



Structuring a Practice

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Some material in this module is adapted from the LTR and Fundamental course modules “The Practice Plan”, “Skill & Drill Progression”, and “Building a Safe Environment”.

Structuring a Practice – Evaluation Criteria
Correctly identifies the needs of the athlete group
Selects appropriate drills to meet the need and sequences them correctly to build the skill
Does due diligence checking the weather and preparing an emergency action plan
Ensures appropriate equipment is ready for the session (i.e. marks & coach boat ready)
Communicates goals of the session through a BRIEF briefing
Sets up first drill quickly
Manages subsequent drills effectively, adapting when necessary
Controls group and time effectively to accomplish goals
Provides opportunities for athletes to cool down, stretch, hydrate and eat, de-rig and change
Runs an organized and interactive debrief, keeping athletes accountable to their own goals

Introduction

This module is broken into three parts – preliminary set-up, the planning of an on-water practice and the implementation of the practice plan.

Preliminary set-up will cover:

- Safety and Equipment

Practice Planning will cover:

- Identifying the needs of your group
- Selecting appropriate drill progressions to match those needs [Drills Resource](#)

Practice Delivery will cover:

- Brief Briefings
- On-water drill management and adaptation
- Debriefs

By the end of this module, coaches will be able to use the steps outlined in these two sections to run safe and efficient practice sessions where athletes can develop skills. As always, personal style variations

are encouraged to be developed as coaches gain more experience in the field. On-water feedback and debriefs are detailed further in the “Performance Analysis and Feedback” Module.

Preliminary Set-up for on-water Practices

Preliminary Set-up covers safety and equipment issues. As the saying goes “Safety First!”, so before you get started on planning your practice you need to make sure all aspects of safety are covered and your equipment is prepared.

Emergency Action Plan (EAP)

To begin with, a standard EAP needs to be developed at the beginning of the season with other coaches and club staff, and reviewed periodically throughout the season. An EAP is a plan designed by coaches to assist them in responding to emergency situations in a quick, responsible and clear-headed way. Details for EAP planning can be found in the “*Developing an EAP*” document at the end of this module.

Coach Boat Safety Equipment and Training

In addition to the EAP, safety must also be addressed daily. Your coaching equipment MUST be of the proper type and in good working order – race coaches are usually further offshore or off club premises and as a result the race coach needs dependable and effective equipment to provide an adequate measure of safety. At a minimum:

- The coach boat needs to be of proper type (minimum 4.2 meters, 25hp, and preferably a 5.0-5.9m RIB with 40-60hp and a center jockey console), with the legally required safety gear, and in excellent working condition. The coach boat should be clean and fully fuelled the night before or if necessary, early in the a.m. before athletes arrive.
- The coach boat should have a dry and regularly maintained first aid kit
- The coach needs to have a reliable way of communicating with shore (Cell phone or VHF)
- The coach needs to have up-to-date CYA coach insurance, First Aid and Boat Rescue certifications

- The coach needs to have a sharp and regularly maintained knife, and if working with wire-rigged boats – wire cutters that will easily cut through small diameter wire (not electrical wire cutters!!!). Test the wire cutters to see if they actually will cut through 3/16” wire in under 10 seconds, and keep them well oiled.



Athletes’ Sailboat Equipment

It’s all well and good for the coach boat to be ready, but athletes’ sailboats in poor condition or poorly rigged also causes serious safety hazards that can overwhelm even the most prepared coach. Coaches should spend a focused amount of time at the beginning of the season to make sure athlete’s sailboats

are in good shape and adequately rigged, and need to supervise a once per week equipment check throughout the season.

Weather Check

Another daily component of safety is the weather check. Coaches need to know predicted wind direction and strength, temperature and u.v. ratings, as well any severe weather patterns in the local area. Knowing the weather helps coaches properly select and sequence drills, in addition to helping coaches prepare to call a day off and go with an alternate on-shore plan if the weather is unsafe or simply too light. Get the complete weather picture at the beginning of every coaching day.

Coach-to-Athlete Ratios

The CYA recommends that there are no more than 6 sailboats for every 1 coach boat. Of course one underpowered, undersized, or poorly maintained coach boat is no match for 6 poorly rigged beginner 420s in a line squall. Adjust coach to athlete ratios as equipment and skill level dictate. Whenever possible work with a second coach in your boat or another boat – this will allow one coach to deal with any problems while the other continues to manage the group.

