

Instructing and Coaching Techniques

for RYA Instructors



Table of Contents

INSTRUCTOR VERSUS COACH?.....	2
A SIMPLE COACHING MODEL.....	2
ABOUT STUDENTS AND HOW THEY LEARN.....	3
<i>Receiving and Processing Information</i>	3
<i>Processing information</i>	5
<i>Comfort, Stretch and Panic Zones</i>	6
ACQUIRING A NEW SKILL: THE FOUR STAGES OF COMPETENCE.....	8
FEEDBACK AND DEBRIEFING.....	9
<i>Observation skills</i>	9
<i>Delivering feedback</i>	10
<i>Questions and more questions</i>	11
<i>Individual Debriefs</i>	12
PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER: PLAN - DO – REVIEW:.....	12

Instructor versus Coach?

As an RYA Instructor you will deliver material as both an instructor and coach. Which of these roles you play depends on a number of factors:

- The type of session (practical or theory)
- The subject (new subject or developing existing techniques and skills)
- The teaching method (discussion, demonstration or student practise)
- The environment (ashore or afloat)
- Number of students
- Where the student is within the RYA scheme

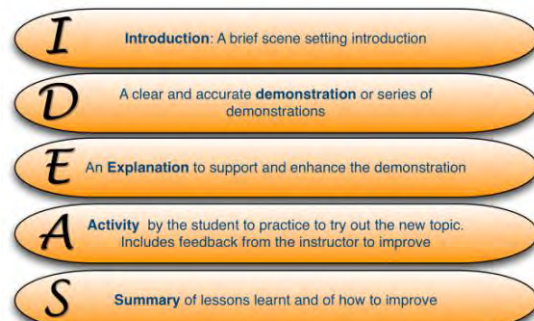
Your role as an instructor is to help students learn through teaching them practical and theoretical aspects of the relevant syllabus. The lower level Cruising Scheme practical courses, up to Dayskipper, predominantly involve explaining and demonstrating techniques that are new to the student - this is the instructing role.

However the higher-level courses require a shift towards helping students develop techniques into a higher or more automated level. This may require more observation, feedback or questioning from the instructor to help the student move forward - this is coaching.

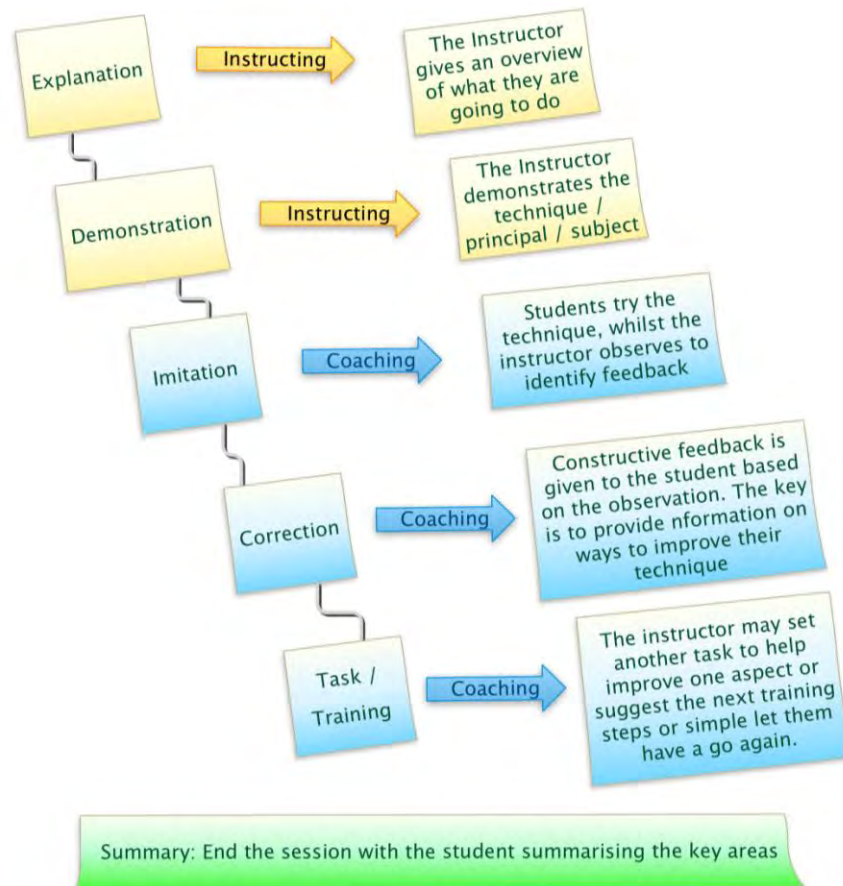
Cruising Instructors are predominantly instructing; Yachtmaster Instructors are predominantly coaching, however no training session is ever truly one or the other.

