

Having fun teaching the 5 essentials

As any RYA Dinghy Instructor knows, the 5 Essentials are, quite literally, an essential part of their teaching repertoire. **Simon Winkley**, RYA Coach/Assessor explores engaging, fun ways of delivering 5 Essentials training to improver students.

» Sail setting » Balance » Trim » Centreboard » Course made good

There are several approaches to teaching a manoeuvre:

- » Teach the students how to do it
- » Teach the students how not to do it
- » Allow the students to experiment.

The second approach could be termed as *opposite learning theory* and, although it should not be used exclusively, it does have its place.

Only teaching someone how to do something exactly right may, to some extent, stifle the learning process by removing opportunities to experience what it feels like when things are not quite working as they should.

A blend of the three approaches can provide an exciting learning platform.

Sail setting

Let's start with the sails. Try getting the students to alternate from setting the sail correctly (sheeting-in until the sail just stops flapping) to sailing over sheeted. What are the differences in how the boat feels? How about an over-sheeted beam reach race? Whilst everyone sails over-sheeted they will have to squeeze as much as possible out of the other four essentials to make up for the unfavourable effects of over-sheeting.

The conclusion that sail setting is key will become obvious but

the students will have developed an additional awareness of what feels wrong, which can only help to understand how the boat feels when the sails are set correctly.

Another alternative is to get a group of boats to lineup from windward to leeward with some setting off with sails set correctly and some over-sheeted. The impact of over-sheeting should be seen immediately.

Balance

Weight distribution across the boat is a critical element of sailing and should be worked on to some degree during every coaching session. The classic problem is heeling too far to leeward in a prolonged gust which causes the sailor to pull hard on the tiller as they fight the boat's urge to turn towards the wind (weather helm).

Try explaining why this happens. In simple terms, if the sail's mid-point (centre of effort) is over the hull, the boat will sail straight. If, however, the centre of effort is allowed to 'lean' over the leeward side, then the leeward side experiences more drive than the windward side, so the boat turns towards the wind. The boat's hull shape helps with this.

So, try a tacking or gybing session or a straight line sailing session with both correct and incorrect balance and discuss the differences in how the boat



Get your students to feel the effect of excessive heel on the rudder.

behaves, especially in terms of the feel of the rudder.

Gybing with excessive leeward heel is particularly tricky, with the boom having to defy gravity to cross the boat in addition to the problem of weather helm.

Trim

Weight distribution fore-and-aft can be exaggerated for learning purposes. Ask students to move their weight too far forwards or too far back in the boat, ideally with the same type of boat close by using correct trim. Assuming this activity is kept safe, great fun can be

had as the students gather on the foredeck or cluster around the tiller as the boat's bow dives or rises.

Then bring out their experiences in the debrief. Speed-loss due to excessive drag and lack of pointing ability is likely to be experienced whilst trimming too far aft and, whilst trimming too far forward, loss of drive from the semi-airborne rudder and resistance at the bow will be apparent. Bringing the changing shape of the wake to the attention of the students as they trim fore and aft will enhance their understanding of where to position their weight.



As one boat retracts the daggerboard the effects of leeway will be highlighted



Compare the extremes of fore and aft trim to help learn how to trim the boat correctly.

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Centreboard

Leeway (making way to the lee – or downwind) is the concept of the sideways/downwind slip of a dinghy. This is minimised by the use of the centreboard.

In the classroom you could explain this by placing a large whiteboard flat on a table to represent a bird's eye view of the water. Draw a wind arrow and place two model boats at one side of the board pointing across the wind. The windward one has its centreboard set correctly and the leeward one has no centreboard down.

Demonstrate how both boats set off together on a beam reach and show how the leeward boat slides downwind, despite remaining at 90 degrees to the wind. When the two boats reach the other side of the board they will be a certain distance apart. This distance can be explained as a measure of leeway.

Now comes the fun part. Literally drop the students into this scenario by getting them out on the water to reenact it in paired boats. Regardless of whether a student is in the boat with the centreboard up or down, they will experience first hand the effects of leeway.

This can be taken one step further on the water by changing the point of sail to close-hauled where the effects of leeway will be even more apparent. Fishing around in the debrief may also highlight the loss of power in the sail experienced by the helm as a side-effect of the leeway.

Course Made Good

Sometimes referred to as 'course sailed', this is the art of getting from one place to another in a

sailing boat. For an intermediate student this may include the basic navigation of a sailing area, or may focus on the choices made when sailing a triangular course to include angles and distances sailed, as well as effective mark rounding.

In the classroom a horizontal white board with model boats can be used once again with students working in small groups. One group can design a sailing area with a start and end point for the other group to discuss the best course to sail. Hazards to negotiate, depending on the students' experience, could be: areas used by other water users, shallows, rocks, shipping lanes, headlands with overfalls and wind bends. Some of the concepts discussed in this session can be highlighted later when back out on the water.

A platform for student experiences

Both adult and junior students engage well with sessions which have an interesting twist. Such sessions may also be run by Senior Instructors to develop their instructional team to help them, in turn, to deliver creative training sessions.

Running exercises to experiment with two of the 5 Essentials in one session, one after the other, works well before returning to shore for a debrief. Allow the discussion to progress naturally. Take care to listen to what the students have discovered and try to link their discoveries with established sailing principles. This should help to improve your students' understanding of the 5 Essentials and they should have had some fun at the same time.