

Briefings are given to reduce risk by highlighting things to be aware of or outlining rules to be followed. It should include general housekeeping, safety considerations, and procedures to follow in an emergency.

This checklist covers the basics that should be included in any skipper's safety briefing. This list is not exhaustive and is provided to give guidance to novice and trainee skippers to help them develop their own safety briefing.

The checklist has been broken into three sections: below and above deck and first mate. In addition, you can find more information on safety briefings, including helpful tips, on our dedicated webpage.

Introduction

There are three parts to a skipper's safety briefing. The first two, above & below deck, which should be given to everyone, and then one for a nominated First Mate, focused on what to do in an emergency, especially if you, the skipper, become incapacitated.

The detail needed for each will vary based on the crew's prior experience and knowledge of the boat. For example, your regular crew will require less information, whilst new crew will need more. There's also a balance between novice crew versus experienced sailors. Your briefing needs to account for this. For example, you can easily overwhelm a first-time sailor with too much detail about a danbuoy that puts them off rather than inspires confidence in the sport. Ultimately, it becomes your decision as a skipper to make the right call. However, even a complete novice will require some briefing to safely enjoy their time on the water.

First mate briefing

In addition to the general safety briefings, you should always nominate and brief a first mate. At the very least, if you become incapacitated, you need someone who can take over or follow a procedure to request help. You should tell the rest of the crew who the nominated first mate is.

The first mate briefing is more detailed, specifically around safety equipment. Their duties range from simply initiating a call to the coastguard (if something happens to you) to helping you in the event of an emergency. The first mate is usually the crew member with the most experience, but much will depend on your circumstances. Of course, as part of your passage appraisal, you'll only undertake a passage that is appropriate for the crew's experience.

BELOW DECK - ALL CREW

This list includes the things that should be given to all crew as part of the below deck safety briefing.

- COMPANIONWAY STEPS**
Brief how to move between the cockpit and below decks using the companionway steps safely—backwards, whilst holding on. Include the importance of closing the companionway hatch after entering or exiting the cabin to prevent anyone from falling through the gap left in the coachroof.
- GAS PROCEDURES**
Brief how to use the stove—isolating the gas supply above deck (at the bottle) and below deck (at the stove) when not used.
- USE OF THE STOVE**
Brief how to use the stove's gimbal—the gimbal should be fixed in harbour and unlocked to allow swinging when at sea. Also, point out where the nearest fire blanket and extinguisher are.
- USE OF THE HEADS**
Brief how to use the heads properly, including thoroughly drying the bowl to avoid regurgitated waste. Heads rules:
 - i. Don't put anything down the Heads that hasn't been through you. (no loo roll, sanitary towels or wet wipes).
 - ii. When at sea, male crew should sit to wee—aiming becomes problematic at best, messy at worst.
- FIRE SAFETY**
Brief the location of the fire extinguishers and their basic use. Include the importance of getting above decks as soon as possible by showing where the fire exits are. These are usually the companionway and any hatch. Demonstrate how to open the hatches, including any locking mechanism. (Hatches should be unlocked but closed when at sea).
Talk about what the fire extinguishers in cabins are for; to help anyone trapped evacuate, not firefight. Once out, close the cabin door and use the nearest fire exit to get above deck.
- SAFE STOWAGE**
Brief the importance of adequately stowing everything. Everything in the boat's inventory should already have a secure stowage location. Show the crew where and how to stow their belongings safely. This is an excellent time to include where any magnetically sensitive areas are to avoid unnecessary deviation.
- HATCHES**
Brief on the importance of keeping hatches closed when at sea. It's not like a house where we can just open windows, no matter how bad the smell!

ABOVE DECK - ALL CREW

This list includes the things that should be given to all crew as part of the above deck safety briefing.

- MOVING AROUND DECK**

Brief on the number of trip hazards on deck. Point out strong points that can help with balance, such as coach roof handles. Also, include not using moving lines or the boom as these are dangerous.

