masthead light abaft the first.

COLREG Rule 21(a); Rule 23(a)

4. **Sternlight**

White, 135° , shown at the stern (135° centred dead astern).

COLREG Rule 21(c)

5. **All-round / towing lights**

All-round lights show 360° ; the towing light is yellow with the same characteristics as a sternlight.

COLREG Rule 21(e),(f)

6. **Power-driven vessel underway**

Masthead light(s), sidelights and sternlight. A vessel < 12 m may instead show one all-round white light plus sidelights.

COLREG Rule 23(a),(c)

7. **Sailing vessel underway**

Sidelights and a sternlight (may be combined in one lantern at the masthead if < 20 m). Optional all-round red over green at the masthead.

COLREG Rule 25(a)–(c)

8. **Motorsailing (sail + engine)**

A vessel proceeding under sail and machinery shows the lights of a power-driven vessel, and a cone apex downwards by day.

COLREG Rule 25(e)

9. **At anchor**

All-round white light forward; ≥ 50 m a second all-round white aft and deck working lights; one black ball forward by day.

COLREG Rule 30(a),(b)

10. **Aground**

Anchor light(s) plus two all-round red in a vertical line (three black balls in a vertical line by day).

COLREG Rule 30(d)

Section B — Special vessels & reading others at night

Beyond the standard underway lights, **special vessels carry distinctive combinations** that announce a constrained or hazardous status: towing, not under command, restricted in ability to maneuver, fishing, or piloting. Reading these *signatures* at night tells you another vessel's limitations early, so you can judge its intentions and give way correctly.

11. **Vessel towing / pushing**

Tug shows two masthead lights in a vertical line (three if the tow exceeds 200 m), sidelights, sternlight and a yellow towing light above the sternlight.

COLREG Rule 24(a)

12. **Not Under Command (NUC)**

Two all-round red in a vertical line; sidelights and sternlight added only when making way through the water.

COLREG Rule 27(a)

13. **Restricted in Ability to Maneuver (RAM)**

All-round red–white–red in a vertical line, plus the lights of a power-driven or anchored vessel as applicable.

COLREG Rule 27(b)

14. **Constrained By Draught (CBD)**

Three all-round red in a vertical line (a black cylinder by day), in addition to power-driven lights.

COLREG Rule 28

15. Fishing

Trawling: all-round green over white. Other than trawling: all-round red over white, plus gear indication where it extends.

COLREG Rule 26

16. Pilot vessel on duty

All-round white over red in a vertical line — “white over red, pilot ahead” — plus anchor or underway lights.

COLREG Rule 29

17. Read the aspect

Both sidelights + masthead = end-on / approaching. One sidelight only = crossing. Sternlight only = you are overtaking.

COLREG Rule 21; Rules 13–15

18. Decide your role from the lights

From the aspect, identify head-on, crossing or overtaking, and whether you are the give-way or stand-on vessel before you act.

COLREG Rules 13, 14, 15

19. Pre-departure light test

Test masthead, side, stern, anchor and all-round lights in daylight; carry spare bulbs and fuses.

COLREG Rule 20; good practice

PART II · DAY SHAPES

Day shapes are the daytime counterpart to navigation lights: black balls, cones, cylinders, and diamonds hoisted where they are most visible.

By day they convey the same status that a vessel's lights show by night, letting other mariners recognize anchoring, towing, fishing, or restricted conditions and respond with the correct right-of-way.

Hoist them promptly when your status changes and lower them once it ends, keeping each shape clean, rigid, and high enough to be seen all around.

20. **Anchor**

One black ball, shown forward.

COLREG Rule 30(a)

21. **Aground**

Three black balls in a vertical line.

COLREG Rule 30(d)

22. **Motorsailing**

One black cone, apex downwards.

COLREG Rule 25(e)

23. **Not Under Command**

Two black balls in a vertical line.

COLREG Rule 27(a)

24. **Restricted in Ability to Maneuver**

Ball–diamond–ball in a vertical line.

COLREG Rule 27(b)

25. **Constrained By Draught**

One black cylinder.

COLREG Rule 28

26. **Fishing**

Two cones with apexes together; if gear extends more than 150 m, an additional cone apex up pointing toward the gear.

COLREG Rule 26(c)

PART III · SOUND SIGNALS

Sound signals carry your intentions and warnings when sight alone is not enough — in close-quarters maneuvering, around blind bends, and in restricted visibility.

Maneuvering & warning vessels in sight of one another (Rule 34)

When vessels are in sight of one another, **short blasts announce a course change** or astern propulsion as you make it, and a rapid series signals doubt.

27. Maneuvering blasts

One short = “I am altering course to starboard”; two short = “...to port”; three short = “I am operating astern propulsion.”

28. Doubt / danger signal

Five or more short, rapid blasts when in doubt that the other vessel is taking sufficient action.

29. Overtaking in a narrow channel

Two prolonged + one short = intend to pass on your starboard side; two prolonged + two short = on your port. Agreement: one prolonged–one short–one prolonged–one short.

30. Blind bend / obstruction

One prolonged blast on approaching; a vessel within hearing round the bend answers with one prolonged blast.

Restricted visibility (Rule 35)

In fog, rain, or darkness that hides other vessels, these blasts replace what the eye cannot see — sound them at the required intervals continuously, and slow to a safe speed while listening carefully for the signals of others.

31. Power-driven vessel

Making way: one prolonged blast at intervals of not more than 2 minutes.

Underway but stopped: two prolonged blasts (~2 s apart) at the same interval.

32. Sailing, fishing, NUC, RAM, CBD, towing

One prolonged followed by two short blasts at intervals of not more than 2 minutes.

33. At anchor

Rapid ringing of the bell for ~5 s every minute or less (≥ 100 m: bell forward then gong aft). May add one short–one prolonged–one short to warn an approaching vessel.

PART IV · DISTRESS SIGNALS

Distress signals declare that a vessel or person is in grave and imminent danger and needs immediate help.

Know them on sight, carry the required means aboard, and reserve them strictly for genuine emergencies.

34. Recognise & carry the distress signals

Gun/explosive at ~1-min intervals, continuous foghorn, red rocket/parachute & red hand flares, orange smoke, “SOS” by light or sound, “MAYDAY” by radiotelephone, a DSC distress alert, EPIRB, code flags “N.C.”, a square flag with a ball above or below, flames on the vessel, and slowly raising and lowering outstretched arms.

COLREG Rule 37; Annex IV

35. Use them only for distress

Do not use any of these signals, or any signal that may be confused with them, except to indicate distress and need of assistance.

COLREG Rule 36; Rule 37

NOTES & MASTER'S SIGN-OFF

Observations / defects noted

Checks completed and verified — Commanding Officer / Skipper

Cpt Signature [_____]

Keep going. This sheet is the recognition layer. The companion protocols — Cast-Off, Night Operations, Passenger Safety Orientation and the rest — turn it into a full pre-departure system. Train the same rules as a free game at analogic-edition.pro/trainer.

Disclaimer.

This checklist summarizes the COLREG 1972 and related regulations for training and reference. It does not replace the official texts.

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