

# The CSC “Great Sailing Lesson” Project

## Survey Responses & Analysis

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### I. Executive Summary

Cal Sailing Club is a unique place to learn sailing, not just because of the Bay’s famously intimidating conditions, but because our community sailing model brings together an unusually diverse group of students, instructors, experience levels, and reasons for sailing. CSC’s success for more than 55 years has been in large part attributable to high-quality lessons from volunteer instructors who not only help new sailors meet these formidable conditions, but also welcome them into the sailing community.

I conducted the “Great Sailing Lesson” survey to get a **student’s-eye view** of what makes a great sailing lesson for this unique club. The survey ran during the 2025 sailing season and elicited 102 responses totalling 1616 individual data points. This report walks through the survey **results and observations** in [Part III](#) (with **student narrative responses** in [Appendices A, B, and C](#)) and concludes with **tangible takeaways for instructors** in [Part IV](#).

#### What makes a great sailing lesson

Student feedback consistently underscored the dual role of great sailing instructors of both **teaching sailing concepts and skills** and **welcoming new sailors** by modeling a positive, calm, inclusive mindset. The survey responses indicate that above all other factors, CSC students will consider you a great sailing instructor if you:

- *Maintain a **positive attitude** toward your students and their learning, including showing **calm willingness to let them make mistakes***
- ***Explain concepts clearly and understandably in words***
- ***Be honest with students about their performance** at this stage of their development*

That’s it. Everything else is details. There are many more traits and techniques of great instructors, and putting these points into practice is a whole separate set of skills in addition to seamanship, but this three-point framework separates the essential from the merely beneficial.

## What the students said: Survey responses

The remarkably parallel responses to the **quantitative questions** (Q4 and Q5) provided the first key takeaway of the survey: Verbal explanation was rated the *least satisfactory part* of lessons and the *most desired trait* among instructors:

- The **lowest-satisfaction score** on the lesson satisfaction question (Q4) was for “I was able to understand the words and ideas the instructor was using”
- Similarly, the **highest-rated trait** for a great sailing instructor (Q5) was “Expresses themselves clearly and explains concepts well in words”.

Together, these results indicate that students don't just want a chaperone to sail with as they figure it out, they want a teacher that will help them understand sailing – the words, the concepts, the reasons why. For CSC in particular, with our non-curricular<sup>1</sup> format and variety of instructors, giving students **solid conceptual structure within a lesson** can help them self-coach and integrate learnings even when there are **substantial differences between lessons**. For instructors, this means keep talking, present ideas in different ways, and richly link each skill and concept to what they have learned and what they will learn next.

The responses to the **qualitative questions** (Q5, Q6, Q8, Q9, Q10; reproduced in full in Appendices A, B, and C) show that in addition to wanting to understand the sailing concepts, **students want to be understood**. Poor instructor interactions, when they happen, tend to be characterized by **instructor frustration** and perceived lack of care for the student's emotional and physical well-being.

*Had an instructor throw me right into tacking when I have never held the tiller in my life. Couldn't sail straight, let alone tack properly. **Instructor kept getting mad/frustrated at my lack of experience and perceived inability to learn. Meanwhile I was trying to just stay “alive”** and could hardly process anything. Ended my time at the controls with a severe whack from the boom across my face, **instructor didn't care.** (Q8)*

**Student frustration** was also evident in the responses, arising particularly when there was a mismatch between their desire for concrete feedback and their instructor's lack of specificity or structure.

*lack of explanation [sic], passion to teach, and overall knowledge left me feeling frustrated and **confused of what I was doing wrong** (Q8)*

*Some instructors **let Socratic method (or no answers, just questions coaching) slip into passive aggressiveness, which robs from feeling safe to learn.** Not on purpose, but easy to slip into if the instructor isn't thinking about it. (Q9)*

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<sup>1</sup> Non-curricular is the opposite of what almost all formal education is. We're used to education characterized by a set progression of lessons, where students have a consistent teacher that proceeds in order through a pre-planned sequence. At CSC we really, really don't do that, and probably never will.

Conversely, students gravitated above all toward instructors who projected emotional safety. **The adjective “calm” was the single most referenced positive trait** in Question 8 “What would make CSC dinghy lessons better?”

*More calm, kind, confident instructors*

*Patient, calm demeanor*

*Patience, humor, calm demeanor*

*Vetted instructors who want to explain concepts and teach, balance between being hands off and too hands on*

*Calm, positive, fun, knowledgeable, patient*

Even more so than expertise, students shared that they wanted an instructor who was in tune with their current level of understanding and what was challenging to them. As one student put it

*...in my opinion experienced instructors need it even more than recently joined juniors, because **they forget what its like to be learning sailing for the first time.***

These student impressions regarding empathy and emotional safety were reflected in the quantitative data. Student satisfaction with Physical safety and Emotional safety were both rated highly (Q4), but **physical safety was the highest-satisfaction item**, whereas **emotional safety was among the lowest-rated items** in terms of satisfaction (93% vs. 89%). This suggests that emotional safety is harder to achieve than physical safety, and may require more concerted effort to achieve.

*Depending on what instructor you get it sets the tone for how you leave at the end of the day - you're great or terrible at sailing, emotional highs and lows*

### **How to put it into practice: Practical Tips for Instructors**

It's no help to instructors to just say “be positive” or “explain clearly”: We need to model good teaching by operationalizing what that means and how to do it. Thus, [Part IV](#) provides **actionable suggestions for how to embody these traits during lessons.**

Collectively, the survey responses and the resulting guidance indicate that great sailing lessons for CSC students are rooted in the reasons they come to CSC in the first place: To **not just experience sailing but understand it**, and to do so in a **supportive, positive setting.**

**“** *If you get the culture right, most of the other stuff will take care of itself.* **”**

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## II. Why the “Great Sailing Lesson” Survey

The Club's non-curricular approach to education, informal as it is, is nonetheless explicit and based on a clear progression, with specific skills tested at each rating of Novice, Junior, and Senior. By contrast, **the Club's framework for growing teaching skills is very implicit and comparatively informal**. The informal, volunteer nature of instruction at CSC famously embraces a wide variation in teaching styles, while at the same time striving for consistency in providing a high quality experience for each student, every time.

To deliver on this goal without being over-prescriptive, we can adopt a **bottom-up approach**. That is, we can look to CSC students themselves to define what makes a great sailing lesson for them, and then suggest ways to fulfill those expectations. Many of the lessons from the data are self-evident after hearing what's working for the students, what's not, and what they need in order to be successful. Instructors can use this feedback to inform and develop their teaching style.

In other words, it's community sailing: We don't like telling people what to do, but we are passionate about bringing people in and helping our community improve.

### Survey by the Numbers

The “Great Sailing Lesson” survey was conducted during the summer sailing season of 2025, between May 24, 2025 and October 22, 2025. It consisted of a 10 question survey administered via Google Form. The students wanted to share: We received 102 responses, and the completion rate across all surveyed items was 88%, for a total of 1616 separate data points.<sup>2</sup>

Respondents were primarily students attending Saturday lessons and Fast Tracks. The week of the Women's Fast Track (July 28-August 1) had the most survey responses (16/102).<sup>3</sup>

The respondents were overwhelmingly unrated sailors (76%) within their first year of membership (59%).

Of the 15 responses to the optional last question inviting students to share demographic, cultural, or SOGI attributes, 5 out of 15 responses identified as female, 3 of 15 responses identified as persons of color, and 3 out of 15 responses as non-binary or queer.

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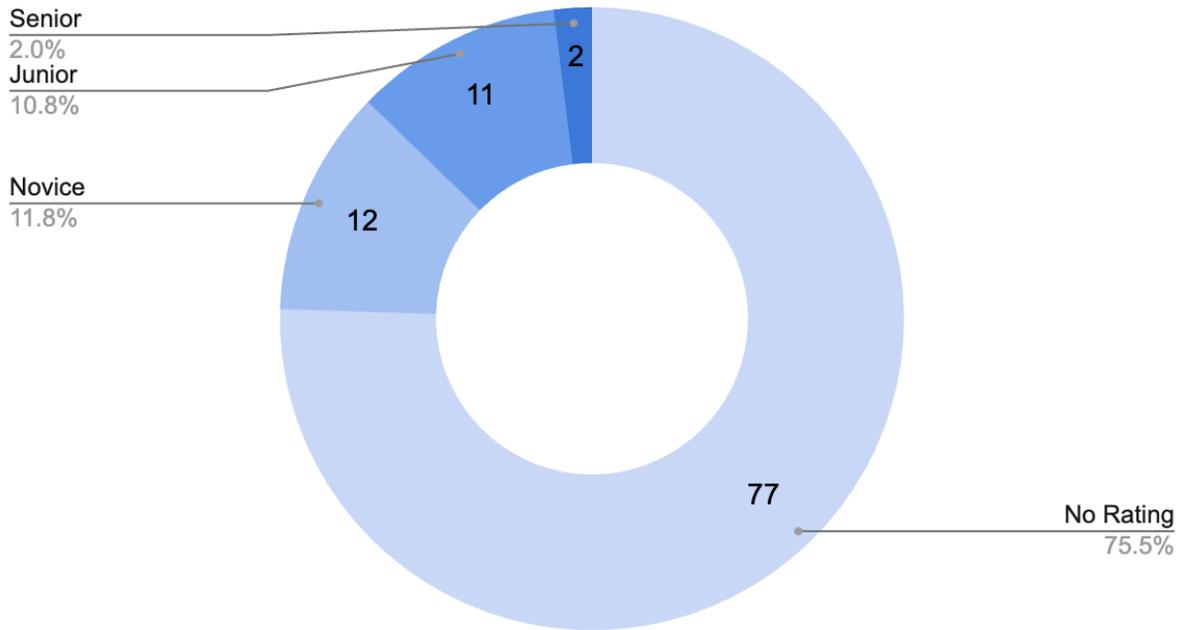
<sup>2</sup> The anonymous survey did not prohibit students from taking it more than once. However, the substantial growth that occurs over a student's first several lessons means that their perspective and needs can shift markedly. If someone felt like they needed to share to reflect the additional experience, I wanted that perspective, too.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Emma, Marley, and Alyssa for their support in helping ensure that the Women's Fast Track students had a chance to share their thoughts.

### III. Survey Results & Analysis

#### 1. What dinghy rating level are you?

What dinghy rating level are you?



