

# Main Sail Set – The Basics

There are several different methods that can be used to judge where your main sail should be set. Here's a fairly easy method that can be used on most boats as a basic rule. But, before I get to the details let's review the tools we have to control the main sail:

## Main Sheet

When going to windward the main sheet pulls down on the boom and thereby controls the 'twist' in the sail. When on a broad reach or running the main sheet is used to position the boom in or out.

## Traveler

The traveler moves the base of the main sheet across the boat and thereby controls the position of the boom when going to windward. The traveler generally is not used when running or on a broad reach.

## Boom Vang

The vang's purpose is to pull down on the boom and thereby control twist when running or on a broad reach. It is generally not used when going to windward.

## Outhaul

The outhaul is attached to the clew of the main sail and is used to control draft or how dished the sail is front to back.

Okay, so with these four tools here are some fairly easy guidelines for setting your main in a light to moderate breeze (we will discuss heavy air another time).

### To Windward

Tighten the main sheet until the aft foot of the top batten is parallel to boom. Try playing with this and you will see the sail twist, over-tighten and the batten will twist around past parallel and point to windward. Ease up on the sheet and the batten will twist off. If the wind speed changes the sheet will need to be adjusted in order to maintain parallel position. Once the main sheet is set, use the traveler to center the boom in the middle of the boat. Now use the outhaul to adjust the draft – in light air more draft and in heavier air less draft.

### Reaching

As you bear off onto a reach you will need to ease the traveler (leave the sheet alone), but how far? The easiest way is to first set the jib using the telltails and then ease the traveler until the main just starts to luff. Then bring the traveler back up until the luffing stops.

### Running or Broad Reaching

As you bear off further you will eventually run out of traveler, this is where the boom vang comes into play. Tighten the vang and then start easing the main sheet until the boom is perpendicular to the apparent wind. It also helps to ease the outhaul so the main has some more dish to it.

These guidelines are not perfect but they are easy to apply and remember, and they will keep your main working and looking good.

*To Windward – Tighten the main sheet until the aft foot of the top batten is parallel to boom.*

Batten angle

Boom

*Main oversheeted – twisted in.*

Batten angle

Boom

*Main undersheeted – twisted off.*

Batten angle

Boom