Beam Reach. Now the wind is coming across the boat at a right angle to the centerline, the relative bearing would be 3 o'clock or 9 o'clock. In order to make the sails most efficient we adjust (trim) them for maximum boat speed.

Close Reach. Now, the wind is coming from ahead of the boat with a relative bearing of 2 o'clock or 10 o'clock. The fastest point of sail for most boats. Sail trim is critical for our boat speed. Telltales on the sails will tell us how to trim. The basic idea is to let the sails out until they luff (flap) then bring them in just to the point on no longer luffing.

Close Hauled (or Beating). This is defined as the closest to the wind we can efficiently sail and is usually a relative bearing of 1 o'clock or 11 o'clock. On this point of sail the sails are brought in as close to the centerline of the boat as possible. Here, we will be making small changes to our course to fill the sails since we already have them trimmed in all the way.

When the wind is coming over the starboard side (boom on port) of the boat we are on a starboard tack. Likewise, when the wind is coming over the port side (boom now on starboard) we are on port tack. This is important to know because the rights of way for sailboats hinge on which tack each boat is on. To learn more about rights of way between boats go to Avoiding Collisions.

When sailing we are usually headed towards some sort of destination. Pointing the boat towards our destination would be the first step followed by adjusting the sails to allow us to maintain good boat speed in that direction. Often times this is all we have to do. If, however, our destination lies directly upwind we will have to sail close hauled on one side of the wind then change tacks to the other close hauled side. Changing tacks by putting the bow of the boat through the eye of the wind is called tacking.

The above diagram gives a rough idea of how sails should be trimmed for any point of sail. We are looking for smooth air flow over both sides of the sail with no luffing. When we have that, our sails are properly trimmed. We often employ telltales to help us determine not only the wind direction but also proper trim.