#### Observations

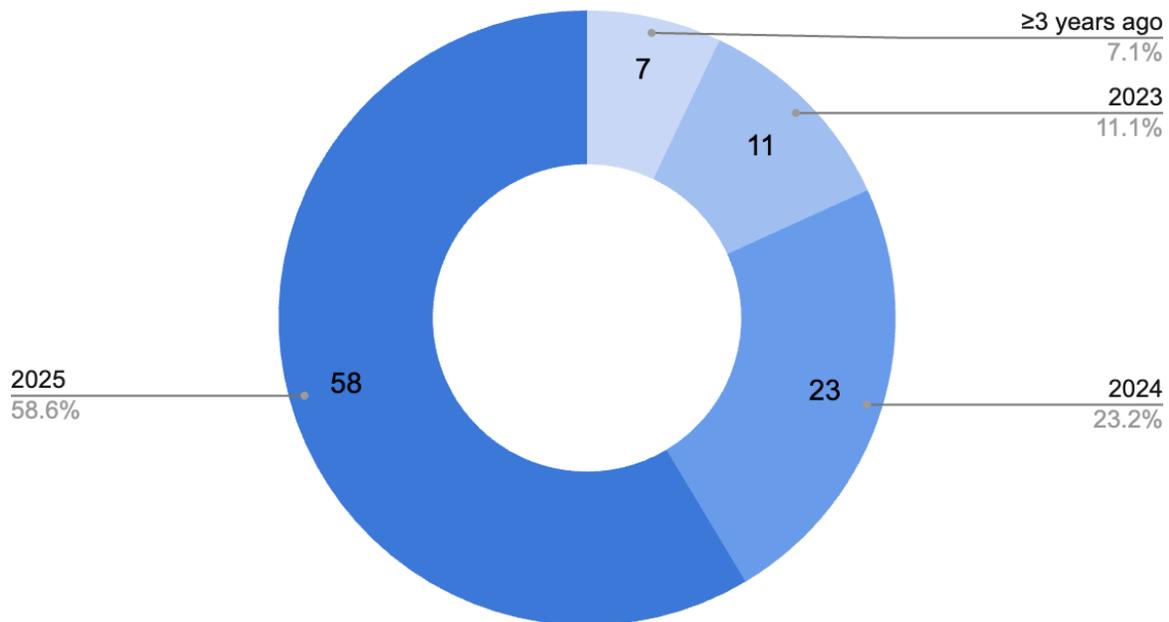
##### Lessons are the primary source of sailing access for new sailors

As expected, new sailors made up the vast majority of students attending lessons during the survey period, with 76% being unrated and therefore unable to check out a boat to practice on their own time. As a result, most students will have not had a chance to practice or even think of skills outside of lessons, which may have been a week ago at best, and perhaps longer.

For instructors, this means that every lesson should acknowledge that even regular attendees have likely had a full week to forget both concepts and muscle memory. You will help your students feel smarter and perform better if you recap terms, concepts, and skills that were learned previously, treating the gaps as an opportunity for “spaced repetition” to help solidify learning.

## 2. What year did you join CSC?

What year did you join CSC?



### Observations

#### Lessons are a key introduction to club culture

Well over half of the students surveyed in 2025 joined in 2025, meaning that they were in their first few months at the club. Instructors are likely to be the first club members that they spend any substantial time with, and also their first model of what to expect from CSC members. This makes instructors both ambassadors and role models for the club.

For instructors, this means being a welcoming presence is part of the role, even before teaching begins. **If this isn't your style, that's not necessarily a problem**, but it suggests you should **look for ways to work with more advanced students so you can focus more on your instructor role than your ambassador role**. Q6 revealed that some teaching styles that can be off-putting to new students – Socratic method, more passive teaching style – are more accepted by more advanced students.

Note, however, that **kindness, calmness, and inclusivity are expectations of all instructors**. Students of all skill levels report being turned off by *“more aggressive instructors”*, *“those who yell and/or micromanage”* and *“especially ones expressing biases against women and queer folks”*.

“ They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.  
 ~ Carl W. Buehner<sup>4</sup> ”

**Many students remain “No Rating” for more than a year**

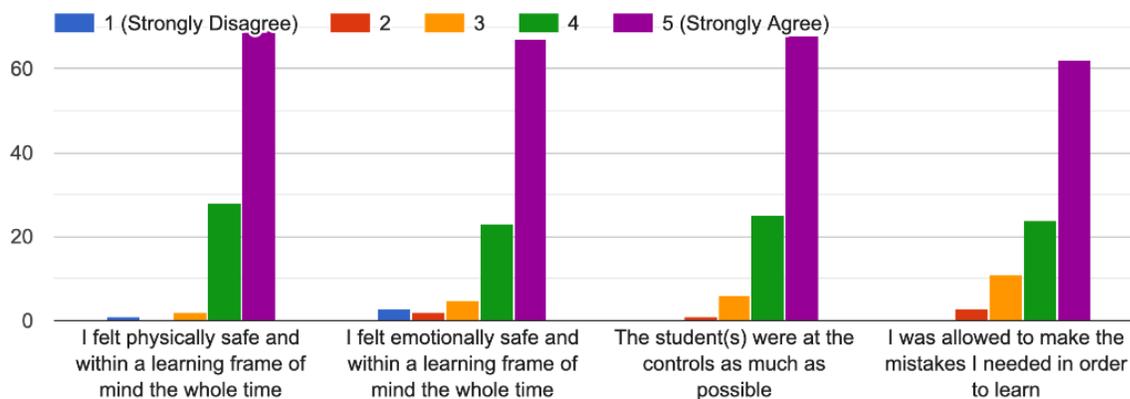
The samples showed that the percentage of the “No rating” students (76%) is greater than the percentage of students who joined in 2025 (59%), indicating that students can go a whole year without feeling competent and/or confident enough to take even a Novice test. This can result in stagnation, as students don’t have the ability to practice on their own and their tiller time is restricted to lessons.

For instructors, this suggests creating more access to testing and encouraging more students to test by explicitly telling them what they are ready for.

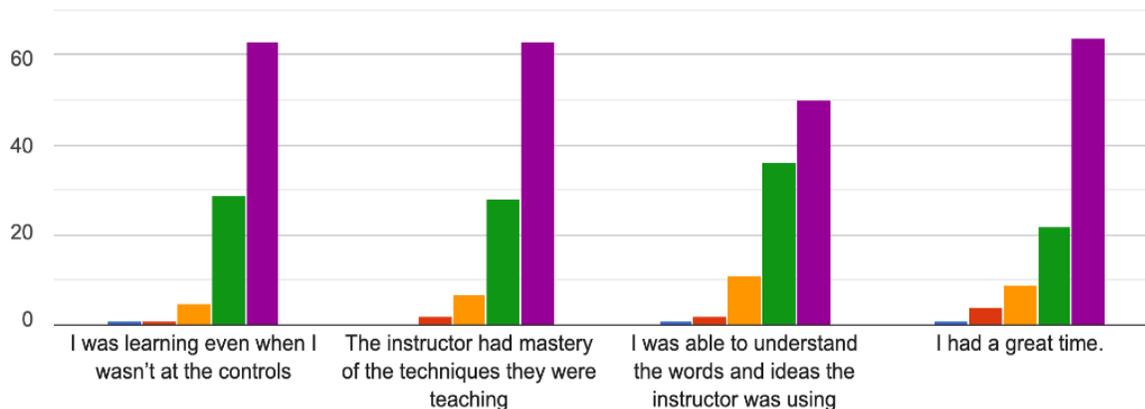
**3. When was your most recent dinghy lesson?**

This question was a methodological one, intended to ensure that the respondents were focused on a specific, recent sailing lesson so that they were providing recent, specific feedback. This was largely successful, as all but 5 responses identified a date during the survey range and therefore likely to be fresh in their mind.

**4. Thinking back to your most recent dinghy lesson at CSC, please rate the following**



<sup>4</sup> Nothing against Maya Angelou, who has some great lines, but she didn’t originate the sentiment or the formulation.



### Criteria with the Highest-Rated Satisfaction

- I felt physically safe and in a learning frame of mind the whole time (93%)
- The students were at the controls as much as possible (92.0%)
- I was learning even when I wasn't at the controls (90.7%)
- The instructor had mastery of the techniques they were teaching (90.4%)

### Criteria with the Lowest-Rated Satisfaction

- I felt emotionally safe and in a learning frame of mind the whole time (89.8%)
- I had a great time (89.4%)<sup>5</sup>
- I was allowed to make the mistakes I needed in order to learn (89%)
- Able to understand the words and ideas the instructor was using (86.4%)

This was one of the key questions of the survey and asked students to rate their satisfaction with several criteria of a successful lesson.<sup>6</sup> 100 of 102 respondents completed this question.

<sup>5</sup> The score for this item was affected by a single response from a self-reported "Senior" that completed no other questions other than to rate their assessment of "I had a great time" as "1 Strongly Disagree", resulting in a raw score of 88.8% for this item. With no other data associated with this entry, I have methodologically removed it as an outlier to avoid obscuring the signals from the more representative responses to this and the other questions, resulting in the listed score of 89.4%. This omission changes the ranking for this item by one, from 7th of 8 to 6th of 8.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the listed traits, the survey included the following note:

Note: A safe and respectful teaching environment are our top priorities, so we expect these from all instructors, in addition to the following traits.

This was intended to address the otherwise conspicuous non-inclusion of these fundamental expectations for instructors. Questions 9 and 10 were provided as freeform answers to catch any concerns with these topics, and one participant took the opportunity to share the following:

*"If 'A safe and respectful teaching environment are our top priorities, so we expect these from all instructors, in addition to the following traits' is the top priority, you should probably ask that question on the survey. I would probably have given low marks. I understand it's a balance, but you might also want a mechanism to collect feedback for instructors. Some instructors may be turning people off of the club."*

Unsurprisingly, the responses to all 8 traits were strongly positive, with even the lowest-scoring satisfaction rating receiving 4.3 out of 5 (86.4%). However, the relative distribution of the ratings provides useful insights into what it is that goes wrong when a student does *not* have a great sailing lesson.