Additional Measures of Safety

Often, and especially in windy conditions, the skill level of your sailors will not match the weather conditions for the day. In these circumstances the coach needs to be creative to get athletes practicing out on the water and pushing their limits, but still needs to maintain a safe environment. Coaches planning to take their groups offshore should also be informing at least one other person of their intended destination and schedule.

Look for signs of fatigue or aggression in sailors, and end the session early if necessary. This is especially relevant in extreme cold or heat conditions. A tired, cold, or overheating athlete is a significant safety concern. Coaches who allow for regular periods for athletes to rest, rehydrate, and apply/remove clothing and sunscreen can help avoid physical breakdowns that lead to safety concerns.

Other Coaching Equipment

Whistle, stopwatch, wet notes, wind stick, compass, marks, lifejacket and wet weather gear are all standard equipment for race coaches to carry on water. Whiteboard and markers are standard on-land tools.

Safety Review

Having safety aspects covered and the proper equipment ready to go saves coaches time on the water (especially in an emergency), and allows them to operate professionally. Coach equipment should be reviewed regularly to ensure functionality. With safety and equipment covered, coaches can now plan and deliver a practice.

Practice Planning

Practice Planning involves identifying the needs of your group and selecting appropriate drill progressions to match those needs.

Step 1: Identifying needs and goals

The first step to planning a practice is to figure out what skill level your athletes are at and what skill set you should be working on today to advance that level.

Identify athlete skill level NEEDS

When learning a skill, athletes progress through predictable stages. They are first introduced to the skill in the INITIATION stage, acquire the major components of a skill in the correct order in the ACQUISITION stage, consolidate rhythm and timing elements of the skill in the CONSOLIDATION stage, refine the consistency of the skill in all wind conditions in the REFINEMENT stage, and finally create their own variations of the skill to suit their own style and unique situations in the CREATIVE VARIATION stage.

Knowing the skill level of each of your athletes, as well as the group as a whole is the starting point to any practice planning as the on-water drills you choose and adaptations you need to make will need to match. There are a number of ways to get information on athlete skill levels and future skill needs.

See the CYA's "*Stages of Skill Development*" and "*Activity Planning Guidelines for Various Stages of Skill Development*" documents for more detailed information on identifying and planning for different skill levels.

Identify GOALS for the practice session

When you have an idea of your athletes' needs, select one to two (maximum) skill sets that the group will work on for the day. Limiting the number of skill sets to work on helps the group focus on really improving those one or two skills significantly (as opposed to trying to focus on many skills and significantly improving none). These skill sets can also be referred to as 'themes' or 'focus' of the day, and can easily be stated as 'Goals' with a little tweaking to make them S.M.A.R.T. More on goal setting and accountability can be found in the Program Management module.

Step 2: Select appropriate drill progressions to match identified needs and goals

Once the goals/skill sets of the day have been identified, the coach needs to select a series of drills that will allow athletes to practice those goals/skill sets.

- Start this step by breaking down the skill into its key component parts. For example, starting is a hugely complex skill and can be broken down into holding position, low speed manoeuvring, acceleration, time and distance to line, starting on different parts of the line, defending your position...and that's even before you vary wind conditions, line bias, and fleet size! Each of these

skills can in turn be broken down further into THEIR component parts. Know what you are looking for as a coach for each one of the components.

- Once key component parts have been identified, sequence them accordingly. Using our starting example above, athletes need to know how to hold position and accelerate before they even get close to a start line or other boats.
- Then select appropriate drills that match your athletes' needs, sequenced in your on-water session from most basic to the complete skill. In our starting example, with a beginner group in light air, you might start with a collector, do a free acceleration drill upwind, follow the leader downwind (a different skill area, but necessary to get back to the laid marks), then practice starts on a short course.

Practice Delivery

Delivering a practice involves running a **brief** briefing, managing and adapting drills on water, and conducting a debrief on-land after returning to shore.

