

RULE 55.1 — CHANGING SAILS

When headsails or spinnakers are being changed, a replacing sail may be fully set and trimmed before the replaced sail is lowered. However, only one main-sail and, except when changing, only one spinnaker shall be carried set at a time.

RULE 55.2 — SPINNAKER POLES; WHISKER POLES

Only one spinnaker pole or whisker pole shall be used at a time except when gybing. When in use, it shall be attached to the foremost mast (as defined in *The Equipment Rules of Sailing*).

RULE 55.3 — SHEETING SAILS

No sail shall be sheeted over or through any device that exerts outward pressure on a sheet or clew of a sail at a point from which, with the boat upright, a vertical line would fall outside the hull or deck, except:


- (a) a headsail clew may be connected (as defined in *The Equipment Rules of Sailing*) to a whisker pole, provided that a spinnaker is not set;
- (b) any sail may be sheeted to or led above a boom that is regularly used for a sail and is permanently attached to the mast from which the head of the sail is set;
- (c) a headsail may be sheeted to its own boom that requires no adjustment when tacking; and
- (d) the boom of a sail may be sheeted to a bumkin.

RULE 55.4 — HEADSAILS AND SPINNAKERS

For the purposes of rules 54 and 55 and Appendix G, the definitions of ‘headsail’ and ‘spinnaker’ in *The Equipment Rules of Sailing* shall be used.

Note that this rule does not require that a spinnaker pole be used at all when flying a spinnaker! The only pole requirements are in rule 55.2. In other words, you can only use one pole at a time; and when it is “in use,” i.e., projecting the spinnaker or headsail outboard, it must be attached to the mast.

With no requirement to use a pole, boats are free to do “gybe-sets” and “floater-drops.” In both of these maneuvers, the spinnaker is set and drawing with no pole attached. In other words, a boat can legally gybe around the windward *mark*, set her spinnaker, fill it, and sail on down the leg with no pole. And likewise, when coming into a leeward *mark*, a boat can legally remove her pole and sail for as long as she chooses before lowering her spinnaker.

“So can a crew member lean out over a boat’s lifelines to hold the spinnaker guy after the pole has been removed?” 

Yes, but only “briefly.” Rule 49.2 (Crew Position; Lifelines) forbids competitors from leaning their torsos out over the lifelines “except briefly to perform a necessary task.” Appeal 72 reads, “Without a spinnaker pole, a spinnaker is less efficient and more unstable. As a boat prepares to round a leeward mark, removing the pole is one of the first necessary steps. From that time until the spinnaker is lowered, holding the guy by hand is a less effective but nonetheless useful means of controlling the spinnaker, which remains a “necessary task” even without the pole. The interval of time is normally a brief one, since generally there is no advantage in flying a spinnaker without a pole.”

Also note that there is no requirement that the tack of the spinnaker be in “close proximity” to the outboard end of the spinnaker pole. The rationale is that it is generally faster to have the tack close to the outboard end, such that there is no reason to penalize a boat if she chooses not to do so.

Note that rule 86.1(c) (Changes to the Racing Rules) permits class rules to change this rule.



“I see a lot of boats flying asymmetrical spinnakers from bowsprits; I assume this is legal?”

Yes. Rule 55.3 specifically states, “No sail shall be sheeted over or through any device that exerts outward pressure on a sheet or clew of a sail at a point from which, with the boat upright, a vertical line would fall outside the hull or deck.” Rule 55.3 is not broken provided that the bowsprit is used to attach the tack (the windward corner) of the spinnaker or as a lead for a line attached to the tack.