

You Make the Call



The instructor and the divemaster stand in shallow water in front of a class of four PADI Open Water Diver course student divers. The instructor begins, “Welcome to pool session number three. Right now I am going to teach you three skills that have to do with buoyancy. I’m going to combine these three skills in one session.”

Looking at a set of slates, the instructor reads, “By the end of this session, you will be able to do these three skills. One: With a buddy, descend in water too deep in which to stand using the five-point method and use buoyancy control to stop the descent without contacting the bottom. Two: With a buddy, swim over a simulated environmentally sensitive bottom while maintaining buoyancy control. Last: Make a five point ascent from above a simulated environmentally sensitive bottom without contacting the bottom.”

Looking up to the divers, the instructor continues, “This is a crucial set of skills that will allow you to protect the fragile ecosystem on the bottom of most dive sites. You’ll see this when we go to Coral Garden for our open water dives this Saturday.”

The instructor continues, “We are going to use the entire pool for these skills. As you know, the deep end is fairly large, about 900 square feet/100 square metres and it is about 4 metres/12 feet deep, so it’ll work great for our dive.

“We will start at the deep end of the pool and I will have you in buddy teams for the skills. While I dive with the first buddy team, our divemaster will stay at the surface with the remaining two divers.”

The instructor continues, “I’ll have the first buddy team start by doing a five point descent, using the pool wall and ladder as a visual reference. Use your BCD to control your buoyancy, rate of descent and to stop before touching the bottom. Once you are a couple of feet/one metre from bottom, start swimming in a large circle, staying next to each other, in the deep end of the pool. After a few minutes of swimming, I will have you initiate a five point ascent. I want you to complete the skill without ever touching the bottom. Control your breathing and take your time. Once we’re back at the surface, I’ll have the second buddy team start the skills, while the first two divers stay at the surface with our assistant.

“Any questions?”

The student divers have no questions so everyone becomes positively buoyant and follows the instructor to the deep end of the pool with the assistant bringing up the rear.

You Make the Call

In the deep end of the pool, the instructor looks at the student divers and says, “Before we start the skills, make sure that you have plenty of air in your BCDs and watch my demonstration. Once I have started my descent, put your head in the water to see what I am doing.”

Leaving the student divers in the good hands of the assistant, the instructor starts the three skills, five point descent, swim and then the five point ascent. The instructor exaggerates every aspect of the skills, pointing to his breathing, buoyancy control and hand signals.

After the demonstration, the instructor takes the first buddy team, signaling the assistant to keep an eye on the remaining divers.

The two divers start with a nice five point descent, including correct hand signals but, once close to the bottom of the pool, one of the divers touches the bottom. The instructor motions to the buddy team that they should slowly ascend and to redo the skill.

At the surface, the instructor says, “Don’t forget to slowly put some air in your BCD before reaching the bottom of the pool and take a big breath to stop your descent. Let’s try again.”

The two divers repeat the skill and remain neutrally buoyant prior to reaching the bottom. They then proceed to swim around the pool, in a large circle. The instructor remains above the buddy team, close enough to offer assistance if needed.

After a couple of minutes, the instructor signals to the divers that they should initiate their ascent. The buddy team hovers above the bottom of the pool while going through the five point ascent. Neither diver touches the bottom and they reach the surface slowly, with their hands above their heads, holding the low pressure inflator. Once buoyant at the surface, the instructor congratulates the divers, “Excellent work! You look like you are ready to go to Coral Garden and swim above the coral, well done!”

The instructor then checks with the assistant, takes the next team of student divers to perform the skills and has the assistant look after the first two divers.

The next divers do an excellent job with the five point descent and start swimming without contacting the bottom. After a few minutes, the pair starts the five point ascent, but one of the divers forgets to look at the time before starting the ascent. The instructor quickly stops the buddy team and signals the diver to remember to look at the time when doing a five point ascent. The instructor also signals that the divers to go back down, swim around a little bit, then start the ascent again. The pair slowly returns to depth and start swimming. They then start the five point ascent correctly and reach the surface. The instructor congratulates them, “Well done! The second time you ascended, you remembered to check the time, excellent! Remember, to know your bottom time and be able to calculate your pressure group, you need to check your watch before starting any ascent.”

The instructor signals the divemaster to make sure everything is ok with the other students and motions everyone to go back to the shallow end for the debriefing.

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“Excellent work everyone! I believe you are ready for our dives this weekend at Coral Garden and that these skills will allow you to protect the beautiful coral and marine life.

“I also want to remind you that you must control your breathing at all time when diving above sensitive bottom. In addition to breath control, you can also use your BCD to slow your descent.

“One thing I saw was someone forgot to check the time prior to ascending. Let make an effort to remember to do that. Otherwise, nice job everyone! Let’s have a look at our next skill.”

Control Scores

Briefing: 4

The instructor gave a realistic value, described the skill and listed all three objectives. The instructor did not cover organization or signals.

Demonstration: 5

The instructor had the student divers watch the demonstration both at the surface and underwater. The demonstration was slow and exaggerated for all three skills.

Problem solving: 4

With the first buddy team, the instructor responded correctly when one of the student divers touched the bottom, but did not reinforce proper technique with additional communication.

With the second buddy team, the instructor responded correctly when one of the student divers neglected to check the time and reinforced proper technique with additional communication after caring for the problem.

Control and Delivery: 5

The instructor was organized and safe throughout the entire session. The instructor used the assistant effectively and provided positive reinforcement to all the student divers.

Debriefing: 3

The specific positive reinforcement was not related to the skills. The instructor identified a problem that actually occurred and offered a suggestion for another problem that actually occurred. While not a common scenario, it is still valid for evaluation purposes. A realistic value was also offered. The instructor did not restate the objectives.

Final score: 4.2