Step 3: Brief Briefings

The first five letters in 'Briefing' spell BRIEF, which should give coaches a clue as to how long briefings should be (5-10 minutes maximum). It's not a time to teach new skills – that would be a lesson. The goal of briefings is to let the group know what drills they are going to do in the session so that the athletes can get on the water as soon as possible.

A Briefing is conducted as follows:

- Begin by reviewing the skills your session will cover
- Explain the drills, clearly drawing them out when possible. Explain the goal of each and the key points you will be looking for as a coach. If you are going to use hand or sound signals at any point, make sure you explain those as well.
- Review drills with athletes and check with them for understanding ("any questions?")
- Do a safety and weather review
- Give a firm time and location to meet on water

As always, there is room for personal style, but the above five points should be covered somewhere in the briefing. Try to be dressed and look ready to go during the briefing. This will indicate to the sailors that you are prepared for the water session and eager to get on the water as quickly as possible.

Step 4: On-water drill management and adaptation

Once the briefing has finished, it's time to get out on the water and execute your practice plan. Below are some best practices to add to your personal style:

- Your coach boat and marks should be ready to go before the briefing so it should be easy to get on-water and to the meeting point before or as your athletes do.
- Set up the collector or first drill quickly.
- Give your athletes time to become accustomed to the drill before giving feedback.
- Keep transitions between drills smooth.
- Develop a standard set of audio or visual signals that your athletes are taught in advance. This helps especially in 'open' drills and when it's too windy to hear.
- Be prepared to adapt your practice plan as weather conditions and coachable opportunities change all the time.
- Allow times for athletes to rest, give and receive feedback, hydrate, eat, change clothes, or apply sunscreen.
- Keep it fun!

Step 5: Debriefs and feedback

At the end of your session, get the athletes ashore and indicate clearly what time and in which location the debrief will be held. In most circumstances it's advisable to give the athletes time to de-rig and change – athletes often lose track of time here and need a reminder 5 minutes out. During the debrief, hydration and eating should be encouraged to promote recovery, as should a cool-down and static stretch either before or after the debrief – see the *"Sport Science"* Module and NCCP *"Prevention and Recovery"* Module for more information on recovery. Complete information on delivering debriefs and feedback can be found in the *"Performance Analysis and Feedback"* module.

Conclusion

This module has covered the planning of a practice, the delivery of an on-water practice, and the safety and equipment set-up that needs to be present before the coach pushes off from the dock. With the addition of their own personal style the coach is now prepared to structure their own practice.

Appendix A: Developing an Emergency Action Plan (EAP)

From the CYA Fundamental Course Guide

An Emergency Action Plan (EAP) is a plan designed by coaches to assist them in responding to emergency situations. The idea behind having such a plan prepared in advance is that it will help you respond in a responsible and clear-headed way if an emergency occurs.

An EAP should be prepared for the facility or site where you normally hold practices and for any facility or site where you regularly host competitions. For away competitions, ask the host team or host facility for a copy of their EAP.

An EAP can be simple or elaborate and should cover the following items:

1. Designate in advance who is in charge in the event of an emergency (this may very well be you).
2. Have a cell phone with you and make sure the battery is fully charged. If this is not possible, find out exactly where a telephone that you can use is located. Have spare change in the event you need to use a pay phone.
3. Have emergency telephone numbers with you (facility manager, fire, police, ambulance) as well as contact numbers (parents/guardians, next of kin, family doctor) for the participants.
4. Have on hand a medical profile for each participant, so that this information can be provided to emergency medical personnel. Include in this profile a signed consent from the parent/guardian to authorize medical treatment in an emergency.
5. Prepare directions to provide to Emergency Medical Services (EMS) so that they may reach the site as rapidly as possible. You may want to include information such as the closest major intersection, one way streets, or major landmarks. Include the 911 locator number if applicable.
6. Have a first aid kit accessible and properly stocked at all times and keep your first aid training current. A list of suggested contents for a first aid kit is included in the reference material at the end of this section.
7. Designate in advance a “call person” (the person who makes contact with medical authorities and otherwise assists the person in charge). Be sure that your call person can give emergency vehicles precise instructions to reach your facility or site.

When an injury occurs, an EAP should be activated immediately if the injured person:

- is not breathing
- does not have a pulse
- is bleeding profusely
- has impaired consciousness
- has injured the back, neck or head
- has a visible major trauma to a limb