## Observations

### Emotional safety is harder than physical safety

We can be proud that student's ratings for their sense of **physical safety** and **emotional safety** were both high, but the two were distinctly separate, with **physical safety being the highest-satisfaction item overall**, whereas **emotional safety was in the bottom half** (92.8% vs. 89.4%). This suggests that emotional safety requires a more deliberate effort to achieve than physical safety, and perhaps also that mismatches between instructor and student perceptions are more likely to go uncorrected.

### The hardest part of a lesson is conveying complicated concepts clearly

The lowest score on the satisfaction question was for **I was able to understand the words and ideas the instructor was using** (86.4%), which reflects not only the complexity of the sailing concepts, but also the immense amount of new vocabulary students are confronted with. After "lesson availability", the desire for "more and better explanation" was the single largest category of feedback to "What would make CSC lessons better?" (Q9), with students suggesting things like:

*More detailed explanation in advance of actually attempting to do the thing*

*More opportunity to discuss mechanics before attempting the skill*

*If more instructors took time to say things in a calm manor with no yelling, if the first way of explaining wasn't being understood - try an analogy or watering down the information instead of sailing jargon*

*Instructors ask the student to talk the instructor through the skill they will practice on land, before sailing. Ask the same question on land after the lesson. Also remind the new students about the online materials.*

*More explanation to get an intuition for whats going on with the boat (during tacking or even tightening sails)*

Here are some ways instructors can put this feedback into practice in their own teaching:

**Keep talking. Really!** Students will not understand a concept the first time you say it or the first way you say it. Both you and they *need* a lot of instruction time to achieve the repetition and variation needed for concepts, techniques, and vocabulary to stick. This means you need to

make full use of your instruction time. Keep talking!

A running commentary may not be everyone's natural style (instructor or student), but on balance, a steady stream of explanation and a mindset to **"teach to the whole boat"** simply gives students more chances to hear and become familiar with the topics, even when they're not hands on the tiller. Indeed, students may learn concepts *better* when they are not also attempting to drive, so in a sense **you are conducting two lessons at once: A hands-on coaching session for the driver, and a conceptual sailing theory lecture for the rest of the crew.**

**Go sailing with other instructors!** Hearing their explanations and cribbing key points, turns of phrase, and structure is a great way to build your own unique and memorable ways of conveying the information. It's not enough to show it or say it, you have to make it understandable and memorable. **Good artists copy, great artists steal.**

**Narrate and layer.** A key piece of feedback I received during a Fast Track was to explicitly give students the opportunity to talk through a skill before doing it, even when they already know the maneuver and are polishing it. One way to put this into a lesson, particularly when teaching a skill for the first time, is to follow a layered narration approach:

- 1) Instructor narrates while instructor (or other student) demonstrates it
- 2) Instructor narrates while student simulates it
- 3) Student narrates while student simulates it
- 4) Instructor narrates while student does it<sup>7</sup>

**"Self subtitle" by using correct terminology and layman's terms in the same sentence** such as by saying "port" and pointing left or reiterating "hike out; that means get your butt out over the water and sit on your thighs". Notice how this latter example pairs the term not just with a definition, but an expectation. Encourage students to stop you if they don't understand, and get them using terminology as soon as they are able. You are teaching a foreign language, often to people who are *already* operating in their second language. Be expressive and direct. **Think like an elementary school teacher, not a professor.**<sup>8</sup>

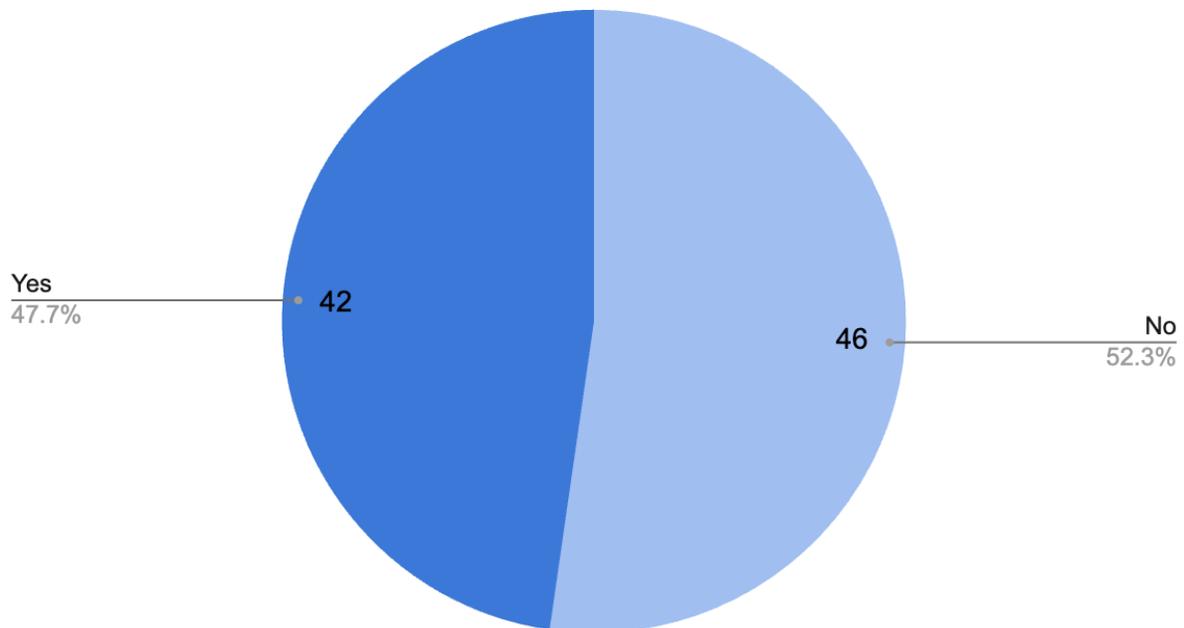
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<sup>7</sup> Having the instructor narrate during the performance phase ensures that the student is focusing on execution rather than recall.

<sup>8</sup> That doesn't mean you can't convey complex information (and you should!), but aim for [Dr. Tatiana Erukhimova](#) rather than [Ben Stein](#).

## 5. Have you ever sought out a particular instructor?

5. Have you ever sought out a particular instructor?



Most students did not report seeking out a particular instructor. (No 52%, Yes 48%). While many did respond with the name of an instructor they clicked with or sought out, the majority of students aligned with the comments “No, each instructor [has] provided a new perspective on sailing” and “No. I enjoy the mix of instructors.”

This is a perfectly acceptable outcome. CSC is not foremost a sailing school; we don’t have consistent instructors, nor students joining the club for a particular celebrity instructor. Although we don’t teach to a standardized curriculum and each instructor will invariably teach in their own way, individual instructors are playing their part well if they contribute toward a consistently positive experience.

### Students who did not report seeking out a particular instructor said:

- *No. I enjoy the mix of instructors*
- *No, each instructor [has] provided a new perspective on sailing*
- *I haven't. I am generally grateful fir whoever will teach me.*
- *Not before. I was just excited to get to be on the water with someone who could teach me.*

### Students who did report seeking out a particular instructor said:

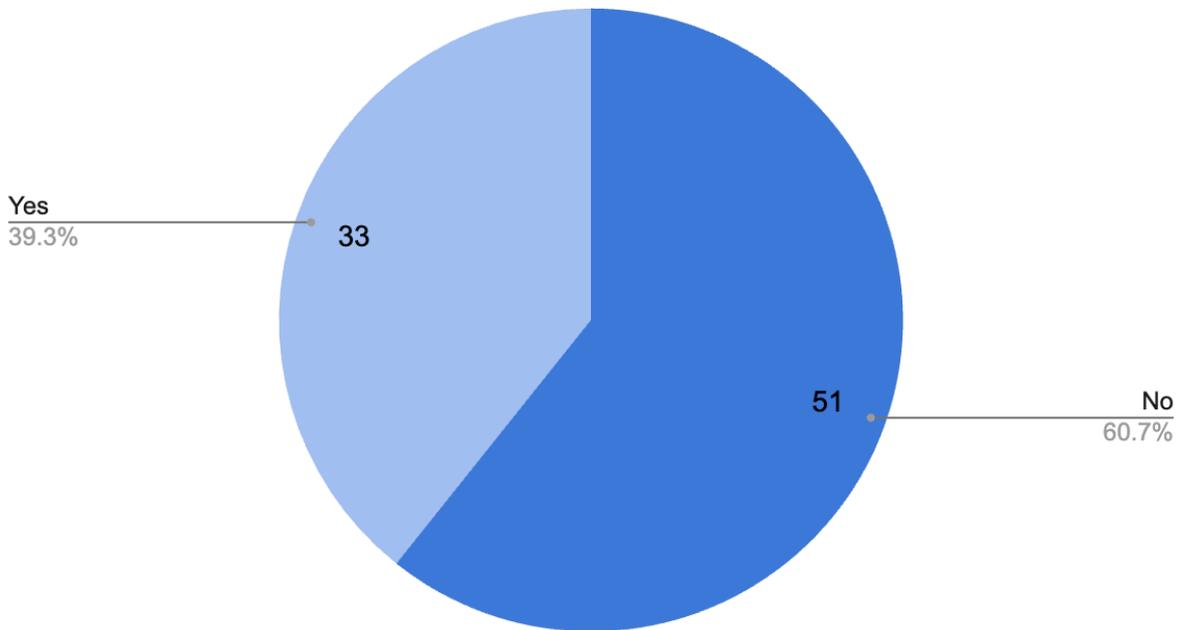
- *Yes, their teaching style, direct, patient and professional*

- Knowledgeable, safe enviro emotionally, demonstrates, fun
- I saw there were a few instructors that are passionate and you can see the love of teaching in how they instruct. I have been wishing I could be assigned to them one day, because they said we get the instructor that they assign us and we can't control it. So I just try to stand by their group and learn whenever I see them.

“ I’m just your instructor.  
Your teacher is out there. ”

## 6. Have you ever avoided a particular instructor?

Have you ever avoided a particular instructor?



This is what we want to avoid. The unfortunate reality is that a bad sailing lesson can do more harm for CSC and the student than a good sailing lesson does good. Fortunately, most students reported that they had not felt the need to avoid a particular instructor (No 61%, Yes 39%).