A Simple Coaching Model

There are numerous models for structuring training or instruction. A simple view is the Brief-Task-Debrief approach. This gives the general framework of briefing students prior to carrying out an activity (Brief), the student carries out the activity (Task) followed by feedback from the instructor to identify ways to improve (Debrief). There are many



coaching models, each with their own strength or weakness depending on who, what, where or why you are trying to teach. It is common for models to be formed around a Pneumonic: IDEAS or EDICT(S) are two examples which many people have heard of:



The great thing about these models is that it gives a structure to build on when you start your instructing career. Later we discuss different learning styles and will see how these models are helpful in ensuring you covering a range of learning styles. Your instructor course will be an opportunity to discuss and try out other models. Look at the EDICT(S) diagram as an example of how the roles of instructor and coach change throughout any particular session.

About Students and How they Learn

At the end of the day, the role of an instructor is to help the student achieve their goal of learning a new activity, skill or piece of knowledge. It may not be too much of a surprise that it would be helpful to know something about how each student learns.

Receiving and Processing Information

Not everyone sees and experiences the world in the same way. We take in information through our senses:

- Visually – what we see
- Auditory – what we hear
- Kinaesthetic – what we touch, feel and experience through movement

These senses are pathways to our brains. None of us use one pathway exclusively – there is significant overlap between them, but your students are likely to have a preference.

Visual Learners: Learning through seeing

They like:

- Written information
- Pictures, diagrams and observing demonstrations

Don't like:

- Question and answer sessions
- Verbal descriptive lessons e.g. talking through a manoeuvre in detail with no visual reference

Clues in the language they use to identify them as visual learners would be "I see what you mean". They tend to talk quite quickly

Auditory Learners: Learning through hearing

They like:

- Information contained in the spoken word.
- Clear verbal explanations/briefings.
- Verbal feedback.
- Discussions and question and answer sessions

Don't like:

- Reading to learn

They tend to be quite talkative and use language such as "That sounds good"

Kinaesthetic Learners: Learning through doing

They like:

- Learning through touch and movement
- To 'have a go' and see what happens
- Imitation and practice

They don't like:

- Formal lessons with long explanations or hand-outs
- Waiting to have a go

This group make up quite a small proportion of the population. They may stand a little too close for comfort when talking with you or may put a hand on your shoulder.

Although they are keen to have a go, they may not really understand what they are required to do: be prepared for trial-and-error learning.

By ensuring our sessions include visual, auditory and kinaesthetic elements, to satisfy these three preferences, we should be able to create a learning environment with

something for everyone. If you recall the make up of a coaching model such as EDICTS you can see that these models are designed to ensure you cover various learning styles.

Once we have received information, we need to process it in order for us to learn. In the same way that we have a preference for absorbing information, we also tend to have a preference for how we learn from this information.

Processing information

Just as people have a tendency towards left or right handedness, which influences how they tackle manual tasks, many people have a particular learning style which influences how they approach mental tasks.

The way people process the received information can be broken down into 4 groups:

- Activists
- Reflectors
- Theorists
- Pragmatists

Activists

I'll try anything once. They involve themselves fully in new experiences and are very enthusiastic about new learning opportunities. They tend to act first and consider the consequences later and tend to tackle problems by brainstorming. They are very active always looking for excitement and thrive on challenge and new experiences. Can be bored by implementation or consolidation.

