BEING UNDERWATER

Lesson Objectives

The main objective of this, the first practical lesson, is to build up the student's level of comfort both in and under the water and to introduce some of the basic skills. These are not aspects to be rushed, as this will only result in slower progress in later lessons. The more these basic skills become second nature to the students, the easier they will learn the later, more complex skills.

Achievement Targets

At the end of this lesson students should:

- Be able to correctly fit a face mask
- Be able to correctly fit and clear (by blowing) a snorkel
- Have started to develop a good finning action
- Be comfortable breathing from a demand valve underwater
- Have commenced developing buoyancy control skills
- Have learned the ‘OK’’, ‘stop’, ‘up’, ‘down’, 'you watch me' and 'you do' signals
- Know how to dismantle and wash a SCUBA unit under supervision

Lesson Contents

As the students will understandably be keen to get diving, for this first lesson the SCUBA equipment should be pre-prepared by the instructor prior to commencement of the lesson, and placed where it will be accessible from shallow water.

1. Briefing

Explain the above objectives to the students and particularly how less haste at this point will mean more speed overall. As this is their first encounter with water pressure, stress the importance of ear clearing, mask equalisation and, when using the SCUBA unit, that they breathe normally at all times. Cover all elements of a SEEDS brief.

2. Entry into shallow water without equipment

Lead the students, by ladder or wading into waist deep water.

3. Fit and practice with mask, fins and snorkel - standing depth

- Mask demisting/fitting

  Mask demisted with saliva and rinsed, seal correctly positioned on face, no hair trapped under seal, strap just tight enough to hold mask in position

- Method of securing snorkel

  Either under mask strap or clipped to it, positioned to give comfortable alignment

- Breathing through snorkel face submerged, static

  Establish breathing rhythm, crouch down to submerge face, check mask for leaks, continue breathing through snorkel until comfortable breathing rhythm established. Ensure that the students have adequate time on the surface for their breathing to settle before submerging

- Flood snorkel/clear by blowing (static, standing)

  Take breath, submerge head further until snorkel floods, rise until surface is at level of top of mask, forcibly exhale to expel water, continue breathing through snorkel, repeat cycle five times

- Fit fins, finning action on back and front

  Lean against buddy or suitable fixed object for support while fitting fins, move around by shuffling backwards once fitted, fin on back to develop action, action from hips with legs flexing slightly, on front breathing through snorkel aim to maintain action

- Flood/clear snorkel while finning, face submerged
  While finning remove snorkel from mouth to flood mouthpiece, refit and clear, repeat five times

- Remove fins, mask & snorkel

Correcting poor finning technique at this stage is easier than trying to correct it once the poor technique has become more ingrained, but do not labour this to the point where progress is held up. Later exercises in this, and subsequent lessons, provide the opportunity to further develop the finning action

4. Kit up with the SCUBA unit and carry out buddy check

Demonstrate and then supervise the practice of buddies helping each other to kit up and the importance of buddy check (BAR or other appropriate acronym as a reminder). Remind students about ear clearing, mask equalisation and breathing normally at all times and about any of the previously briefed signals that have not been used in the first part of the lesson. Refit mask and fins as above.

To make this first experience as comfortable as possible, where the location permits (eg. swimming pool), the kitting up and buddy check should be performed in standing depth water.

5. Breathing from a demand valve, standing depth

Initially on the surface, then submerged as for the snorkel exercise above. Allow adequate time underwater for the students to become comfortable breathing from the demand valve.

6. Buoyancy control - standing depth

This exercise not only allows the student to experience the feel of increasing and decreasing buoyancy provided by the BC, but it also develops familiarity with the BC controls.

- Inflate and deflate the BC on the surface, using the direct feed

  Inflate BC fully, crouch down until supported by BC, vent air from BC until waterline rises to chin level, re-inflate BC fully, repeat several times venting from both BC mouthpiece and dump valve.

7. Swimming on the surface on the back, BC inflated - standing depth

This builds confidence in the support provided by the BC and provides the opportunity to further develop a good

finning action.

- Finning action

  Check finning action

- Attitude in the water

  Laid back attitude in the water to minimise drag, explore more upright attitudes to see the difference, frequently look round to check direction

The swim should be for a minimum of 50m, but extend as necessary if any corrective action is required.

8. Buoyancy check and swimming underwater - standing depth

This exercise introduces adjustment for neutral buoyancy and then, once achieved, progresses to swimming underwater at the same constant depth to avoid the need for further buoyancy adjustment.

- Buoyancy check - fin pivot

  Lay flat on bottom, adjust weight/BC inflation to pivot on fin tips with breathing, BC inflation/venting in small bursts, BC control held high when venting

If necessary adjust the students' weights either on a weightbelt or in integrated pouches, - not by putting weights in BC pockets!

- Swim underwater

  Swim underwater at constant depth, check finning action, minimal use of hands/arms. This initial underwater swim should be for a minimum of 20m, but again extended as necessary if any corrective action is required

9. Swimming underwater - to/in/from deeper water

This progresses from the previous exercise to further develop the student's buoyancy control by changing depth while swimming.

- Buoyancy adjustment with changing depth
  Adjust buoyancy as depth changes, BC inflation/venting in small bursts, using both BC mouthpiece (held high when venting) and dump valve, swim from shallow to deeper water and back covering about 50m overall, repeat several times. Initially adjust buoyancy by stopping and using 'fin pivot'. Once students have developed a 'feel' for the amount of adjustment required, progress to buoyancy adjustment while swimming. Discourage any tendency to continually hold on to the BC controls so that students develop the skill of finding them quickly when needed

- Finning action and attitude control

  Good finning action maintained, level attitude maintained. If problems are experienced with attitude control, adjustments to the disposition of any weights carried or how high the cylinder is carried on the student's back may be necessary

10. Remove equipment

As for kitting up, where the location permits, removing the equipment while in the water will make this lesson more comfortable. Remove fins leaning on buddy or other suitable fixed object for support. Buddy pairs assist each other to remove equipment, SCUBA unit laid down, demand valves placed on top.

11. Exit water

Exit by wading or via steps.

12. Debriefing

Using the 'REAP' format, make sure that everyone has enjoyed their first lesson and highlight the areas of progress that they have made. Offer constructive criticism and explain how they will further develop their skills in the next lesson.

Ensure that the students note the configuration of equipment that they have used, particularly the amount of any weight that has been needed, for preparing their equipment for future lessons.

Answer any questions that the students have.

13. Equipment care

This exercise underlines the need to take care of the equipment upon which their lives depend. For this lesson the exercise must be demonstrated and carefully supervised.

- Equipment washed in fresh water, pressure dissipated from regulator, equipment disassembled, regulator dustcaps dried and fitted, and all items stowed away