### Here's what the students said caused them to avoid an instructor:

- Those who yell and/or micromanage
- Yes, more aggressive instructors, especially ones expressing biases against women and queer folks
- Haven't had to actively do that, but would prefer to avoid a few (purely because I didn't think they are very good sailors/teachers)

- ...Instead of explaining what he was telling the other person in the boat what to he would just repeat it even though the other person didn't know the terms. **It got so bad he just started screaming 'what the fuck are you doing' over and over** instead of just taking control of the tiller and navigating us safely
- Micromanage, yells, impatient, short
- My instructor the first time **didn't say much** during the lesson. I had to ask questions and even then, the students were the one answering me. The lesson ended with me feeling like I didn't learn as much as I would have had if I had a different instructor. I saw others who were teaching and speaking to the students a lot, having them participate, etc., that I was listening to them instead of standing by my group. So the next time I was back, I said to myself, if I get this instructor again, I will ask for someone else.
- Had an instructor throw me right into tacking when I have never held the tiller in my life. Couldn't sail straight, let alone tack properly. **Instructor kept getting mad/frustrated at my lack of experience and perceived inability to learn. Meanwhile I was trying to just stay "alive" and could hardly process anything. Ended my time at the controls with a severe whack from the boom across my face, instructor didn't care.** (Q8)

## Observations

The responses show students were turned off when they **didn't receive the amount or clarity of explanation they expected**, and when they **perceived the instructor was aggressive toward them or frustrated with them**.

Developing explanations (and alternate explanations, and tertiary explanations) in order to reliably find a perspective that connects with students has a large amount of personal style that goes beyond this section, but [Part IV](#) provides many ideas and techniques to draw from.

By contrast, the skill of managing frustration (or at least the appearance of frustration), is more tractable and immediately necessary. Frustration is an inevitable part of learning difficult skills, both for the student and the instructor. Instructors who successfully manage both their and their students' frustration – avoiding yelling and the feeling of micromanaging – create a more relaxed and fertile learning environment. Here are some strategies for how to manage the unavoidable frustration when it begins to appear for both instructors and students:

### **Break the skill down small enough that success is assured**

If you or the student are getting frustrated, that may be a sign of having bitten off more than you can chew for this session. Refocus your collective goal so that it's understandable (have the student repeat it back) and achievable (tell them what success is and why you're resetting to that success criteria). This may be as simple as "Don't pinch for 10 seconds in a row" or "Don't fall over when tacking". Once that is achieved, congratulate them and collaborate on setting the next incremental goal.

### **Don't just tolerate mistakes, embrace them**

The student ask of “don't micromanage” means both give students room to complete and/or correct their mistakes, and also to approach mistakes as gifts and learning opportunities, rather than errors requiring critique. **Try counting to 10** (probably in your head, maybe not) or asking the student if they would change anything; both approaches give the student time to self-correct and involve them in the level-setting process.

If you detect frustration from yourself or the student, consider **explicitly thanking the student for demonstrating a key challenge**. Treat them like a co-instructor who is giving you the opportunity to focus on a difficult-to-teach fine point. This keeps it positive and demonstrates to everyone in the boat – student, instructor, crew – that your support is unconditional and not tied to their performance on a particular maneuver.

“ *The master weaver incorporates the mistakes of his students into the larger pattern.* ”  
~ *Sufi wisdom*

### **Consider whether errors might be a *misprioritization* rather than a *mistake***

Student frustration can be particularly acute when they feel they are being rebuked for something they were doing intentionally based on earlier feedback. You can build understanding and trust by **explicitly identifying the possible motivation behind the misprioritization and correcting both the understanding and the technique**. For example:

“Hey crew, you're doing such a good job releasing the jib before it backwinds that you're actually doing it too early. You're robbing her of power right when she needs it. Try it again but this time let it luff exactly once so she knows you're giving her every bit of power and the least possible drag.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Keep the stakes low**

Safety is paramount, and it's easy for instructors to get agitated, especially if safety becomes a factor during a lesson. Plan ahead to keep this tension out of the equation as much as possible.

- **Stay out of the Novice area** to ensure that students have room to learn to steer in a safe environment. Staying clear of windsurfers, swimmers, paddlers, and other boats avoids being put in the position of committing the cardinal sin of yelling or grabbing the tiller.
- Teach “**Helm's Alee**” early and often as an immediate action drill. This gives you an unambiguous way to communicate and ensure that anyone steering is able to avoid an accidental jibe, again saving you from yelling instructions or grabbing the tiller.

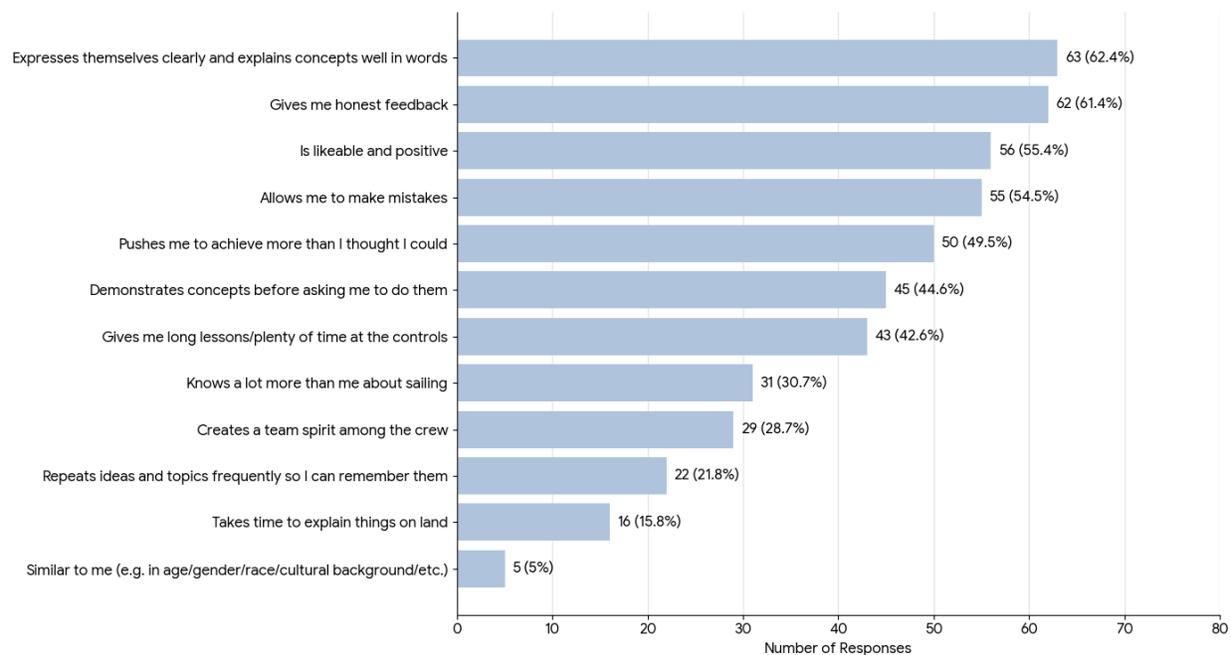
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<sup>9</sup> This also demonstrates using the students to keep each other honest, which removes you from the equation. Instead of nagging students to hike, you might simply and sadly ask why they're not supporting their friend.

- Teach “**Job #1 is balance the boat**” to help students remain focused and upright when the inevitable wild maneuver or spicy conditions introduce chaos. This way instead of telling them what to do, you can remind them of the pre-agreed priority and let them self-direct.
- Model and express “**slow down in emergencies**”. Explain that there’s a reason paramedics walk to an accident scene and test pilots talk in that unhurried drawl.<sup>10</sup>

“ *Errors are often a result of misprioritization rather than mistake.* ”

## 7. Select up to 5 traits that are most important in a great instructor for you.



All students but one responded to this question, and all respondents selected multiple traits.<sup>11</sup> Not all respondents selected 5 traits, however, which suggests that when they choose traits they were being selective in their responses, and therefore that the choice not to use their full allotment of up to 5 traits indicates that unselected traits are either not important or were less important than traits that were not offered in this list. (477 of 510 possible selections used, 94% utilization).

<sup>10</sup> [The real reason airline pilots all sound kind of the same](#), Medium (2023). It’s been called the “Houston Center” voice. [The Speed Check Story](#), The SR-71 Blackbird (2018).

<sup>11</sup> To reduce the potential for presentation order impacting selections, the traits were presented in random order using Google Form’s built-in randomizer.

### **Highest rated (selected by more than half of recipients)<sup>12</sup>**

- Expresses themselves clearly and explains concepts well in words (62.4%)
- Gives me honest feedback (61.4%)
- Is likeable and positive (55.4%)
- Allows me to make mistakes (54.5%)

### **Also-ran (near 50%)**

- Pushes me to do more than I thought I could
- Demonstrates concepts before asking me to do them
- Gives me long lessons/plenty of time at the controls

### **Minor factors (rated less than half as important as primary traits)**

- Knows a lot more than me about sailing
- Creates a team spirit among the crew
- Repeats ideas and topics frequently so I can remember them
- Takes time to explain things on land
- Similar to me e.g. age/gender/race/cultural background/etc.

## **Observations**

This question, along with Q4, provides the key findings for this survey. Together, they are a co-referenced view first of what students experience in their actual lessons, and second of **what they would like to see in their ideal lessons**. As noted in the Executive Summary, the strong consistency in response across different presentations of the question and concepts throughout the survey indicates a strong, true signal from the students.

### **Clarity of verbal explanation is a key skill**

In Q4, the lowest satisfaction rating was for the item “I was able to understand the words and ideas”. Here in Q7, the highest demand trait is likewise “expresses themselves clearly and explains concepts well in words”. Students are saying unequivocally that **conceptual understanding is what they want from instructors**. They certainly also want more access to lessons, more tiller time, and emotional safety, but these needs seem at least adequately fulfilled; verbal explanation is the thing they are not getting as consistently or completely as they are ready and willing to accept.

### **Mastery is not expected**

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<sup>12</sup> The bullet points in the Executive Summary are drawn essentially verbatim from these top 4 traits, as they were strongly supported by the findings from the other questions.

Students rated high satisfaction with “The instructor had mastery of the techniques” in Q4, which was validated here in Q7 because “Knows a lot more than me about sailing” was a low demand trait. This indicates that, although instructors should know the material well enough to teach it and do so safely, other factors predominate in the students’ minds when it comes to what makes a great sailing lesson.