They may learn best from self-discovery, learning by doing or trial and error. They will appreciate flexible approaches to learning and generally dislike highly structured approaches or activities that require them to take a passive role.

Reflectors

I'd like time to think about this. They like to ponder experiences and produce observations from different perspectives. They tend to collect data and consider it before reaching conclusions, leading to delay in feedback on issues. They listen to others before making their own point. They may learn best from situations that allow time to research and review what is happening. They like to stand back from events and observe and learn by listening and sharing ideas with others. They may dislike working to deadlines or having to take immediate action or produce results without much time for planning.

Theorists

How does this fit? They look to make sense of everything, pondering and adapting observations into logical and perhaps complex theories. They tend to think through problems step-by-step. They like analysis, synthesis and a tidy rational scheme of things. Theorists can feel uncomfortable with subjective judgements, ambiguity and lateral thinking. They may learn best from activities that allow time to integrate observations into theories. They generally like to work independently and normally dislike situations that involve considering feelings or emotions. They dislike those situations, which they consider to be 'shallow'.

Pragmatists

How can I apply this in practice? They tend to think that if it works it's good. They are willing to try out new ideas, theories and techniques to see if they work in practice. They like to get on with things and act quickly and confidently on ideas that attract them. They can be impatient with open -ended discussions.

They may learn best from activities that have clear practical value and that allow ideas and approaches to be tested in practical settings. They will generally like workshop and laboratory teaching methods and will dislike situations where learning is not directly related to an immediate purpose or obvious relevance.

Comfort, Stretch and Panic Zones

The various elements mentioned so far rely on us adapting to the students' needs. We have no control over what type of learner a student is, only on how we adjust our behaviour to match their needs. One area that we can change within in a student is their emotional state. In simple terms we need to be aware of where our student is mentally. Whilst we may find a passage in heavy weather exhilarating, a student may find it terrifying, learning nothing or worse still being put off for life.

We can view the student's state in one of three zones: The Comfort Zone, The Stretch Zone and the Panic Zone.

The Comfort Zone is where we the student feels comfortable. It tends to be the activity they like doing and are reasonably good at (at least in their own mind!). Although they like being here, it is not the place for them to learn.

To develop, they need to be pushed into the Stretch Zone. In the stretch zone students are slightly outside their comfort zone and are being challenged, but with a realistic prospect of success. Judging how much we are stretching students is an important art for instructors. Get it right and you build confidence and improve ability. Get it wrong and you risk putting the student into the Panic Zone.

The Panic Zone is all consuming; and learning is not on the agenda. Once in the Panic Zone it is difficult to get a student out of it. It can destroy confidence and affect skills that were once in the comfort zone.



Good training moves the student between the Comfort and Stretch Zones, avoiding Panic at all costs. It's easy to see that heavy weather sailing may be exhilarating for one but frightening for another, but it is often at a much lower level that people edge into the Panic Zone.

One RYA Training Centres had a complaint from a student who was furious after booking a Competent Crew course for himself and his wife, only to find himself on a boat with two Dayskipper candidates. Based on his understanding of the world, a Competent Crew

course would only involve Competent Crew students. Most formal teaching does not mix levels. To make matters worse the instructor gave the two Competent Crew students attempts at all the Dayskipper tasks. Despite being well meant, this pushed them out of their comfort zone and straight into panic. They were not ready for this and already felt they had been put on a Dayskipper course despite clearly wanting a Competent Crew course.

After a little explanation about how mixed abilities on courses worked and with the instructor ensuring he was alert to their panic zone all were happy.

With different students the same instructor may well have received glowing reports for the course for pushing them a little further than the course required, but in this case the students were not ready.

Differentiating between each student's needs is important, and ensuring that beginners and advanced students get a fair share of your attention is crucial if we are to successfully deliver and re-enforce learning.

