General principles for running practical sessions

- All sessions should start with a Brief and finish with a Debrief.
- For details on effective briefing and debriefing please see below or read G101 and G14.
- For ideas on practical exercise please see G106 and G14.
- Always have an Aim or Focus.
- Use a variety of delivery styles, e.g. diagrams, pictures, discussions, demonstrations (if possible).
- Make sure your sailors are involved and use their knowledge.
- Use open questions, e.g. How, What, Why?
- Safety should be of prime importance.
- Have a structure and keep it simple.

Briefing (Plan)

- Briefings can be very varied in both length and how much information they contain which depends on what you are trying to achieve from the session. An important aspect of the Brief is to be structured; this enables your sailors to follow the information and understand the aims. They should contain the following:
  - Aims
  - Timings
  - Safety
  - Sailor involvement

The list above gives the minimum headings that a briefing should cover. Each of these areas can and should be broken down into specifics but remember the title is a “briefing” so should be brief and stick to the aims of the session.

If we expand on the headings above we will end up with a structured informative Brief which contains all the relevant information for the session. This could include some (but rarely all) of the following:

- Aim – be specific, break down the skill, focus just on the session aim and involve the sailors in deciding on this.
- Timings – set realistic timings but be flexible, include the exercise and how to achieve the exercise.
- Safety – cover any safety issues that may be relevant, signals, sailing rules, other activities or shipping, tides and weather, local hazards.
- Sailor involvement – is imperative as it keeps the sailors involved and focused. No one likes being talked at, but everyone likes being involved.
- VARK – there are a number of ways of communicating with our sailors:
  - Visual
  - Aural
  - Reading
  - Kinaesthetic

We will look at this in more detail later under ‘Styles of Coaching’.

Session Afloat (Do)

- There are a few basic principles on the session afloat, these are:
  - Work towards the aims of the session
  - Follow the Brief
  - Keep it safe – always be thinking “what if…”
  - Keep it moving, but allow sailors time to practise new skills
  - Be flexible

- Make notes for your debrief
- Position the coach boat in the most effective position for coaching and/or videoing
- Select the exercises that will have most learning opportunities for the sailor bearing in mind the aims of the session
- Feedback afloat – you must be close to (preferably alongside) and have eye contact with the sailor for this to be effective.
- Don’t shout across an expanse of water
- All ‘seasmanship’ type exercises/manoeuvres should follow: planning, approach, manoeuvre and escape....

De-briefing (Review)

- When should you debrief? If it is a cold day then get the sailors somewhere warm and dry. When it is hot it goes in the shade and make sure everyone is hydrated. The sailors need to be comfortable to be fully involved with the debrief.
- Refer back to the Aims of the session
- Ask:
  - Open questions – why, what, how, when, who, where?
  - Don’t give all the answers, ask the sailors as they will have some ideas, thoughts and observations of their own
  - Use a whiteboard and note their observations down

- A great way of getting your sailors to be involved is to use “Think, Pair, Share”:
  - Think – about the question that you have just set them
  - Pair – discuss it with their crew/helm or another partner
  - Share – then answer with the rest of the group
  - Discuss

- Discussion should be between you (the coach) and the sailors. If the sailors are fully involved with debriefing then you should just be facilitating it.
- The Talk Ratio between coach and sailor should be 40:60 as a minimum. This is achieved by the coach using a skilled questioning technique which should be able to lead the sailors down the desired route.
- If a sailor learns something for themselves they are far more likely to remember it, than if they were just given the information.

- Re-focus:
  - Agree the aims for the next session from what has been learnt from this session. Identify the focus for each sailor; the sailor should be fully involved with this decision.
- VARK:
  - Again feedback doesn’t just have to be verbal, think of other ways of facilitating the information, e.g. diagrams, walk throughs, using a boat, dinghy park shuffle, video and stills.

Wet Notebooks

Use a notebook and take notes on the exercises. The essential part of a coach’s job is to give specific and quality feedback. Most of our Olympic coaches use notebooks so that they can deliver specific quality feedback.

Tips for delivering a good session:- “Accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative”

I hear and I forget.
I see and I understand.
I do and I remember.

The mere statement of a fact is no guarantee that listeners have received that fact as you understand it, or will necessarily remember it for any length of time. It is far better to teach a practical subject in a practical way whenever possible.

Bear the following points in mind when teaching in the classroom

Always be positive and enthusiastic. It will rub off!

Consider the room layout. Anything you say or do will be pointless unless your students can see and hear you. Remember that you are in charge; move furniture if necessary. Encourage students to fill brief/lecture rooms from the front. Make sure your room is comfortable, cool and well ventilated.

Keep it short and simple (KISS). 10 minutes is about the maximum length of time to maintain students’ attention without testing or a break. Don’t over-run.

Give your brief a structure. Introduction, Development, Summary, and Test.

A hand-out stating the important facts is useful but should not be given out until the end of the brief. However, if you can use hand-outs that allow students to take notes then the act of taking notes helps them remember what has been said. Always conclude with the ‘golden nuggets’ of the lesson, try to minimise these to approximately 3 points.

Always use first names. Use duct tape to either write your students’ names on their buoyancy aids or on the transom on the boat.

Tutor your presentation to suit your audience.

Choose your language. Avoid using jargon, even simple terms such as tack and gybe should be checked that everyone understands (see use of questions).

Choose your position. Where and how you stand is important. Standing behind a desk or lectern is more formal and puts a barrier between you and your audience but sitting on a table at the front of the class may be too relaxed for some talks. Watch experienced speakers and assess their use of body language. Don’t hide behind your visual aids.
Planning Your Exercise Brief

The aims

The teaching points

Diagrams used

Diagram of the course to be used

(include position of the coach boat)

Order of events

Safety brief

Key questions for you:

Have you planned the session with the needs of your group and their current abilities in mind?

Have you chosen the best visual aid to demonstrate the lesson?

How will they remember the exercises?

Have you checked they know what you have briefed?

Questions not only assess the knowledge of the sailors but also check they have understood.

Young sailors very rarely ask questions so don't assume that they have absorbed your entire brief!