



Sculling in Choppy Waters, A Lesson in Tacking

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Tacking is a nautical term describing the maneuver by which a yacht sails at angles against or with the wind.

Wind and waves usually follow the same direction and some tacking techniques can be applied by the sculler in dealing with larger waves.

When rowing against “large” waves, I try to slice them at 30 to 45 degrees (sailors call it “close-hauled”). Meeting a wave head on will get you wet and slow you down as the bow dips into the wave. In a following sea, I also prefer to come down at angle (at a “broad reach”).

“Tacking” in a zigzag course, increases travel distance, but not by as much as you may think. On a typical tacking course, you may add 10% to 15% compared with a straight line course. However, since your water speed increases, you may actually reach your destination sooner than in a straight line course.

A “beam reach” (wind and waves parallel to your line of travel) in a yacht is very fast and comfortable, but in a scull it is your worst choice. On a “beam reach” you spend most of your energy trying to balance your boat with a huge loss of speed and a good chance of a swim.

As you leave the harbor, check wind, waves and currents. If it is very windy and choppy, set your course so that you do the hardest part going out and save the “downhill” ride for your way back.