Tips for Reinforcing Learning

- *Always put new techniques into context – understanding is helped if you see the ‘big picture’.*
- *The average person can deal with approximately seven chunks of information – don’t overload them.*
- *People remember the beginning and end, but often miss the middle – keep demonstrations and explanations short and structured.*
- *Keep information memorable – use unusual, funny or unexpected ways to illustrate your teaching.*
- *Use a range of methods to teach important skills in order to cater for your students’ range of learning styles – i.e. explaining, showing a video, visualizing, reading, looking at pictures etc.*
- *Ensure that new skills become well-established with plenty of practice and reinforcement.*
- *Focus your students on what they should do, rather than what they should not do, or they might end up doing the very opposite to what they should!*

Acquiring a new skill: The four stages of competence

When looking at learning new practical skills or techniques, there are four stages that learners typically go through. They may pass through them rapidly or slowly, but everybody will pass through them. Having an idea of where a student is in the progression will help identify what they require from you as an instructor.

The first stage: Unconscious Incompetence

The student is unaware (Unconscious) that they are unable to do something (Incompetence): they don't know what they don't know. In this stage the student has no idea that there is a skills gap, this state can exist equally:

1. in a new-comer to the activity who genuinely has a 'beginners mind' and has not yet experienced any of the techniques or skills required to claim competence or;
2. in a 'experienced' student with a mis-guided sense that what they are doing is great!

A baby happily playing where they are on a floor, without any concept of moving elsewhere to play is in this state – "I'm happy with what I do and I don't need to learn anything else". A student in this mind-set is not interested in learning, because they cannot see that it applies to them.



The second stage: Conscious Incompetence



The student recognises there is a skills gap, and that they want to close the gap. They are aware of what they don't know. For some this adds clarity, others find it daunting and frustrating. In general student need to have entered this stage to be receptive to your training. A baby realises that walking becomes an option - a goal is recognised and they begin the process of learning to walk.

The third stage: Conscious Competence

Students are becoming competent but still have to think about what they are doing and how they do it. Following simple sequences will be useful at this stage. Students in this stage will tend to need more coaching. They know how to do it and can pull it off when they concentrate. Refining their technique and moving the skill towards an automated process is how they will progress. The baby's got it! At least most of the time, practice will make perfect.



The fourth stage: Unconscious Competence

Tasks can be completed with very little conscious thought. Things flow and are effortless. The baby walks without any conscious effort, leaving the brain to find new challenges in the quest for improvement. In many

ways this is mastery, although people can slip from this level back to Conscious Competence if they do not carry out the technique often enough. This is skills fade.

Feedback and Debriefing

As an instructor, you may be tricked into thinking that your main purpose is to instruct; the temptation being to constantly introduce and demonstrate new skills. In actual fact, given all the mediums available to the learner – videos, books, forums, the instructor earns their pay by offering constructive feedback. A student can research a certain skill, watch videos or discuss techniques in online forums, but they can't easily self-diagnose when the skill proves difficult to master on their own.

To deliver constructive feedback, the instructor must become a skilled observer. All instructors want their students to achieve success. However, once a task has been set, avoid the temptation to constantly correct: allow the student to have a go unhindered. This will give you a good opportunity to observe how much of your

Top tip: Only step in if it is a question of safety.

teaching has hit the mark.

Observation skills

Remembering that the point of your session is to teach a student a new skill, or hone their existing skills, you need to be in a good position to see everything. A skilled observer looks at the whole situation, critically analysing the information. It is important to use more than just the sense of sight. As experienced skippers, we position a vessel effortlessly; we are in tune with key indicators from our body. Do the revs sound too high for this proximity to the pontoon? Feeling the wind coming from that direction, we know whether to speed up or slow down. We must try to convey to our students the sense of noticing slight changes in trim or balance so that they can start to recognise signs other than visual ones: the feeling of having slightly borne away or pin-pointing when you've started to plane.

During the practice phase, make sure you are in the best position to observe the whole situation (keep an eye outside of the boat) and know what key points you are looking for.

Take in the big picture:

- Has the student acknowledged traffic/hazards in the vicinity?
- Are they comfortable and smooth at the helm?
- Is there anything they are doing that, if corrected, would make things more fluid?
- Is it safe?
- Does the student achieve the objective?
- Was everybody briefed and did each person understand what role they were to play?

