



Notes on coaching session brief and debrief

How to structure your briefing effectively

The key to a good briefing is to keep it short and simple, but also convey all the information needed to hit the water and have a good train. This can be a very challenging line to walk, and many coaches struggle to get the right balance. On this page, I hope to give you a good idea of how to use the drills found on this website effectively, so that your sailors can live their best life.

1. The best number of drills to use.

Depending on the length of your sessions and the skill of your sailors, I recommend between 2-5 drills per lesson. For Learn to Sail, I find it is best to use 3 drills, whereas with a Race session, it can be beneficial to use 4-5.

2. Start with a collector or warm-up.

It is important that sailors get a chance to warm up their muscles before doing the main set or drill. This gets them in the right mindset for learning and you'll get the best sailing out of them. I usually like my warm up to be a collector, so that all sailors are in the same place and it is easy to give them instructions for the next drill.

3. The main drill or set

Each lesson should have a theme. The important thing to remember about kids (and even adults most of the time) is that they can't take in 15 things they should be working on at once. The maximum number of things to work on for the lesson of the day should be 3. Don't expect them to take every single one on board, often they will only remember one. The main drill should relate to this theme, and that theme should be the one thing that you emphasize strongly on and off the water. For example, your theme could be telltales, and your main drill is [Tacking on the Whistle](#). This gives your sailors a long upwind to watch their telltales, and also gives them the opportunity to watch their telltales on both tacks, simulating a long upwind in a race.

You will notice that many of the drills on this site have multiple teaching points, and again I stress only use max 2-3 of these teaching points per lesson. If you try and do a drill and use all the teaching points at once, it can lead to information overload and confusion in sailors. If you are doing more than one main drill, make sure that it uses the same teaching points, but in a different way. This helps drive the message home for a lot of sailors and gives variation. Variation is important because everyone learns differently, so one drill might make one sailor shine, but another drill works far better for a few others.

4. The Warm Down

At the end of the lesson, it is a good idea to have a bit of fun. I often use the warm down to play a game with the sailors, especially in Learn to Sail or Green Fleet, but with the race team as well. This lets sailors relax and enjoy the thrill of sailing, as well as use what they've learned in a different way. You can also end the lesson with a few fun races, or a long sail to a point and back to shore.



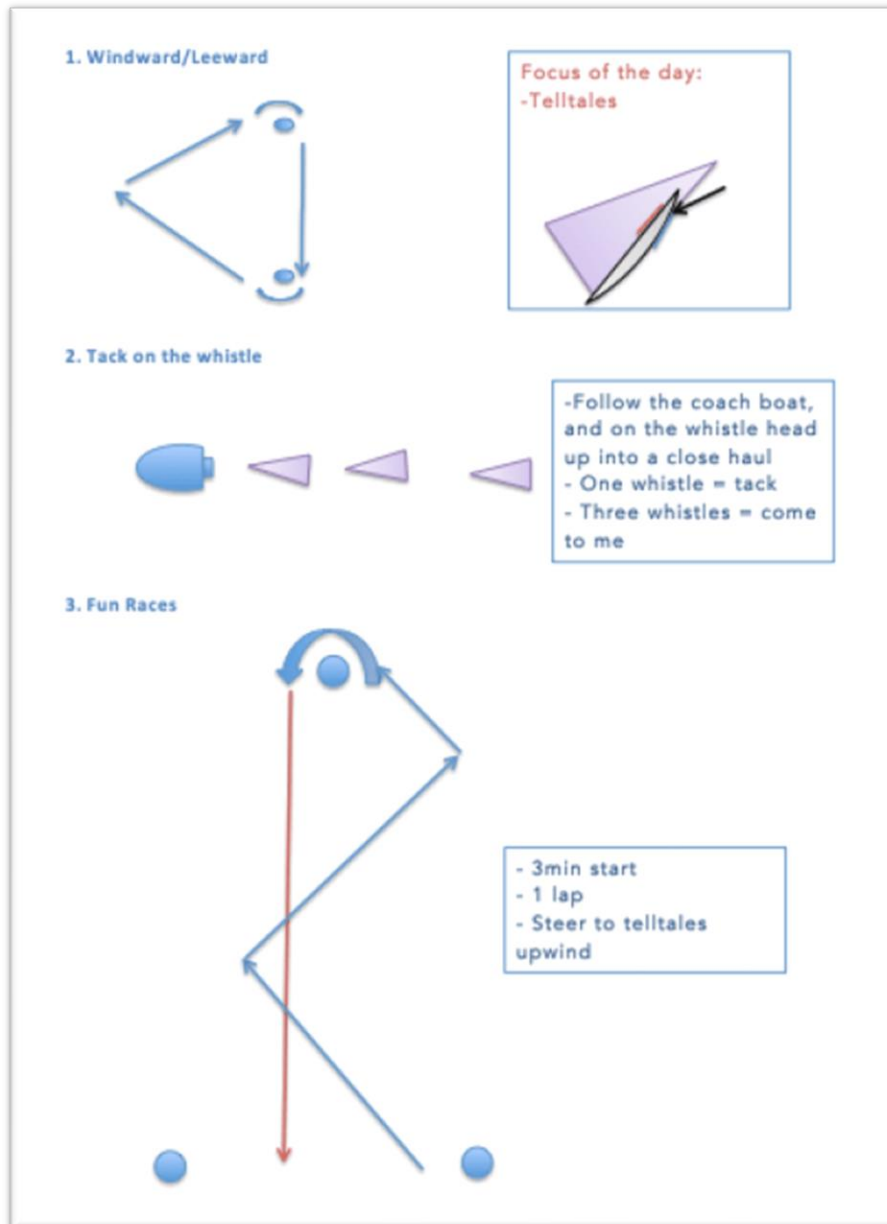
One thing that works great is if you write up the whole lesson plan on the whiteboard except the warm down, and during the briefing ask the sailors what they want to do. This can often make it more fun for them, and also gives you a good idea of what their favourite activities are as a group. This can help you plan lessons in the future that they will enjoy and learn from.

