



Sailing to Win  
La voile pour la victoire



Sailing for Life  
La voile pour la vie

## Development Coach Course Tactics and Strategy Module

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<b>Tactics and Strategy Module – Evaluation Criteria</b>
Understands the factors of basic tactical success at the Youth level – Start, Speed, Stay out of trouble
Sequences core, tactical and strategic skills accordingly
Place tactics and strategy into perspective relative to other skill sets
Understands and can communicate RRS Fundamental Rules, Part 2, Race Course set-up, and Protests/Appeals.
Sources expert tactical/strategic input when the answer is not known.

Tactics/Strategy may be one of the most controversial topic in sailing. There are many books on sailing tactics and strategy, even more opinions on the subject, and even a few myths floating around. As a result, the beginner (and even experienced) racer and coach often overcomplicate their approach to tactics and strategy.

This tactics and strategy module uses best practice from experienced Canadian Olympic sailors and coaches to provide a simplified approach Canadian sailing coaches can use with their athletes. The module will cover:

- Taking a simpler approach to Tactics & Strategy
- The difference between tactics and strategy
- Sequencing skills when teaching tactics and strategy

At the end of this module, Development Coach candidates will be able to provide a simple and effective tactical/strategic message to their athletes and will be able to work tactical/strategic skills into overall sailing skills development.

## Strategy and Tactics: Keeping it Simple

There are many books on sailing tactics and strategy, even more opinions on the subject, and even a few myths floating around. As a result, the beginner (and even experienced) racer and coach often overcomplicate their approach to tactics and strategy.

### *Sailing really is simple*

The truth when it comes to tactics and strategy is that sailing is actually pretty straightforward, with many successful sailors following a very simple approach: **Get a good start, sail fast, and stay out of trouble.**

This section of the CYA Development Coach Course will explain why keeping it simple is the best approach when teaching your athletes about tactics and strategy.

### ***It can't be that simple?***

It is, especially at the Youth level. Imagine a typical race – when the start gun goes, likely 25% of the fleet will have trouble getting off the line, and an additional 25% will likely lose their lane within the first couple of minutes. If an athlete practiced nothing at all but starting and boat speed (particularly in tight lanes with other boats around), they would have a great chance at being in the top half of the fleet with the race barely having started. And as is so often the case with sailing, the “rich get richer” – now out in front of the fleet the leaders have the cleanest wind, can see puffs and shifts clearer, and have more options to tack when they like. With good boat speed, sailors in this position will extend, extend extend....as long as they stay out of trouble.

### ***Staying out of trouble***

So how do racers get into trouble? Some common tactical mistakes that get people into “trouble” include:

- Not paying attention to the fleet (splitting from them)
- Tacking too often (reducing boat speed)
- Getting into ‘little battles’ with one other boat and forgetting the fleet or where they are on the racecourse (like when a leeward boat tries to pinch out a windward boat for five minutes, with both boats losing boat speed and perhaps even going well over the layline)
- Getting involved in Rules incidents (regardless of whether one is in the right or wrong)
- Sailing in dirty air

Staying “out of trouble” would therefore imply that sailors:

- ✓ Stay in contact with the fleet
- ✓ Reduce the amount of tacks/gybes - only tack/gybe when it makes sense to do so
- ✓ Pay attention to the fleet and position on the racecourse
- ✓ Sail CLEAN – anticipate Rules situations and avoid entanglements whenever possible, even when in the right
- ✓ Sail CLEAN – anticipate traffic situations and position for the cleanest air

## Tactics vs. Strategy: What's the difference?

Strategy is a sailor's overall plan on how they wish to sail the race (or a leg of the course), in the absence of other boats. To make this plan they may take into account wind/weather, wave/current and local geographic features.

Tactics refers to how the sailor will execute this plan in relation to the other boats in the fleet and primarily involves how the sailor positions themselves relative to the fleet, relative to another boat to establish a favoured position, and the Racing Rules of Sailing (RRS).

## Teaching Tactics & Strategy

A common situation on race teams is for coaches to focus on the details of the advanced skills, the material which may seem newer, more interesting, or 'flashy' to the athletes, but which actually accounts for a relatively small amount of the athlete's success in any race, or more likely is inapplicable because the athlete has not developed skills needed to apply this new information. A good example of this would be teaching leeward mark rounding rules before the athlete can regularly execute good mark rounding technique (controlled boat handling, exiting with boat speed).

The list below outlines a suggested progression for coaches with Youth or beginner sail racers to follow when teaching tactics and strategy. Although there will naturally be overlap throughout the steps, we suggest progressing to the next skill once your athletes truly understand and can demonstrate the previous skill to a satisfactory level. This progression assumes the sailor has achieved basic level of boat handling and control.