If the student demonstrates something you were not expecting, remain flexible enough to recognise an equally valid method and give feedback on that. At the end of the task,

before delivering your feedback, take a moment to prioritise. Think: safety first then skill acquisition. Any points that relate to safety must be addressed. Consider which key point would have the most significant positive effect when corrected; it may be that it addresses a number of your points in one go.

To start with, you may wish to take notes to jog your memory and help deliver more accurate feedback. These notes may also come in handy at the end of day and end of course review.

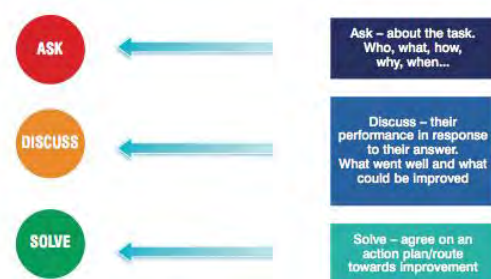
Delivering feedback

If we're not careful, feedback can sometimes turn into a monologue. Solutions which are generated by the student are much more likely to be acted upon than those prescribed by the instructor. Feedback should take the form of a conversation, with the student doing most of the talking. Think of it in terms of a radio communication. You need to let go of the transmit button!

For various reasons, from how well the student slept last night; to how windy it is; to whether they are feeling hungry, cold or unsafe, the average person can take on between 2 and 7 pieces of information at any one time. With this in mind, try to limit the number of points you wish your students to remember to a maximum of three. At the end of the feedback conversation, the student should be able to summarise what went well and which areas they need to concentrate on for their next attempt. On average we retain just 25-50% of what we hear, so we need to use a variety of methods to engage the student in taking ownership of the feedback process. There are plenty of feedback models to experiment with to find one that suits your style of delivery. However, knowing what message you want the student to take away is the key to success.

Top tip: Knowing what message you want the student to take away is the key to success.

Using Questions: The Traffic Light



Using questions to elicit feedback from a student works really well, if you ask the right question! Be wary of half-using questioning - by asking something to start the conversation off and then launching into a monologue.

Use questions to get the student to think through their actions, however remember "Pose; Pause; Pounce". Give students time to realise you are posing a

question; think about what they know of the subject and then formulate and deliver the answer.

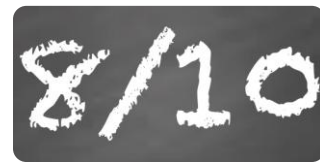
If a student gets wind that you may crack first and answer the question yourself, they sometime just wait it out. Asking questions in a way that students feel comfortable enough to answer takes time to master. If no response is forthcoming, it is probably because the question is not clear enough.

When using questions in your teaching, try to think of it as a supportive and friendly way of initiating a learning conversation. It is good to think before you ask, 'will my question get a yes/no response, or do I stand a chance of eliciting more information from the learners'. It might be that you're considering coming alongside for the first time. Think about what would make you feel comfortable enough to contribute; "so we'd like to come alongside, we've spoken to the marina office and they've allocated us that berth. Now before we head on over, what should we think about?" By using this kind of open question, you will encourage participation, every answer is valid, and you can tease further thoughts from your students.

Be wary of asking closed questions which can only result in a yes or no answer, as the student is either right or wrong and it leaves little by way of conversation. Students may be put off answering as they may worry about feeling foolish for giving the wrong answer.

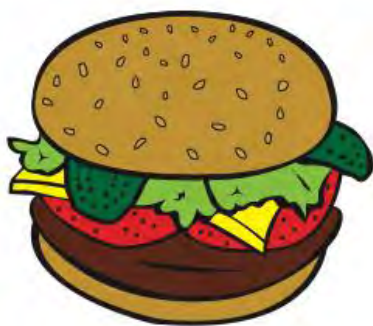
Score out of 10

Another useful technique is to ask the student to score their performance in the task out of 10 (at the same time, decide what you score you would give them). Their answer can sometimes offer a real insight into how confident they are feeling. Their answer can be a good starting point for the conversation.