The takeaway for new Juniors or experienced sailors who have not yet taught is to **be bold in bringing your particular contribution to students**. There are many opportunities to gain teaching experience as you develop your teaching style and ability, such as land lessons, dockside lessons, and teach-alongs. Sailing expertise and teaching expertise are parallel and related, but if you just follow these bullet points, you can be a successful teacher even while you are still learning.<sup>13</sup>

### **Tiller time is valuable, but learning happens throughout the sail**

Gives me plenty of time at the controls was surprisingly low rated (ranked 7th of 12 in Q7), perhaps reflecting that students were reasonably satisfied that I was learning even when I wasn’t at the controls (ranked 3rd of 8 in Q4).

Nonetheless, **access to lessons overall, and tiller time within lessons, was the most commonly cited point of improvement** in Q9 (15 responses). Thus, instructors should strive to both make the most of available on the water time by getting off the dock quickly, but should also keep up a steady stream of commentary and “teach to the whole boat” to make sure all students benefit, even when they’re not hands on the tiller. See [Part III Q4](#) and [Part V](#) for tips.

### **Similarity matters, but other traits matter more**

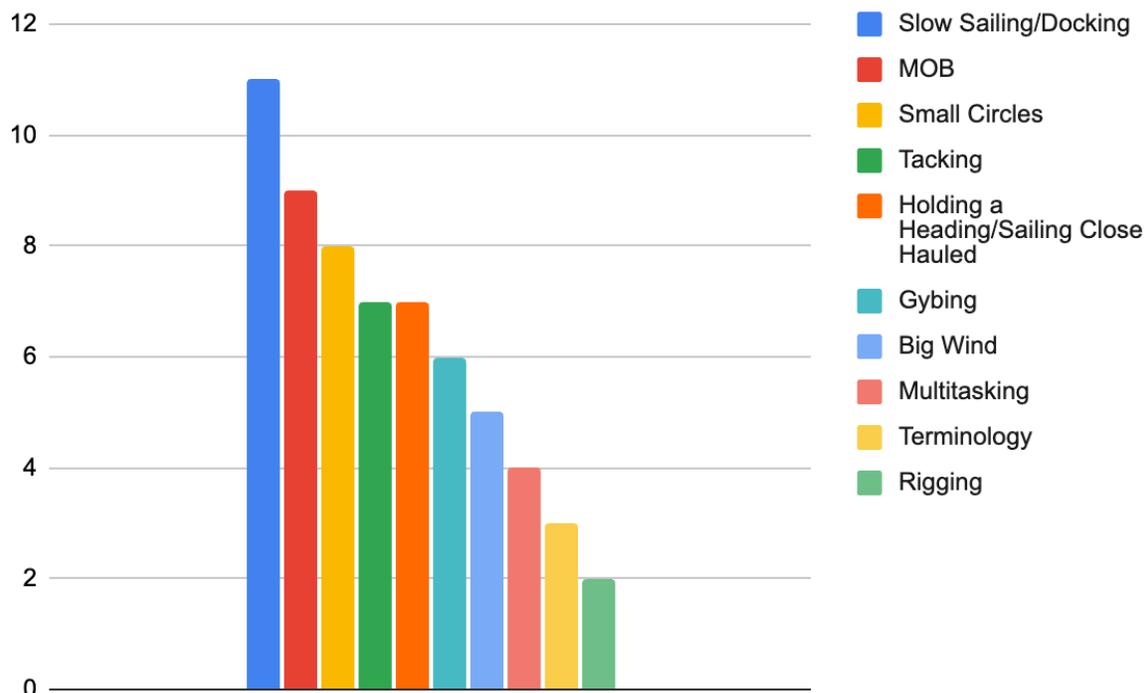
Similar to me was considered **the single lowest demand trait** (5 out of 100). This may indicate that, despite the enormous value in representation and diversity in our instructor pool, within a given lesson other factors are more important, or at least more urgent.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> And of course the best teachers will enthusiastically tell you they are still students themselves.

<sup>14</sup> Note, however, that this criteria was nonetheless selected by 5 out of 100 respondents, and we did NOT link survey responses to group identity, so **valuation of this trait may in fact be substantially higher among underrepresented groups**. This is a valuable area for future research, perhaps building on the findings of the [ICSA TIDE](#) Survey (2022).

## 8. What has been the hardest skill to learn so far?



This short answer question was framed intentionally open-ended, making the analysis somewhat more difficult but allowing students to express themselves as freely as possible.<sup>15</sup> 92 out of 102 responses shared an answer for this question. I grouped together similar answers and interpreted student descriptions into discrete categories where possible, selecting multiple categories when their answers encompassed more than one. The full student responses are provided in [Appendix A](#).

### Observations

#### “Power management” is an implicit skill that we should make explicit

Slow Sailing/Docking was by far the most frequently mentioned skill, even above MOB, potentially indicating that the additional maneuvering required by MOB is less difficult for students than the greater accuracy in power management demanded by docking. If you miss an MOB, you can go around. If you miss a docking, you have bigger problems, and more people to see them.

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<sup>15</sup> Clearly, students at different levels will key on different maneuvers as the hardest “so far”; a never-ever may report steering is the hardest, not even considering more advanced maneuvers. Likewise, a subjective assessment of what the student finds most difficult does not always correspond to where their skills are weakest. For example, many students may underrate “sailing close hauled” as they have not actually learned to bring the boat fully close hauled and thus overestimate their mastery of upwind sailing.

### **Tacking is referenced more often than gybing**

This likely has more to do with its coming earlier in a student's learning sequence than it actually being a harder skill to learn. One student's response was notable for illustrating the **value of thoughtfully sequencing skills**. The student, perhaps more than their instructor, accurately diagnosed the difficulty of trying to learn later skills without the physical familiarity and conceptual understanding gained from learning the earlier ones:

*"Had an instructor throw me right into tacking when I have never held the tiller in my life. **Couldn't sail straight, let alone tack properly. Instructor kept getting mad/frustrated at my lack of experience and perceived inability to learn. Meanwhile I was trying to just stay "alive" and could hardly process anything. Ended my time at the controls with a severe whack from the boom across my face, instructor didn't care.**"*

## **9. In your opinion, what would make CSC dinghy lessons better?**

This open-ended questions gave students their most direct chance to tell CSC what they want. Student response was strong, with 74 out of 102 responses including a suggestion (73%). Although many comments included more than one suggestion for improvement, they generally grouped into the following categories:

- Lesson availability & lesson duration (15)
- Understanding of skills and concepts (11)
- Emotional Safety & "Vibe" (10)
- Student/Instructor Level Matching (7)
- Instructor Development (6)
- Student Progression Assessment (6)
- Practical matters (6)
- Positive Sentiment (5)
- Information overload (3)
- There's more than one way to do it (2)
- Sense of physical safety (2)

The complete responses to this question are reproduced in [Appendix B](#).

### **Observations**

#### **Lesson availability is #1**

This is not a surprise. Students overwhelmingly love the lessons we offer, and their primary complaint is simply that it's hard to get lessons and when they do have lessons they want longer lessons with more tiller time. The bottleneck is instructors, so we should be looking for ways to encourage CSC members to give back by becoming instructors.

### **Students are not a monolith: When in doubt, just ask.**

Advice that works for some students does not work and may in fact be counterproductive for others. For example, *Takes time to explain things on land* was the second lowest rated trait in Q9 (16%) BUT it was a distinct recurring comment in Q9, such as

- *More time spent explaining on land*
- *A little more explanation before the lesson*
- *Familiarization with parts of the boat on land*

Similarly, although students highly rated verbal explanations (*Expresses themselves clearly and explains concepts well in words* Q7) and I recommend keeping up a running commentary to meet this strong need, at least two responses suggested they would be better off, at least occasionally, with less:

- *Talk slower, say less for very beginners*
- *Less spoken words sometimes on the water*

The obvious conclusion is that instructors need to stay in tune with their students. Explicitly asking about learning styles, comfort, and preferences is a good way to make sure students both understand and feel understood.

## **10. Do you have any advice for fellow CSC students?**

Although this advice is framed as what CSC students would say to fellow students, **it is really what they would say to themselves, or what they wish someone would have said to them.** It provides an invaluable window into the students' mindset, which thoughtful instructors can use to inform their teaching and their advice. Even though it was the last question and was the type of reflective, open-ended question that generally has low participation, more than half of respondents submitted advice for their fellow students. (57/102 = 56%)

Adorably, the two most common themes of advice for other students (and for themselves) could be characterized as:

**Take an active role in your own sailing education (18)**

**Believe in yourself (and be kind to yourself!) (16)**

Savvy instructors can both look spookily insightful and help their students by proactively addressing these two common self-coaching themes.

Some notable responses are:

**Believe in yourself (and be kind to yourself!) (18)**

*To a fellow CSC student: A lot of the things you aren't getting right now are not coming so easy just because you haven't had enough practice with them. Sailing is ever changing due to day-to-day conditions like wind, waves, and even your own mindset.*

*This means its a lot of two steps forward and one step backward but as long as you stick with it, you'll get visibly better at skills over time and have a ton of fun doing it!*

*Keep trying things you're uncomfortable doing. An instructor likely won't let you do something unsafe*

### **How to use instructors (7)**

*Just go with the flow and listen, all instructors have different perspectives and styles, and sometimes the "correct" way varies - but I've learned that means there is more than one way to sail.*

*Depending on what instructor you get it sets the tone for how you leave at the end of the day - you're great or terrible at sailing, emotional highs and lows*

The full responses are reproduced in [Appendix B](#).

## **IV. Tangible Takeaways for CSC Instructors**

Topics, methods, and style will necessarily change based on the situation and students. It helps to have a deep bag of tricks to ensure that you always have many options to align the experience to the circumstances and implement the feedback from the students. Below are some ideas to add to your collection.

### **Improve club learning resources**

Some of the improvements that came out of the student suggestions are simple additions to collateral or tweaks to procedures. Implementing these would be good volunteer hours for multiple people, and would help students make the most of their lesson time:

- **Laminated cards with lesson information**, such as
  - Parts of boats
  - Rigging checklist
  - Sailing maneuvers illustrated + explained (MOB, Slow Sailing, Departure + Docking, Small Circles)
  - Novice Skills Checklist
  - Junior Skills Checklist
  - Post-Lesson Survey QR Code
- **Land lessons and other learning activities for people waiting on Saturdays**<sup>16</sup>
- **Change the Lesson Sign-Up sheet to include**

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<sup>16</sup> This is a great opportunity for new instructors, injured sailors, and people who just don't want to get suited up on a given day.

