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Sailing describes two very different ways of moving forward. The first kind of locomotion, which even a child understands, is that of an object being thrust leeward by the wind – just as every beer can dropped in the trade winds south of the Canary Islands ends up in the Caribbean. The second kind is created by sailing into the wind. When positive and negative pressures exist on a sail and the centerboard or keel resist lateral drift, then a sailboat, amazingly, travels forward despite the wind.

Ultimately, sailing maneuvers always come down to two things: either getting the boat to sail or getting it to stop sailing. Boats practically sail themselves, but stopping them is a most difficult undertaking.

In order to produce the sailing or stopping described above, and to turn the boat, there are only three sail positions: either it is (1) drawn full (full and by), whereby propulsion is generated and the boat sails.; or (2) the sail is back winded, by forcing it backward against the wind. This way no propulsion is generated. It acts, instead, as a brake or to assist in turning the boat. The third sail position is drawn neither full nor back, but hovering (luffing) in the wind and having no effect. The sail is always in one of these three positions; the question is only whether it was intended or not.

### Heaving To

This maneuver is an art form which threatens to be forgotten. It is best for bringing calm to the boat and for possibly being able to take care of someone in need. If the jib sheet isn't released in the tack, then a back-winded jib results. The mainsail is now eased until both sails balance each other out. This way, both sails receive wind pressure and the boat will roll less than without sails. The result of this maneuver is a boat that is angled about 45° to the wind, no longer moves forward, drives backward minimally, and doesn't need to be steered. At this point, one can fix the rudder and take a break.

### Weather Helm & Lee Helm

When steering a sailboat without steering gear, it is understood that a well-trimmed mainsail and a badly trimmed jib, or a jib that is too small, causes a tendency for a boat to be "weather helm," meaning to turn windward. "Lee helm" is the opposite of weather helm. The boat can still be steered, though, even if it isn't dead straight. In any case, it is clear that a boat should be sailed with balance. Otherwise, weather helm and lee helm have to be continuously counteracted. This puts a strain on materials and slows down the boat.