



Adapting courses to meet your customer's needs

Current lifestyles and commitments make it hard for many of our current or potential customers to commit to taking courses, especially when they are run over one or two weekends or are a week long. When surveyed, course length and scheduling are just some of the highlighted barriers to participating in sailing for either the first time or as a more regular participant.

So how can we meet the needs of our customers who have demanding life styles and increasing work commitments.....

1. Breaking up the courses

Breaking courses into 'bite size chunks' allows for more flexible programming, helping us to change and therefore attract higher numbers onto courses and also recruit more new sailors and windsurfers into club membership.

Shorter, clinic style sessions, also focus both the instructor and student on the specific aim therefore improving the quality and outcomes of the session.

Breaking up the beginner's end of the market into smaller chunks enables the possibility of running sessions over a few hours, such as evening sessions in the summer that people can attend after work – a fantastic alternative to going to the gym!!

Start Sailing or Windsurfing

The basic teaching methods for both dinghy sailing and windsurfing work well as an incremental learning system and there is no need for modification. However there is no requirement to deliver this as one whole consecutive course.

Try breaking down the course into 3hr sessions. Depending on the market you are trying to encourage these could be in the evening after work or during the day once the children have been taken to school. Combine similar, complementary elements together, which provide a sense of achievement at the end of each session, such as:

1. Introduction to personal and sailing equipment; rigging and launching and basic boat controls
2. Tacking, sailing to windward and a basic look at the 5 essentials

Although at this level the session order is very important to the learning process and needs to be maintained, there can be great flexibility in the number of sessions you run the courses over to ensure you are meeting the demands of your students. Shorter sessions mean reduced risk of 'information overload' for students. A full day of learning a new skill is often too much for students, and performance can be seen to drop off as they tire.



Progressing skills

Once the basics have been taught and students move on to further courses such as Level 2 or intermediate, greater flexibility in the programming is possible. Teaching these elements can be looked at in different ways, broken down and offered as a succession of 2 or 3hr sessions opening up the scheduling options.

With both sports, there are core skills that need to be taught, such as boat/board handling, rigging and reefing, launching and landings, and controlling your speed.

Then, learning from the Windsurfing Scheme, there are other parts of the syllabus which can be covered in a clinic approach. Larger groups of skills, such as:

- Seamanship type skills, Start Racing, Coastal sailing skills

Or smaller clinics:

- Boat setup and reefing
- Introduction or progression of the Five essentials/Fastfwd
- Gybing
- Launching and landing
- Improved Tacking
- Harness Work.....the list goes on!

2. Course programming and logistics

It's all well and good suggesting all these adaptations, but how do we actually programme for it.....?

At the beginner level, complete attendance of scheduled sessions would be required, due to the incremental nature of the Method. Therefore fixed date courses or pre-booked sessions would be a necessity. Group learning also develops the social bond which would encourage further participation after the course has finished!

As discussed earlier, level 2 or Intermediate, offers more flexibility with the order in which the syllabus is covered. Clinics enable you to look at the specifics of certain skills required by the syllabus, with people attending as many as they wish, those complete the required modules gain their certificate.

Taking it further, continuous level 2 dinghy/intermediate windsurfing sessions could be run the length of the summer months (similar to a gym sessions, where attendance may be irregular), enabling students to drop in and out until they have completed the syllabus and attained the required level. For some students this may mean they will exceed the minimum in terms of attendance and skill however they are in a safe and fun learning environment.

This approach would demand good record keeping of each student's progress. Ideally the same course leader would deliver the sessions to build a rapport with the students.



Covering the theory sessions may be a challenge if not all of the course students attend all of the time, but not one that can't be overcome. Solutions could include covering the theory as modules on a rotational basis, publicised in advance and delivered more than once (Week 1 – Meteorology; Week 2 – Clothing and Equipment; Week 3 - Sea Sailing etc).

3. Further Coaching

The same approach can be applied to Level 3/intermediate or advanced windsurfing. Providing 'time on the water courses' with tasters of what the intermediate and advanced syllabus has to offer. Both the windsurfing and dinghy scheme have a fairly open syllabus, lending itself well to the 'gym session' model explored above.

Running clinics of the advanced modules is also a beneficial route, once students have completed their previous levels, they could move on to these, gaining a taster or continuing to progress their skills.

- Beachstarting progressing to waterstarting
- Tacking
- Gybing
- Spinnaker work – hoist and drop
- Trapeze work
- Basic rig tuning etc.

4. Packing the flexible course

Other sessions that have been successfully tried at clubs with the aim of keeping those new to the sport participating include:

- [Over 50's sailing club - Sessions specifically targeting a group.](#)
- [Ladies mid-week sailing group - An example of a social session where the activity is going for a sail.](#)
- [Sportivate - The aim would be to engage students from 14 to 25 years old](#) to participate in a 6 week sailing or windsurfing program to achieve an RYA level 1 certificate followed by regular participation through weekly club sessions and therefore fitting the criteria for Sportivate funding.
- Mid-week courses - Some students preferred to take five weekdays in order to learn to sail, rather than lose 2 weekends/4 consecutive Saturdays.
- Get Back into Sailing sessions – An early season series of sessions aimed at building confidence after a winter break.
- Supervised Sailing – A series of summer evening sessions where those who recently completed a beginners course can come sailing under the supervision of an instructor. Once again this is aimed at building confidence.
- Can Sail Can't Race – An extended Start Racing course that not only includes race training sessions but also gets people on the start line for club racing initially under instruction with after race de-briefs in the bar

All of the above have the shared aims of building confidence on the water and the formation of friendships among those who may be new to a sailing club.

Social group formation is a key factor that encourages continued participation and the uptake of club memberships.



5. Give a little extra/using social media

Instructors can further assist their students by using social media (see www.rya.org.uk/go/gsm). This can be used to provide a focus to the teaching coming up where links to learning resources can be uploaded.

A range of short RYA clips from tacking and gybing to the five essentials are on YouTube (further details [here](#)). Links can be sent out to students in email groups or via Facebook to encourage discussion or banter with clips taken of the students. E.g. Did you see Fred fall out of his boat at last week's session? Have a look at this clip for tomorrow's session so we can all practice saving him:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/RYA1875#p/u/4/LGZrK3tVCFk>

Such banter will also stimulate the formation of social groups (as will having the bar open for the end of session de-brief).

6. Research your market

One size does not fit all clubs and all students. 'Bite Sized' courses may or may not be the answer to boosting numbers and demand. What is important is that clubs and centres recognise the need to have an open mind and are flexible in what they offer in order to attract students on to courses.