



Clothing Advice for Sailing in Miserable & Cold Conditions- Tips assembled by Franny Charles, MIT Sailing Master

Suggested clothing tips have come from many years of experience as a sailor, coach, umpire, and PRO as well as excellent advice from Brian Clancy, Cornell coach, Lily McGrath, BC star sailor and Audrey Giblin, Dartmouth star sailor. Please feel free to share tips with others as we try to update this document on a regular basis.

Summary-

Harden up. It's not that bad, and especially if you're sailing, you are better off than anyone else who happens to be out there on the water. If you're a skipper, you're in the absolute best position to be warm. You have a wind blocker, splash blocker, and you should be always working hard. When you leave the dock. Start working. Everyone wants to talk about gear. Yes, gear is important, and preparing for the cold is important. But, if you're a bump on a log out there complaining about the cold, then you can pretty much guarantee that you will get cold, no matter what you wear.

Find another boat, do a tacking drill, or two boats and get some Pig going. Anything to get moving. Not just static hiking upwind, but more boat handling. Keep the boat dry. Dry feet are warmer feet, and bailing is work...so anytime you can use your muscles as opposed to sitting around it's going to be better. Keep sailing too. If you're luffing around the start line, you're ruining the jibs, and getting yourself cold.

Being smart is also critically important. Keep the chatter up with your partner and look for signs that they might be oddly cold. Always keep asking them if they are and understand that if someone begins to get silent or just nods, head right into the dock. Always be safe and smart. Sometimes folks just get cold and not because they didn't prepare, but just because...it happens.

Hats-

These are a definite when it comes to cold weather sailing. By trial and tribulation, many sailors have concluded that when it is raining or snowing, the best item to wear is a baseball hat with an ear warmer over the top. Not only does your head stay warm, but you keep the rain and snow off your face too. If it is just plain cold (no rain or snow), I would highly recommend (for the ladies) purchasing a wool hat with a ponytail hole off Amazon. Amazing. If the wind blows through your hat, get another. Also, a fleecy neck gator and a second one for wet conditions is a favorite of sailors from northern New England. It acts as a wind and spray guard if you pull it up between sets, also.

Socks-

Considerably less amazing is when, due to wind, waves or rain, there is a constant slosh of freezing water in the bottom of the boat. As such, maintaining feeling in your feet becomes tricky. Wear one pair of smart wool socks under the dry suit because too many layers can decrease blood flow. However, some sailors have found success in wearing wool socks with a second, neoprene pair over them to help insulate the foot. Old running Sneakers are warmer than boots. Rip the insert out, easier to fit the drysuit bootie in there. (applicable for skippers & crews) Go to Walmart or something and buy a cheapo pair off the clearance rack. Buy a pair that is a half or whole size bigger than normal if you go that route. Still take the insert out. Everyone thinks you need more and more socks. No. You need 1 good pair of thinner ski boot type socks. Your toes need to be able to wiggle.

Gloves-

Crews- As most New England sailors realize at about age eight, hands tend to be the first (and most painful) body part to go numb. There are many different methods, as do all sailors, and found that either Seal Skin gloves or Atlas Thermal gloves worked best. To note, both of those gloves tend to rip or shred very easily, so usually two pairs are required in a single season. Many of my teammates enjoyed the Atlas Vinylove 460 Cold gloves (warning: very bulky), or just plain winter skiing gloves with wool liners—according to a teammate, Helly Hansen liners work the best. The orange or blue lobster glove things are important for crews. Atlas now makes a model with removable fleece liners so you can swap out from one day to the next or if you stick your hand too far into the water. Check out Amazon or APS, Ltd. Yes, they are hard to work with, but get used to it. Frozen hands are also hard to work with... Hand warmers – might as well burn your money. They don't work and are annoying to deal with.

Skippers- It is not really feasible to wear the lobster gloves as a skipper, and any other type of glove will absorb the water from the mainsheet tight grip. Once the water is absorbed it's just cold and your hands will deteriorate. It's amazing how warm your hands are as a skipper. You are constantly opening and closing your hands. There is a little trick to this as well. Because before you launch for sailing, you're not really doing anything...thus your hands will get cold. The easy solution is a fleece neck warmer on your chest between the life jacket and drysuit. It's smooth on your cold hands, and warm because it's close to your core. Tuck your hands into the life jacket and it serves as a sleeve, much like the pouch on a quarterback's belt. Some people go so far as to sew in a patch of fleece onto the inside of the life jacket.

Underlayers-

Start building up moisture in your skin when you get dressed in the morning. Use a whole bunch of skin moisturizer on your hands, feet and face. Reapply once you are about to get ready for sailing, especially on your feet. Solid base layers- Dress at home then walk across campus looking strange...yes...but whatever, rolling into the sailing center, then getting undressed and then dressed again into sailing gear is not only a waste of time, but to get your base layers on you have you get down to bare skin, and that's cold. At the absolute bare minimum, wear all your base layers to practice. Wear as few layers as you can to maintain as much flexibility as possible. However, wear tightly fitting base layers. Under armor pants and tops are key. Then, fleece pants and a sweater on top. If you need more warmth wear a fleece over the sweater, but that's rare, and only when it was the real deal. Never ever wear anything with a collar under the drysuit.