Even if you don't ask the student to score their manoeuvre out of ten it can be a helpful reference point for you when delivering your feedback. Make sure that the tone of your feedback reflects how well you thought it went; if it was an 8/10, make sure that most of what you pick out is the good stuff!

The Praise Burger



This is known under varying names, but regardless of the name the point is that a de-brief should be rounded in its content. Starting with a well done, re-enforcing what went well can break the ice.

Follow this with the 'meat' – where and how to improve before closing on a positive note.

The hair-dryer

For some students, the gentle approach of the above methods may not work – they just want to be told. There are any number of reasons, including national culture or simply personal style, why a student will not appreciate a soft, inclusive approach. If you recognise the impatience of a student just wanting the answer then the hair-dryer is for you.

This is simply delivering the news without trying to guide the student to the same conclusion as you. Having said this, it is important that you verify they understand and agree. Although this is more direct, it should still take into account the feelings of the student and overall be a positive and constructive experience

Individual Debriefs throughout the course

Regardless of the techniques you use for de-briefing students after each practical session, and there isn't one best way, it is also important to keep the students informed about their progress throughout the course. Taking the time to speak to the students individually at the end of each day pays dividends at the end of the course.

Try to keep the daily debriefs fairly short and ensure that you deal with any problems identified during the day as they arise. Think about where to have your chat. The general content should be a appraisal of progress so far, summary of where to focus the attention during the next day or rest of the course and an indicator of where they are on track or not. Be honest, but make sure you leave the possibility of success open, it may take individual students a while to “get it”, but when they do they may well surprise you. Telling a student at the end of day one of a five-day course they will not pass by the end of the course will not be well received. Telling them that we have a lot of work to do in X, Y or Z to be in with a chance will be more welcome. If, however, half-way through the course it is clear that they are unlikely to complete the whole syllabus successfully then they need to be advised of this. The end result should not be a surprise.

A significant part of the Instructor Course is taken up with developing de-briefing techniques.

Pulling it all together: Plan - Do – Review:

A key to success is the Plan- Do Review cycle. This can apply at the higher level of a whole course or at the lower level of an individual session. You start with a plan - your best estimate of how you will deliver the training. You deliver the plan, following it as closely as you can, amending as required. Once done you review the whole process to see what went well, what didn't and how you might improve the plan.

The table below gives an overview of how Plan-Do-Review affects all elements of delivering the RYA training scheme. This will be covered in more detail during your Instructor Course.

Plan – Do – Review: How it may look throughout a course

	Individual Session	For you	For the student
Plan	<p>What are the key points I want to get across in this session?</p> <p>Does the student have the necessary pre-skills or knowledge for this session?</p> <p>Do you have the necessary stream, wind, depth or boat to do this session?</p>	<p>Have a broad plan of the whole course in terms of the general order of delivery and the locations required to do this.</p> <p>Have a more detailed plan for the next 24-48 hours.</p>	<p>At the start of the course give an overview of what course they are on: “A dayskipper is....” “We assume you know....” “We will be doing...”</p>
Do	<p>Deliver the session around whatever coaching model you choose. Be flexible enough to change if it isn’t working.</p>	<p>Deliver each day in line with your plan, keeping an eye open for learning opportunities such as Colreg examples.</p>	<p>Deliver your training whilst observing the students progress.</p>
Review	<p>Did the student retain the key points I wanted to get across? Why did I need to change the way I delivered this?</p>	<p>At the end of each day review how well you are progressing along the syllabus and whether you are on track.</p> <p>Be honest about the success and failures: did I estimate the timings well? Did I miss any key points?</p>	<p>In addition to feedback after particular sessions the student requires an end of day de-brief each day. Highlight what was covered, what went well and where they need to focus.</p> <p>A mid-course debrief should indicate the likelihood of completing the whole course successfully by the end. Be wary of giving this debrief too early just because they had a bad day.</p> <p>At the end of the course give them guidance on their next steps.</p>