- **Rating or sailing level** to allow grouping students
- **QR code** to a post-lesson survey
- **A sample sailing lesson video** to help students and new instructors know what to expect
- **Instructor development opportunities**
  - More roundtables, teach-alongs, reference material
  - Instructor alignment on the few skills that *do* have a specific CSC way

## Explain concepts clearly in words

Individual instructors will have differing skill levels as sailors, and will develop their own explanations and patter through repetition. Here are some ideas to try out.

### Teach to the whole boat

Although tiller time is critical to student development, it is hard for the driver to absorb theory while in the midst of practice. At the same time, it's important to ensure the other students are learning even when they are not driving. Thus, in a sense you are conducting two lessons at once: **A hands-on coaching session for the driver**, and a **conceptual sailing theory lecture for the rest of the crew**.

Even if you're teaching the same topic, the explanations for the driver will tend to be more focused and practical – “what” and “how” – whereas the others are more able and more willing to absorb additional conceptual knowledge – “why”. If the driver's brain is full, occupied, or frazzled, give them permission to tune you out and take quiet time while you focus on topics of interest to the other crew.

### Use catchphrases to condense lessons

There's a teaching phase – where conceptual information can be conveyed, processed, and understood – and a performance phase – where practical information and muscle memory take over. Catchphrases are a shorthand to invoke the larger concept in a small way. By introducing catchphrases during the teaching phase and familiarizing students with the concept that they represent, you can make it easier to coach them during the performance phase, as well as equipping them with tools to self-coach. Some catchphrases I've found useful are:

- **When in doubt, let it out**
- **Happy boat/unhappy boat** = Close hauled vs. Pinching
- **JiFL** = Just in from luffing
- **SFTP** = Speed First Then Point
- **Think downwind thoughts** = Main out, jib out, weight shifted
- **Trim on, hike out, turn up** = how to get to close hauled

- **Even gestures can be shorthand.** I've taken to rapping my fist on the gunwale to wordlessly remind the driver to get back up on the side where they belong

## Emphasize multiple correct ways to do things

This helps dispel student frustration and keeps you from appearing nitpicky. By explaining the why behind your advice and entertaining the idea that other instructors had different but also rational bases for teaching a technique in a particular way, you can help students drill down to the essential goals of the maneuver and improve the robustness of their skills. If both ways work but you have a preference, just say that and give your rationale. Common examples that elicit student complaints include:

- Microphone vs. Frying pan
- Wetsuit vs. no wetsuit
- Control power first by sheeting out vs. hiking out vs. turning up
- At what point during a docking it becomes acceptable to turn head to wind
- Recovering MOB on windward vs. leeward
- When and how hard to pull the boom across during a gybe

## Narrate and layer

A valuable piece of feedback I received during a Fast Track was to explicitly give students the opportunity to talk through a skill before doing it. One way to put this into a lesson is to follow a layered narration approach:

1. Instructor narrates while instructor (or other student) demonstrates it
2. Instructor narrates while student simulates it
3. Student narrates while student simulates it
4. Instructor narrates while student does it<sup>17</sup>

## Give honest feedback aligned to the student's level

Keep goals small and compare against what's expected of them at this stage rather than perfection. A terrible tack can still be a great *first* tack. Explicitly rating them against where they're at gives you the freedom to disregard non-essential elements without condoning bad technique. As a result, you seem both wise and fair, and your feedback can grow with the student without ever contradicting yourself. Consider "That's fine for starting, we'll build on it" for never-evers, versus "You're too good of a sailor to settle for that" for the same maneuver later in their sailing career.

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<sup>17</sup> Having the instructor narrate during the performance phase ensures that the student is focusing on execution rather than recall.

## Focus on specific limited goals for each exercise/maneuver

If your objectives are limited, your feedback can be limited, too. For a first tack it might just be “get the wind on the other side of the sail”. Later tacks might be “face forward the whole time”, “smooth handoff”, or “stop at close hauled”. You can then explicitly disclaim feedback about any other element as detracting from the current goal. Fell over? Don’t care, you still managed to stop at close hauled.

Remind yourself: “**If you chase five rabbits, you’ll get none**”. Go after one thing at a time, disregard without ignoring the others. Don’t say it’s good, say we’re not focusing on it right now. **Cultivate the ability to watch and take mental notes without commenting on it right now.** If you can’t tell, simply watch silently to see what recurs consistently and focus on that.

“ *The teacher’s skill lay in presenting experiences in such a way that the student was bound to succeed. ~ Keith Johnstone* ”

## Know when *not* to teach

As noted in the catchphrases section above, there’s a teaching phase and a performance phase; make sure you’re not trying to teach during the performance phase. At that point, **you can’t impart new information, you can only remind**, so the catchphrases you’ve cultivated earlier can do outsized work by efficiently conveying a larger concept without distracting the student.

## Be candid but not nitpicky

You’ll be more credible and they’ll be more attentive if you give it to them straight. If the tack was a 2 out of 5, say so and distinguish what went well (keep that the same) and what didn’t (focus on/change that). That can help make the improvement tangible.

## Project an aura of calm

Instructors, like parents, have a lot to think about. Sailing, lesson planning, maintaining a running commentary, ensuring safety, and dealing with the unexpected that arises during a lesson is a recipe for stress. Even when the instructor doesn’t actually feel agitated, these responsibilities can undermine the sense of calm that students value so highly.

## Align expectations

Students will project their nervousness onto you. You can appear more calm by making them more calm. Ways to do this include:

- Dock talk with expectations of how long they’ll be out & safety
- Giving them calibration time when first handing over the tiller

## **Choose what to react to**

Give them time to spot their own mistakes. Try counting to 10 (maybe in your head, maybe not) or asking the student if they would change anything; both give the student time to self-correct and involve them in the level-setting process. Intentionally separate the stimulus from your response; if the student drops the tiller or tacks accidentally, let the situation play out to its conclusion, then let the student lead the debrief. “So, what happened there?”

## **Stay out of the Novice Area**

Safety is critical, so it's much easier to project calm when you don't need to insist on accurate and timely maneuvers to ensure safety. Enhance your and the students' calm by staying *well* away from others, particularly other Novices, swimmers, windsurfers, and Cal Adventure boats.

## **If you don't have to sail the boat, don't**

Let the students do essentially everything, even if they screw up. This promotes ownership of their learning, and also implicitly says “This is safe. If it wasn't, I wouldn't let you do it.” Particularly in departure and docking, which are students' first and last impressions of the lesson, a supportive but hands-off approach pays handsomely.

## **Treat errors as *misprioritization* rather than *mistake***

Student frustration can be particularly acute when they feel they are being corrected for something they were doing intentionally based on earlier feedback. In other words, they have overprioritized or incorrectly applied earlier guidance to the current skill, but they were trying to do what they thought you wanted. You can build understanding and trust by explicitly identifying the motivation behind the misprioritization and correcting both the understanding and the technique.

In the case of a student who tacks too quickly and falls while trying to change sides, it's worth digging into the motivation of why they tacked at the speed they did.

“Whoa speed demon. You slammed that tack so fast you didn't have time to get to the other side. Was it maybe you were worried about running out of steam and getting stuck in irons? You had PLENTY of power, you could have given yourself twice as much time. Try it again, half speed.”

## **Explicitly promote calm & manage comfort**

Communication is key. It's okay to tell the students that their learning is important but safety is the #1 priority, so unsafe maneuvers may require quick responses or quick words, but you're not yelling at them, just raising your voice to make sure instructions are clear.

## **Once you have established calm, don't settle for the Comfort Zone.**

If students are too comfortable, push them to ensure they're in the Growth Zone. If they get too stressed and enter the Fear Zone, it's time to bring it down. Various ways to enhance their calm include:

- Easing out to idle power
- Coming to beam reach
- Asking them what would help them get to a comfort level at which they can learn well
- Letting them swap drivers temporarily
- Taking the mainsheet for them
- Teach heave to and show them that they're in control of their boat and of the situation
- Ask them what their comfort level is on a 0-10 scale. Check in later to show progress<sup>18</sup>

“ *Comfort the afflicted, afflict the comfortable.* ”

## How I Teach a CSC Sailing Lesson

### Disclaimer and caveat

At the risk of appearing prescriptive, I will share the beats of how I tend to do lessons at CSC. I emphasize that **this is not the best, only, or CSC-approved way to do lessons**. CSC is and will always be love, chaos, and individuality. I share this in part to address the inherent paradox that students tend to sail with many different instructors, and instructors sail with many different students, but instructors don't have the chance to sail with many different instructors. Consider this a ride along: **Shamelessly steal what works for you, disregard the rest.**

Note that this is an ideal structure; rarely do I get all parts of this format in a single lesson, but circumstances permitting, these are the beats that I include. I expect many instructors naturally follow a similar format for similar reasons; I am as interested in the similarities as the differences, so please feel free to share via email or in the `#dinghy-instructors` channel on Slack.

### Rigging the boat

I'll have the students do as much of it as they can, but I won't sacrifice sailing time for a rigging lesson. For more advanced students, I will have them rig it in my absence as part of confidence building and a skill check.

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<sup>18</sup> None of these suggestions involve the instructor taking the tiller from the student. Even though well-meaning, that gesture can send the wrong message and evokes defeat, giving up, or being replaced. Successfully managing the fear without giving up control lays an enormously valuable psychological and emotional foundation.

## Dock talk

**Names.** I give my name (which I also have written on the back of my PFD) and get their names and pronunciation. I tell the students I think names are important and why; we will use names of people and names of things.

**Sailing experience and goals for today.** I never omit this. If pressed for time I'll do it on the way to the wind line, but it's a critical part of the lesson. Using their names, I get from each student a statement of how much sailing they've done (how many lessons, or where else they've sailed) plus concrete goals for today. This gives me an idea of their level and confidence, plus starts setting up our shared definition of success. I may adjust, refocus, or define their goals for them.

**Boat balance & capsize safety.** For never-evers or nervous sailors, we go over Job #1 (balance the boat) and may play at rocking the boat while on the dock. I also explain that in the event of a capsize, I will be doing the (dry) capsize recovery and what their role is. Depending on skill levels and conditions, I may reassure them that capsizing is a normal part of learning, and the better they do the *more* likely they are to capsize because we will be pushing their skills.