Teach 'Core' skills first:

- 1) Boat speed for Light and Medium winds (and Heavy air when available)
- 2) How to read puffs & lulls, lifts & headers on the water
- 3) Laylines
- 4) How to identify areas of clean air, wind shadows and lee-bows on upwinds and downwinds
- 5) Boat speed in tight lanes
- 6) Starting Skills, including how to bail out from bad starts quickly

Teach basic Tactical & Strategic skills second:

- 7) Fleet strategy basics:
  - a. Nobody really know what the wind is going to do, but having a plan is better than no plan at all as it guides your decision making with respect to the fleet
- 8) Fleet tactics basics:
  - a. Never Split away from the fleet – If you think a side is favoured you only need to be to that side of the fleet.
  - b. Spend your lead to ensure a win – If you are ahead you should cover the boats rather than trying to extend your lead.
  - c. If you get a bad start, get back into the race, don't feel like you need to separate to get it all back at once.
- 9) Basic Rules – RRS Part 2...and sailing them CLEAN

For most beginner racers (year 1 or those that would compete at a local/regional level) – skills 1-6 should be the focus of training and racing, in addition to a basic understanding of RRS Part 2 (skill 9).

For intermediate racers (years 2-3 or those that might compete at the national level) – skills 1-6 should still be the main focus, at times shifting focus during practice races and regattas to skills 7-9 if the athlete racer can execute Core skills 1-6 on a regular basis.

## More Advanced Skills

For more advanced racers, the coach should still focus on skills 1-9, and use their discretion in providing additional information & training on the items below:

Teach Tactical & Strategic advanced skills last:

10) In-depth use of RRS (one on one tactical battles, protests & redress)

11) Strategic extras:

- i. Tide/current effects on mark roundings, starts & laylines (unless you race/train in a predominantly tidal or current-based venue, in which case you will need to add this much earlier).
- ii. Weather forecasting
- iii. Playing the fleet under different strategic scenarios

12) Understanding the importance of being prepared and keeping it simple at regattas

## Conclusion

Remember, the truth when it comes to tactics and strategy is that sailing is actually pretty straightforward, with many successful sailors following a very simple approach: **Get a good start, sail fast, and stay out of trouble.**

As a coach, if you focus the majority of your attention on the 'Core' skills and encourage your sailors to stay out of trouble and stick with the fleet, you will be giving your athletes the best chance of success.

## Presenting the Tactics & Strategy Module at the Development Coach Course

Tactics & Strategy Module: Schedule of Activities

(Total allotted time 90mins, during evening session at Development Coach Course)

Task	Topic	Approximate Time
1	Group Activity – How is Tactics/Strategy taught currently?	20mins
2	Distribution and discussion of Resource Material	40mins
3	Group Activity – Drills for practicing tactics & strategy	25mins
4	Wrap up – Reinforcement of Key Points	5mins
		90mins

Tactics & Strategy: Task 1

20mins

Suggested Exercises	Resources
<p><b>How is Tactics &amp; Strategy currently taught in your program?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Split candidates into groups of 3-4. Direct them to talk about how they have been taught to use tactics and strategy in their home environments (or how they currently teach the subject as coaches).</li> <li>2. Have each group answer some or all of the following questions:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Which tactical/strategic advice regularly works for them or their athletes.</li> <li>b. Which tactical/strategic advice has proven to be confusing or an outright myth.</li> <li>c. What are the key tactical/strategic elements to teach beginner sailors in their first and second seasons of racing.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Have each group discuss their answers.</li> </ol> <p><i>Another option is to provide a list of the 12 suggested tactical/strategic skills as presented in the Resource Guide, and have each group rank each skill in the order they think should be taught.</i></p> <p><i>Another option would be to provide a list of the 12 suggested tactical/strategic skills as presented in the resource guide, assign each one of these skills to the group, and have each group explain their relevance to tactics and strategy.</i></p>	<p>Whiteboard</p> <p>Whiteboard markers</p>

Tactics & Strategy: Task 2  
40mins

Suggested Exercises	Resources
<p><b>Distribution &amp; Discussion of DCC Tactics/Strategy Resource Material</b> Review the Development Coach Course Tactics &amp; Strategy Resource Material with the group. A group discussion format is recommended, as is distributing the handout after the discussion . Be sure to encourage questions from the group.</p>	<p>Whiteboard</p> <p>Whiteboard markers</p> <p>Resource Material Handouts</p>

Tactics & Strategy: Task 3  
25mins

Suggested Exercises	Resources
<p><b>Drills for practicing Tactics &amp; Strategy</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Split candidates into groups of 2-3. From the resource material direct each group to select one of the 12 skills and develop/describe a drill (or if time permits a drill progression) for that skill</li> <li>2. Have each group present their drill (or drill progression). If time permits have others suggest alternative drills for the same skill that have worked for them in the past.</li> </ol>	<p>Whiteboard</p> <p>Whiteboard markers</p>

Tactics & Strategy: Task 4  
5mins

Suggested Exercises	Resources
<p><b>Wrap-up and Reinforcement of the Tactics &amp; Strategy Module</b> After ensuring there are no outstanding questions, it is important to wrap up the Tactics &amp; Strategy Module by emphasizing the simple approach in its teaching – that <b><i>focusing on good starting technique, good boat speed, and staying out of trouble</i></b> are keys to Youth sailors' success.</p>	