5. How long should the Briefing be?

5-10 minutes, no more than 15 is the short answer. Keep in mind that sailors can only retain so much information and can only sit still in a classroom setting for so long, especially if this is an after school session.

6. What should be on the whiteboard for the briefing?

Visual aids are crucial for sailors during a briefing. I have seen coaches deliver briefings with no writing or pictures before, and I think it is very important to remember that very few people are auditory learners. In a briefing, you want to cover as many ways of learning as possible in order to get through to as many sailors as possible. This means you should have diagrams with titles, key points/lesson themes written down, and also explain them orally. Here is an example of what a good lesson on a whiteboard might look like:



During the briefing, you might add to your drawings, showing perhaps where the telltales are on the sail with a drawing of a sail, or in the second drill showing arrows indicating sailors heading up to a close haul. You also want to explain steering to the telltales versus adjusting your sail to the telltales. Now that you've covered everything, kept it short, but also kept it informative, sailors are ready to hit the water!

If you follow these simple steps to creating an effective briefing, you will find that you get the most out of your sailors and also of your time on the water. Enjoy!

How to Run an Effective De-Brief

A good de-brief is an essential part of a good training session. It gives both sailors and coaches a chance to reflect on their training, and it gives you a chance to give good, specific feedback to



help the sailors improve. However if not done properly, a de-brief can also leave sailors feeling upset or not wanting to come back. We want to avoid this as much as possible, so here are some tips to make your de-brief so that you leave sailors wanting more.

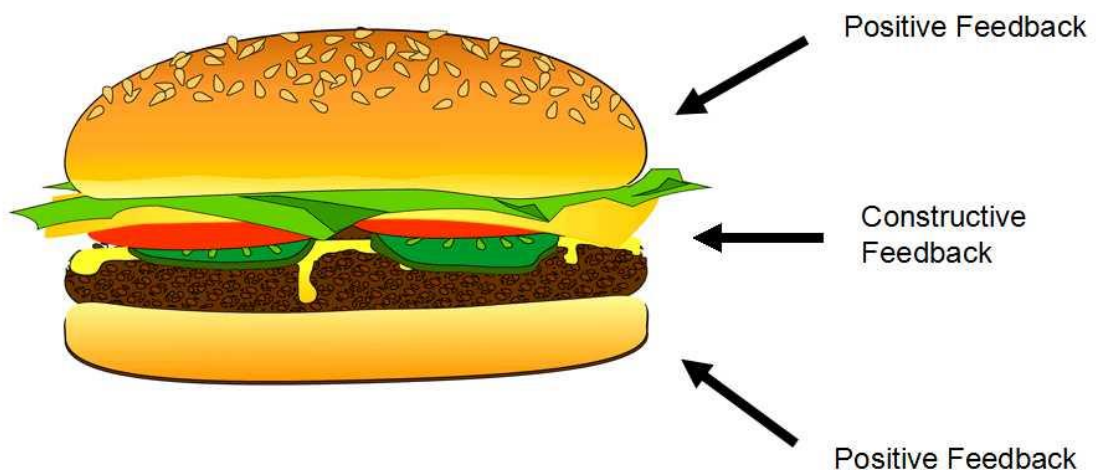
1. Always give a mixture of positive and negative feedback.