## Departure

I typically choose the student with the middle level of experience, if available, but even for a complete beginner, this is an important levelsetting signal that "You can do it, I can help". I may give them a couple of practice pushes to learn the turn maneuver and will make other accommodations as needed, but ultimately failure is an option, and I tell them that. Students learn more from their botched departure than my successful one.

## While sailing

**I typically sit in the middle with my back to the mast and I don't do *shit*.** The most I'll do is help nudge a jib over, shake out a batten, or balance the boat. It's common to do 3 hours of lessons and not touch the tiller or a sheet at all. This includes not looking forward; unless we're in the Novice area or close to the edges of the sailing area, I rely entirely on the students to be lookouts, and expect them to support each other.

**What I do is talk.** Sometimes explicit instruction about the maneuver at hand, but the rest of the time I'm discussing the topics they raised during the dock talk, quizzing them, or filling in theory gaps I've noticed from their questions or behavior. Even just nautical trivia is useful in building out their sailor's mindset. Preventing dead air not only ensures that I "teach to the whole boat", it also gives the driver a certain amount of cover as the other students can focus on me and not on the driver as they learn to steer a straight course or get psyched up for a maneuver.

**25 minutes per person, with an audible timer.** Using a watch keeps me honest and feels fair to the students. You don't have to ever mention what the timer is for. 25 minutes means I can give "extra time" or bring an exercise to a natural ending point ("I'm not going to let you end on that one...") while still keeping to the target 30 minutes time.

Particularly for new students, they may reach their capacity to absorb after 30 minutes of tiller time. (Remember that dock time, wetsuits, PFDs, and rigging are also learning time). This gives them a chance to rest and digest. They may actually learn more *after* their tiller time, by watching someone put together the pieces they just struggled with.

**Hiking and Happy Boat.** I spend a disproportionate amount of time getting students bombproof on hiking hard and on reliably distinguishing between close hauled (Happy Boat) and pinching (Unhappy Boat). I test hiking by having them work together to counterbalance me or each other, and by occasionally leaning to the low side by way of a pop quiz. Students can opt to graduate from hiking school by demonstrating dipping the back of their head in the water while at close hauled. Drilling Happy Boat/Unhappy Boat instills a sense for interrelation of heading, trim, power, and heel, which pays dividends across all the other maneuvers. I can spend a whole lesson teaching tacking, or spend 15 minutes drilling Happy Boat and then teach the rest of the tack in 90 seconds, to better results and higher student confidence.

## Sailing back

I use sailing back to the dock as a chance to get someone more tiller time if they got shorted, or restore confidence if someone had a rough go. I encourage the students, including the driver, to stand up in the boat and stretch out, demonstrating that there are no hard and fast rules for body position. This is a good time for Q&A and for briefing the driver on the docking sequence.<sup>19</sup>

## Docking

I insist that the student does it, come hell or low water, even for a first timer. This is the last opportunity they have at the tiller for the day, and again is critical implicit communication that *they* are the ones sailing. Unless the approach becomes completely unsalvageable or unsafe, as with departure, students learn more from their botched docking than my successful one.

## Dock Debrief

We get out of the boat to change the context and give everyone a chance to physically relax, do high fives and fist bumps, then I go through:

- **What I liked & congratulations** to individual students for achieving goals and facing challenges.
- **What did you learn? What stuck?** This lets students teach themselves and teach me what was effective and memorable for them.
- **Goals for next time.** I ask them, or suggest to them, what they should tell their instructor they want to focus on next time to give them a sense of progression and ownership.

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<sup>19</sup> If they were very good, I will sing sea chanteys.

## Appendix A: Responses to Question 8

### **“What’s been the hardest sailing skill to learn so far?”**

- Gybing
- Tacking
- Slow sailing
- Small circles
- Gybe
- Docking
- Docking
- Points of sail
- Tacking
- Jibing
- Handling high summer winds
- Man overboard
- Had an instructor throw me right into tacking when I have never held the tiller in my life. Couldn't sail straight, let alone tack properly. Instructor kept getting mad/frustrated at my lack of experience and perceived inability to learn. Meanwhile I was trying to just stay “alive” and could hardly process anything. Ended my time at the controls with a severe whack from the boom across my face, instructor didn't care.
- Doing it all at once
- COB
- All the new terms
- Too new to answer
- Stopping (ish) eg crew overboard or docking
- Docking for sure... slow sailing is hard to master because of how time critical it can be.
- Understand the wind. Like know where it is from and how to react under different circumstances.
- Small circles in high wind
- Rudderless in varying conditions!

- To engage the the main sail for turning
- Man overboard
- Slow circles - lack of explanation, passion to teach, and overall knowledge left me feeling frustrated and confused of what I was doing wrong
- Too new to tell. Getting through the first tackings and close hauls.
- Man over board
- I'm 2 lessons in, but in tacking, thinking about and doing everything at the same time is difficult.
- Small circle
- Correcting on the fly
- ROW
- Man overboard & slow sailing
- Pinching instead of adjusting sail in high wind
- Rigging
- Gybing but getting better
- Small circle
- Sailing at close reach and holding point while going fast, healing
- Rigging
- all
- Vocabulary as non native English speaker
- Crew over board/small circles in high wind and wavy area
- Intuition, point of sail, putting all info together
- Crew overboard
- Hand positioning while driving
- Gybing and points of sail
- First lesson is a lot to absorb
- Jibe
- Intuitively feeling the correct point of sail
- Small circles; also, staying calm
- Thinking about all the things at once
- Control. Like with Crew overboard and docking
- Clean tacking

- Confidence in high winds
- Small circles, partly because of the two kinds
- Man overboard drills
- Interfacing with others
- Slow sail/stop
- I am pretty new but I am getting the handle of tacking. I think the next one is rigging.
- Moving my body around during a tack
- Any skill in higher winds
- When at the helm getting from one side to the other. My legs are weak. It is not technic I need to build up strength in my legs, and body. I am 69 years old and still kicking.
- Tacking (I'm only on my second lesson)
- Keeping to a single point of sail
- Keeping course on close haul
- Slow sailing, circles
- Slow sailing properly - conceptually its fine, but the adaptations to the wind conditions is tough. And hand positions for tacking - it was so awkward handling the extension and main without looking at what I was doing.
- Slow sailing/stopping next to the buoy
- Terminology
- Tacking due to the logistics of moving around small boats
- Slow sailing, circles, man overboard

## Appendix B: Responses to Question 9

### “In your opinion, what would make CSC dinghy lessons better?”

#### Lesson availability & time during lessons (15)

- Fewer people per boat
- More identical dinghy's . YouTube video of some lessons
- "More instructors on Saturday - less waiting. Longer time at the tiller, to get more repetition per session. More things to do on land while waiting for a lesson.
- More land lessons
- More practice
- Land lesson before water practice?!
- More lessons in a day or longer lessons
- Less waiting time for a lesson, but I realize that its volunteer run and the club is doing a great job
- If there was a better waiting procedure, sign up online and more reliability when it comes to instructors.
- I would say let each student has the same amount of time controlling the boat
- Longer,more time on controls, less teacher-student dynamics. Maybe knot tying lessons and land practice
- Very hard to get lessons on Saturday. Either longer lesson times on Saturday, or add some more lesson times on Sunday (perhaps summer only like windsurfing). I learned the most from fast track, or random weekday lessons, but most people including me couldn't make weekdays unless we take time off from work or school.
- More days in the week. More time in the water
- Longer time at the helm
- I just need more time out there and more practice.

#### Conceptual framework (11)

- More opportunity to discuss mechanics before attempting the skill
- If more instructors took time to say things in a calm manor with no yelling, if the first way of explaining wasn't being understood - try an analogy or watering down the information instead of sailing jargon

- Instructors ask the student to talk the instructor through the skill they will practice on land, before sailing. Ask the same question on land after the lesson. Also remind the new students about the online materials.
- More explanation to get an intuition for whats going on with the boat (during tacking or even tightening sails)
- More video with technical explanation on the physics
- Diagrams printed out at the yard
- Longer lessons
- More time spent explaining on land
- A little more explanation before the lesson
- More detailed explanation in advance of actually attempting to do the thing
- Familiarization with parts of the boat on land

### **Emotional Safety & “Vibe” (10)**

- More calm, kind, confident instructors
- Patient, calm demeanor
- Patience, humor, calm demeanor
- Vetted instructors who want to explain concepts and teach, balance between being hands off and too hands on
- Calm, positive, fun, knowledgeable, patient
- I liked the acknowledgment when I did something right
- Some instructors let Socratic method (or no answers, just questions coaching) slip into passive aggressiveness, which robs from feeling safe to learn. Not on purpose, but easy to slip into if the instructor isn't thinking about it.
- I would like instructors who are positive and encouraging. Instructor should be able to recognize that students may struggle with a maneuver, and instead of throwing that maneuver at the students over and over again until they “get it” they should recognize that, and break things down so it's easier for the student to understand. for example, we had another student on our boat, who was clearly uncomfortable with hiking out, and didn't have the right footwear for it. The instructor kept yelling at him to hike out, forcefully and repeatedly, in the middle of tacking, which the student was also not super comfortable with. this ended up with the student missing the hiking strap in a frenzy while being yelled at, and him over the side of the boat, in the water. I know that “trial by fire” can be a good strategy in some cases, but it seemed like it was too much

- If “A safe and respectful teaching environment are our top priorities, so we expect these from all instructors, in addition to the following traits” is the top priority, you should probably ask that question on the survey. I would probably have given low marks.
- More non-male instructors, instructors stating their pronouns and asking students their pronouns in introductions (and actually using the right ones), instructors going through some sort of training on how to teach effectively and inclusivity/club values before teaching, instructors communicating before going out how long to expect to be on the water, more scheduled rigging and land lessons, straight men at the club not making frequent inappropriate comments (last time I was there on a Saturday a few presumably straight men at the dock were loudly making really immature homophobic sexual “jokes”), weekday evening lesson availability, printed out dinghy handbooks at the club to look at while waiting for lesson, a little bit of sit down classroom style instruction when you start out - more guidance through test taking

### **Student/Instructor Skill Matching (7)**

- I mean, given all the constraints they're conducted under, they're amazing. So not really anything. Maybe thoughtfully matching students and instructors, but that seems hard.
- I think during lessons students should be split according to experience, so that they can practice similar stuff
- Matching instructors and students based on their experience
- List of instructors prior to lessons
- Coordinated skippers
- Perhaps have similar levels be grouped together so the lesser levels don't feel overwhelmed with all the info. When it was my first time, the other two have been sailing for the 9th time so they rigged the boat, the instructor only corrected their mistakes without explaining anything, and I generally felt left out because I didn't understand most of the terminology. I tried asking what they were doing, if they need help rigging, what x or y tern mean, etc. but it felt that since I don't know anything and nobody was explaining that I am just in the way. Good thing there were others that were explaining things while on the dock, so I just stood around them instead and didn't join our group until we had to leave.
- I think more specific skill focused workshops might be helpful

### **Instructor Development (6)**

- People see[k]ing out/receiving concrete feedback from more experienced teachers and or their students
- Actual feedback direct to instructors, or culture of mutual feedback

- Testers need to be patient, be mindful of how words/comments can impact students attitude/sailing abilities. Communicate what is allowed or not allowed during testing, for example - it is okay for tester to demo what they are explaining to student and student can still pass test
- I understand it's a balance, but you might also want a mechanism to collect feedback for instructors. Some instructors may be turning people off of the club."
- My last instructor was excellent. Overall more instructor training would be great.
- Having more instructors for sure but also maybe we should give lessons for instructors. in my opinion experienced instructors need it even more then recently joined juniors, because they forget what its like to be learning sailing for the first time.