Cover the importance of closing the companionway hatch after entering or leaving the cabin to prevent anyone from falling through the gap left in the coachroof.
- CLUTCHES AND CONTROL LINES**

Brief on the safe use of clutches and how to release them properly. This should be done in conjunction with a briefing on the safe use of a winch.
- WINCHES**

Brief on how to use a winch safely, including loading and unloading whilst keeping fingers clear and how to use a winch to take the load from a clutch before opening it. It should also include the dangers of rope burn, specifically, not trying to hold a rope under load using hands.

Proper use of a winch handle, including stowing appropriately when not in use, should also be covered.
- SAFETY EQUIPMENT**

Point out the various pieces of safety equipment as it will help build the crew's confidence. A full detailed explanation of every piece of equipment is probably unnecessary and likely to overwhelm and be forgotten. However, a detailed run-through of the equipment should be covered during the designated first mate briefing.
- BOOM SAFETY**

Brief on the dangers of the boom, including not holding it when moving along the boat. When briefing about safely exiting the cabin through the companionway, remind everyone to watch their head on the boom.
- UNCONTROLLED GYBE**

Brief on safe locations to sit in the cockpit, avoiding the boom, mainsheet and traveller when sailing downwind. General awareness of the danger should be made so any subsequent warnings when at sea will be clearly understood.

ABOVE DECK - ALL CREW (CONTINUED)

This list includes the things that should be given to all crew as part of the above deck safety briefing.

- MOVING AROUND DECK**
Brief on the number of trip hazards on deck. Point out strong points that can help with balance, such as coach roof handles. Also, include not using moving lines or the boom as these are dangerous.
Cover the importance of closing the companionway hatch after entering or leaving the cabin to prevent anyone from falling through the gap left in the coachroof.
- SHORE POWER**
Brief on the correct way to connect and disconnect shore power; Always disconnect the shore end first. We do not want a live electric cable dangling from the socket in the water—vice-versa, when re-connecting, connect the boat end first.
- WARPS & CLEATS**
Brief some basic skills for safely using mooring lines. Include how to secure a line to a cleat, sweat a line, use a cleat to take the load and the danger of lines in the water getting caught around the prop.
- BOARDING & DISEMBARKING**
Brief on how to get on and off safely from amidships, stepping off (no jumping) and whilst holding on to the shrouds.
- LIFE JACKETS & SAFETY LINES**
Brief everyone on life jackets. Where they are stowed, how to correctly fit one, crotch straps, manually inflating and rules around wearing them. This should also include safety lines and how to use them, connecting to the life jacket and jackstays.
- STARTING & STOPPING THE ENGINE**
Brief on the process for starting and stopping the engine. This will differ for each vessel.

FIRST MATE

This list includes the things that should be included in a first mate briefing in addition to the general safety briefing given to everyone.

- LOCATION OF ALL SAFETY & OTHER EQUIPMENT**
Brief on the whereabouts of everything from Day Shapes (anchor ball etc.), first aid kit, navigation equipment, instruments, emergency tiller, life raft, flares, EPIRB etc. - all the equipment onboard.
- MAN OVERBOARD**
Brief on the specific man overboard safety equipment and how to use it. Danbuoys & horseshoe buoys should be shown along with any personal beacons being used and how they work. Talk through how to lower the sails quickly and the man overboard procedure.
- ENGINE FIRE**
Brief on the engine bay extinguisher (usually automatic) and the importance of not opening the engine bay door. Point out where the fire extinguisher port is located and its use (additional fire extinguisher inlet).
Stopping the fuel supply will also be necessary, so show where the fuel isolation valve is located.
- SEACOCKS & BUNGS**
Brief each seacock's location and the emergency wooden bungs that can be used to block the hole in case of their failure.
- LIFE RAFT**
Brief on the location and procedure for launching the life raft. Remember to include tying on the painter securely.
- VHF EMERGENCY PROCEDURE**
Brief on the DSC function and subsequent voice MayDay message that should be sent. Don't forget to remind them to use channel 16.