I like to use the feedback hamburger in a debrief. Start with positive feedback, say something that the whole group did well on and explain why. Then you can give constructive criticism, either to specific people or to the group as a whole. Make sure that the criticism is phrased as “you can improve on...” or “I want you to work on...” *rather* than “you did badly on...”.

This is vitally important. Our word choice sets the stage for how sailors will respond to our feedback. If you start your criticism with “You guys really sucked at ... today”, then sailors are more likely to feel angry, upset, or badly about themselves leaving the debrief, and are more likely to not work on it or they even may not come back.

Finally, give more positive feedback. You can end off perhaps with something they improved on that session, or something that they really did well. It is important to leave them with the sense that they accomplished something today and that their efforts are paying off.

Feedback Burger



#workwithchantell

2. Get as many sailors to talk during the de-brief as you can.



By this, I do not mean chaotic talking over you or excited chatter. Something I often do during my briefing is write down a reflection question on the whiteboard. I get each sailor to answer the question. Even if they copy another sailor's answer, remember that that's okay and that every response is valid. Sometimes sailors don't want to share their real response so they'll copy someone else's answer, but that doesn't mean that they are not reflecting on their session.

Example reflection questions:

- What did you do well today? What do you want to improve on?
- What was one moment of triumph you had today?
- What's one thing you learned today?

Other questions might be more focused on the lesson itself, such as:

- How did you know you were on the start line?
- How often did you check your sail/telltales today? Was that more, less, or the right amount?
- How did your roll tacks go today?

3. Specific is terrific

During your de-brief, you want to be giving specific feedback to sailors. However, this doesn't mean that you should be telling sailors every single thing that they could do better and launch into a 45minute diatribe on the subject. While you're on the water or while sailors are de-rigging, you should be sorting out the most important things to mention, and perhaps finding one or two things that the whole group needs to work on. While it is good to give specific feedback to individual sailors, other sailors don't want to sit and listen to you giving feedback to everyone individually. Do that on the water.

Specific for the group is the best policy. For example, "I noticed today that everyone did an excellent job looking at the telltales and adjusting to them frequently. This will really help us succeed on our upwind legs, so great job all. I think something that we could still all work on is our boat balance, I noticed that many of you were heeling to windward in the light breeze. Why does that make us go slower?" Then after the answer, explain in a bit more detail, preferably with a drawing on the whiteboard.

A common vague de-brief scenario we all want to avoid goes something like this, "Great job guys, solid effort today. Your starts weren't great, but your upwinds were alright and we were heeling too much, so that's a thing. Any questions? Sweet see you next time."

This is an example of a far too vague and short briefing, the opposite end of the spectrum is far too long and specific. We want to be finding a medium in between, the golden short and specific. Which brings me to our next point...

4. How long should your de-brief be?

Just like your briefing, your de-brief should be between 5-15minutes. If you have an older group of race team members, you can go up as far as 30min. However I normally aim for



the 10 minute mark. I find that 10 minutes is enough to convey the feedback hamburger, get every sailor talking, and have them leaving happy. Remember if your de-brief is too long and you start to get glassy eyes and vacant expressions, you may have sailors leaving annoyed and bored and not wanting to come back.

5. How much should I use the whiteboard while de-briefing?

The short answer is as much as possible. Remember that everyone learns differently and it is important to have visual aids as well as questions written down for the readers, and explanations for the auditory learning.

If you follow these 5 tips for an effective briefing, then you can be sure to see fantastic results from your sailors, and you will have a better understanding of them as well.