

The HangLine

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Defining Skill Part 3 in the TASK Model

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An individual can take all the courses in the world and still not acquire the skills necessary to do a dive safely. Training, attitude, practice and natural ability all determine how well a diver will develop his skills. In some cases a diver never seems to develop his physical abilities to a competent level simply because he lacks the natural talent or skill to do so. I like golf. I have been out on many golf courses and driving ranges and I have even taken lessons, but I simply cannot learn how to drive a ball down a fairway in a straight line consistently. I recognize that my ability to become a good golfer is limited by a lack of natural skills. This was especially evident when I was at a driving range and watched a young boy of 13, who for the first time with a golf club in his hands drive a ball 200 yards. He has a natural ability; his skills as a golfer will develop far more than mine.

When developing skills, divers should execute a learning process that will provide a safe educational experience. Let us again refer to the method whereby a diver learns

how to clear a partially flooded mask under water. This is an important skill and is taught because there is a reasonable likelihood that a diver will have problems in the water at some point in his diving career. The reason for teaching the skill is first explained to students with the hopes that they might attach a value to it, i.e. *'what would you do if water suddenly was forced into your mask and you could not see?'* In class students are then shown a picture or video of someone clearing their mask, perhaps a first hand demonstration by the Instructor in front of the class. They get to practice the skill out of the water, then in a pool in the shallow end (where they can stand up and out of the water if need be) and finally in the deep end in front of an Instructor or Divemaster before finally attempting it out in a controlled open water environment.

Mastering a Skill

The Three C's

- C - Confidently**
- C - Competently**
- C - Comfortably**

As this skill develops, it builds confidence within the student to learn other skills like clearing a fully flooded mask and then eventually taking the mask off and breathing without it underwater. Notice that the learning pace is gradual and comfortable. It is about mastering a skill in a certain environment





before extending the environment the diver is in, the activity the diver is participating in or using a different type of equipment. This reduces the risk of having a problem or an accident while learning a new skill.



As a diver extends the range of his diving depth, the appropriate thing to do then is gradually master that skill in that environment. This can be accomplished by practicing that particular skill in that environment using controls that will help prevent problems if the diver has difficulty (i.e. a buddy watching close by, an up-line that a diver can hold onto and/or in an area where the current is minimal.)

As a diver extends the range of diving equipment he is using, he will want to master all of the skills involved in competently handling that equipment in an environment he is already relaxed in and engaging in an activity he is already comfortable doing. Skill development may begin with formal diver training but it is something that is developed throughout a diver's career. One of the most common skills divers overlook is proper breathing technique. A safe diver will continue to work on his breathing technique and personal fitness levels routinely in and out of the water.

Mastering a Skill

This is a term that is often used by Instructors when they present learning objectives to their students. When an Instructor states that he expects a skill to be mastered to satisfy the requirements of a certification, he is referring to a level of performance that meets a predetermined criterion. This is based on a standard outlined by the training agency that licenses the Instructor. Ultimately the Instructor must be satisfied that a diver is capable of repeating that skill on his own outside of the learning environment. This perhaps suggests that 'mastering a skill' is a somewhat subjective evaluation and predisposed to different interpretation. What one Instructor feels is satisfactory another may not; it is all based on experience and the personal philosophies that divers have about 'competency'.



In the past I have stated that despite all of the educational resources available to divers, the final qualifying process ultimately lies within the diver, not the Instructor. There are too many dynamics affecting how one performs a particular skill. So is there such a thing as 'Mastering a Skill'?





At the end of the dive, a diver needs to be able to say without question that he completed that dive competently and with minimal risk. Yes it is true that **ability** is a very subjective thing and therefore the only person that really needs to be satisfied that he is capable of making a dive safely is the diver himself, no one else. If you feel that you have mastered a skill, ask yourself the following questions;

- i. **Do I understand and value the purpose of mastering the skill?**
- ii. **Can I repeat that skill over and over again with out making any mistakes or having any difficulty?**
- iii. **Can I repeatedly demonstrate that skill comfortably?**
- iv. **When I do the exercise does my heart rate and breathing rate stay normal?**
- v. **Can I complete that skill without having to think about what it is I am doing. In other words, has the skill become a natural reaction, habitual in nature?**
- vi. **Can I execute the skill competently and confidently in a variety of environments where I might be task loaded and stressed?**
- vii. **Do I actually enjoy practicing the skill?**
- viii. **Could I demonstrate the skill to someone else in such a way that they would be impressed?**
- ix. **Would I be able to introduce new equipment to my configuration and**

still demonstrate the skill masterfully?

- x. **If I were in a pinch, could I adapt quickly and react appropriately and still successfully complete the skill – safely?**

If you answer 'no' to any of the above questions, you might really want to re-consider your ability to make a dive safely with an optimal **Risk-Benefit Ratio**. Mastering a skill is about being able to repeatedly execute that skill in a confident, competent and comfortable manner despite what is going on around you.

~Safe Diving