### **Progression (6)**

- Curriculum
- A way to record the different sailing skills you need to be proficient at, and to gauge where you are with them - kind of like the whiteboard at Fast Track but one that you can keep track of yourself. It would help for those starting conversations with the instructors on what you're working on!
- The structure of Fast Track with 16 skill areas and a 5-point comfort/competence scale is great. I think I could have made more effective use of lessons if I'd seen that before, and seen knowledge gaps earlier.
- Way to assess your skills before and after lessons, like at FasTrack
- If there was a more structured way to sequentially progress through all the skills needed to pass junior skipper. Right now seems like you randomly go through different things with different instructors.
- Lessons are a pretty great experience already. I think I'd be nice to have someone to chat with after to figure out what skills I should work on next to get to the next rating

### **Practical matters (6)**

- Lessons might be more smooth/efficient if each team was primarily responsible for their own boat.
- Too soon to tell
- The footstraps are in pretty rough shape. Given that hiking is part of the junior rating it would be nice to see them replaced.
- Prioritizing getting boats on the water over on land training. Always asking students at the start of the lesson what skills they need to practice, and letting students practice those. Making sure their are sufficient MOB buoy's so that all students that want one can use one.

- Getting started faster
- More structure at the sign up phase

### **Positive Sentiment (5)**

- I enjoy them as is
- It was great!
- They are great!
- The instructors are fantastic, and I really appreciate their help
- They're pretty great

### **Information overload (3)**

- Talk slower, say less for very beginners
- Less spoken words sometimes on the water
- I've seen instructors overwhelm newbies by throwing too much at them and giving them too much correction when they haven't had time for the last feedback to sink in. Instructors should: let students start by holding only the tiller; focus on one skill/ feedback at a time and let students work on that until they improve.

### **There's more than one way to do it (2)**

- A small number of instructors are too dogmatic and that's not helpful. But most are really great
- If instructors had to take a class before becoming instructors. I have had many ones tell me different techniques and some saying the other way is wrong completely. I think there should be one consensus on how basic skills like sheeting in are taught. More patience and clearer instructions from the instructors would be good too. I think many forget what it was like learning or that some people may be slower at picking up sailing since they have been sailing for so long.

### **Sense of physical safety (2)**

- Sailing slower
- I had a lesson where the instructor did not do any pre-departure briefing, checklist, safety checks etc and this made me uncomfortable as I had never been on that type of boat before and it was already rigged in the water before the lesson. All instructors should do this, especially with new students.

## Appendix C: Responses to Question 10

### “Do you have any advice for fellow CSC students?”

#### Believe in yourself (and be kind to yourself!) (18)

- Be brave
- It intense at first but gets easier
- Just keep showing up.
- It becomes easier and more fun the more you learn -- if at first it seems too daunting/hard but if you truly want to sail - push through, keep trying - you will get there!  

- Don't be afraid to capsize!
- Take fast track, even if you're not sure you're quite ready for it!
- Sailing is tough! Don't get discouraged if you have a hard day on the water or a tough instructor. More time on the water and connecting with the community can not only make learning more fun but it'll make it seamless!
- Learn at your own pace and the skills will come with practice
- Be brave! Flipping over is actually quite enjoyable, so don't be afraid.
- Keep trying things you're uncomfortable doing. An instructor likely won't let you do something unsafe
- Have fun!
- Have fun, make mistakes.
- Staying open minded, have fun
- Try things you don't think you are ready for. Always say yes
- Get over the fear of capsize, then you will be more comfortable with making mistakes, then progress will come faster.
- To a fellow CSC student: A lot of the things you aren't getting right now are not coming so easy just because you haven't had enough practice with them. Sailing is ever changing due to day-to-day conditions like wind, waves, and even your own mindset. This means its a lot of two steps forward and one step backward but as long as you stick with it, you'll get visibly better at skills over time and have a ton of fun doing it!
- Just enjoy the ride and be willing to make mistakes.

- Open minded

### **Take an active role in your own sailing education (16)**

- Ask questions. Say no if you don't know.
- Ask a lot of questions.
- Take an active role with your teacher
- Come with a learners mindset, never take anything personal
- Everyone's learning style is different. Stick with it
- Be persistent. Do not give up on the first try. Try 10x back to back if you have to master a maneuver. You got this
- Repetition. Try the maneuver 5 times in a row.
- Take lessons frequently to consolidate the skills!
- Pay attention when you are crew, you can learn a lot from listening and watching.
- have humility and do your best to cultivate a welcoming learning atmosphere
- Be comfortable saying "no" when you're unsure
- Listen and Keep coming back
- Sail, sail, sail
- Come here sail as much as possible
- Find people you can learn from and seek them out as teachers
- Practice tack maneuvers on land - you can even do it at home! watch YouTube instructional videos for sailing dinghies and sailing theory, advocate for what you need before and during lessons, remember to take a moment during lessons to breathe and enjoy the scenery

### **How to use instructors (7)**

- If you don't like an instructor's style, don't be put off sailing. Just pick another
- Depending on what instructor you get it sets the tone for how you leave at the end of the day - you're great or terrible at sailing, emotional highs and lows
- Find an instructor who leaves you feeling positive - happy student, happy lesson, happy sails!
- Get out more with different people!
- Just go with the flow and listen, all instructors have different perspectives and styles, and sometimes the "correct" way varies - but I've learned that means there is more than one way to sail.

- Embrace the learning opportunity of learning from so many different instructors
- Take the mix of directions as a way to learn what works for you!

### **Use all the resources (7)**

- Keep practicing and read the manual
- Read the online material, read again after practice.
- Practice! And watch the videos
- Experience and study vocabulary/knots
- Show up early to watch people rig boats
- Practice rigging in land while they are waiting for their lesson
- Get suited up and ready early so you can help to rig the boats. Be proactive about helping with boats in the yard so you're familiar with how to rig a boat. Read the Cal sailing manual, and watch the youtube videos after your lesson. The manual and videos made a lot more sense after a having seen things on the boat first hand during the lesson.
- Learn the mechanics of the boat
- Just keep asking questions and have fun!

### **Practical advice (2)**

- Arrive early. Very early
- DO NOT BRING ANYTHING ELECTRONIC WITH YOU ON THE BOAT, ESPECIALLY YOUR CAR KEY!

### **We do Women's Fast Track because people still ask why we do Women's Fast Track**

- Why are there so many women's events paid for by the club? We all pay the same dues and should be treated the same. Women can organize their events and use club gear, but they should not get club's funds for meals/volunteer hours, because that's not fair to everyone else who is paying dues. Women should not have their special fast track either, as it's not fair. Plus during the June fast track, 4 out of the 5 new juniors are women, and there is no reason they still get a special session devoted to them (at the expense of others who may want to participate). As a non-profit organization, we cannot discriminate based on sex, right? How do people feel if we organize men's events paid for by the club?

## Appendix D: Practical Details

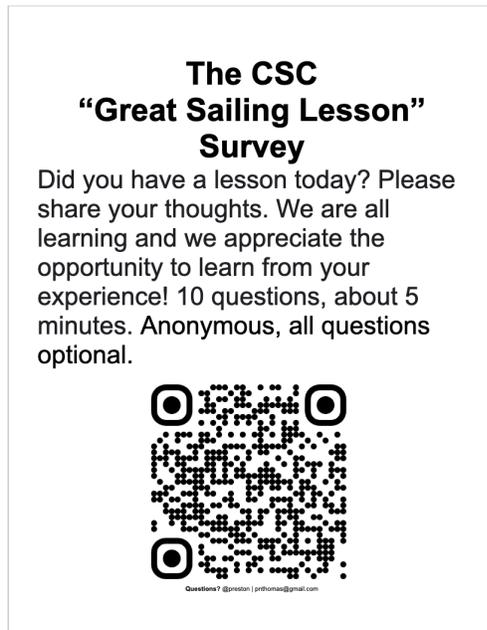
Science works best when people build on it! Below are links to the elements of the survey in case anyone wants to repeat, extend, or otherwise build off of them in the future.

[Survey](#) via Google Form

[Publicity flyers](#) posted around the club

[Reminder slips](#) (1"x3" 15 to a page) handed out before lessons & available on the DL desk

### Survey Poster & Slips for handing out before lessons



The survey began with the notice copied below to establish the purpose of the survey and ensure that students felt comfortable giving candid answers, especially when they might have uncomfortable experiences to share.

At CSC we're all learning, even your instructors! This survey is a 2025 Senior project gather insights into how your lesson went and what a great sailing lesson means to \*you\*.

Survey responses are anonymous and will be aggregated; individual responses won't be tied to particular lessons. The quantitative and qualitative responses will be compiled into insights to be shared with the instructors and ExCom to help deliver CSC magic to students of all types and levels.

All questions are optional. 10 questions, about 5 minutes. Thank you for sharing your experience!

In the future I would add an optional box for “**Do you want to be contacted about your survey response?**” and a space for their email to create the opportunity to follow up on places where concerning behavior was reported.