

FLUID FOUNDATIONS

Episode 5: Gybing



The autumnal winds are most definitely upon us and the prospect of lots of great sessions on the water has never looked so good! With this in mind Jim Collis continues with his Fluid Foundations series - a series of articles that take us back to first principles and concentrate on the core skills and techniques within windsurfing in a simple, easy to follow progression. Helping us to get the most out of our time on the water. So far Jim has looked at getting planing, harnessing, footstraps, stance, and tacking, and the series continues this month by looking at improving and fine tuning our gybes, whether planing or not.

The Fluid Foundations series is designed as a tool to be used by any windsurfer. Whether entry level and wanting to improve your skill repertoire, or advanced and looking to benefit from taking on board simple tips that will help to hone and consolidate your performance on the water, this series works for one and all!

K.I.S.S. is not some crazy, half-hatched idea but rather just an interpretation of a widely used concept in a huge number of sports: the idea of bringing everything down to 'base' level, creating firm foundations from which to build a solid skill level and above all complete understanding through simplicity.

Before continuing, it is important to point out that this series does not go into equipment and kit set up. For information on this, please refer to Jim's Tech Spec Series from September 2007 in Windsurf Magazine.

It is also worth mentioning that, in addition to the articles in this series over the next few issues, Jim has recently released a DVD called Fluid Foundations that runs through all of these core skills in windsurfing on film. For more information on obtaining a copy of his DVD please contact Jim on jimcollis@windsurfevolution.co.uk

THE 5 THEMES OF K.I.S.S. ARE:

To help with this easy progression, all the skills within the Fluid Foundations series are broken down and simplified according to Jim's "K.I.S.S." methodology - Keeping It Stupidly Simple.

KISS consists of 5 themes that run through our windsurfing and is appropriate for absolute novices all the way through to world champions.

These themes underpin the essential core aspects of the skills within windsurfing, helping us to concentrate on the root cause of why a skill works, rather than confusing us by concentrating on peripheral aspects that might happen as a result of doing the skill. For example, in a tack - focusing on what our head is looking at to help control our direction, rather than thinking about what our little toe is doing as the board steers!

HEAD - Looking where we want to go and being aware of everything around us

ARMS - Keeping a straight front arm, thereby distancing ourselves from the rig and helping us to naturally counter balance against it, and using our back arm to 'sheet in' or draw power from the rig

LEGS - Adjusting leg and feet positions on the board to keep it flat and us stable!

BODY - Changing our body's position/shape according to the conditions and how we feel. For example, if we feel over-powered or threatened we get lower and if we feel underpowered or inefficient, we become more upright

BREATHE - Remembering to breathe so that we can be relaxed, alert and responsive when sailing, which in turn helps us to flow and perform more naturally whatever the skill or conditions.

GYBING

Over the years gybing has become the holy grail of windsurfing. Whether it's the exhilaration of accelerating downwind as we go into a gybe, or the satisfaction of conquering one of the pinnacle manoeuvres within the windsurfing bible, or even just wanting to look good from the beach, the majority of windsurfers freely admit to sacrificing a huge amount of their time on the water to learning, practicing and perfecting the gybe, whether planing or not.

When the mystery and general hype is stripped away however, the gybe is just another way of turning around – like the tack – the difference only that the tail goes through the eye of the wind rather than the nose!

So why does it take so long to learn the gybe and does it need to?

Far from taking anything away from the conquest of a good gybe, the real hurdle that faces most windsurfers, and one of the reasons that we spend so long learning this particular way of turning around, is the general shroud of mystery and confusion that has been draped over it for many years. It is here that we need to face a few home truths and hopefully will be able to see our way to simplifying the gybe and understanding that, as just another turn, it is perfectly feasible to achieve and perfect, whether planing or non-planing, in a matter of hours and days, rather than months and years.

Firstly, one of the major problems is the concept of 'list learning' (learning a skill by following a sequential order, or list, of things to do) that has been adopted for so long by windsurfers and which hinders us far more than helps. A gybe, whether planing or not, lasts about 3-4 seconds. The reality of us being able to follow a list of 15-20 things to do during that small a time scale, and then understand which part of the list caused it to go wrong if we crash, is a tall order! The inherent problem here is that the human brain can, on average, only process a relatively small quantity of things at one time (the maximum being 5-7 things). Add in the psychological factor of attempting a new skill and that number of things becomes even less, to the point where most people can generally only focus on one thing at a time when learning. This is where the concept of simplicity and focusing on the 'core' aspects of a skill comes into its own. This allows us to focus on a small number of key factors that make a skill work (ie one or more of the 5 elements within the 'K.I.S.S.' methodology) to get

results quickly, rather than concentrating on lots of symptoms and confusing intricacies, which result in us struggling to achieve anything.

Secondly, as was briefly mentioned above, the psychological factor is another huge issue, with regards to achieving the gybe quickly and effectively. When gybing, whether planing or not, we accelerate as we head downwind into the gybe. This can cause us to become defensive, albeit exhilarated, resulting in us being far from in a 'learning' state of mind. The trick here, as with learning any skill, is to start learning in a comfortable environment, so that you can focus on what you are doing rather than worrying about what is going on around you. As you gain confidence, you can start changing the surrounding environment so as to become more rounded and 'acquired' in your skill development. With this in mind, it is far more constructive to learn and/or practice our gybes initially in a wind strength and water state that are comfortable and on kit we are used to. Once we have done this, we can head out in slightly stronger winds/choppier water states and perhaps use smaller boards and bigger rigs as a progression, rather than from the outset hurling ourselves into mountainous seas and ballistic wind strengths on kit that we are very unsure of.

The final issue is to understand that the gybe, like the tack, is fundamentally the same technique whether planing or not, dispelling the myth that the 'carve' gybe is a mythical beast that can only be tamed by super heroes! Although when we are planing we use the rail of the board to 'carve' the board around the corner, and when not planing we use the rig to steer the board, the actual technique that we use (what our head, arms, legs and body are doing) is exactly the same. It is perfectly feasible to follow a quick, achievable progression from cracking the non-planing gybe to the planing gybe.

With all of this in mind, we are going to approach the gybe, as with all skills that have been covered in the fluid foundations series so far, with pure simplicity, focusing on nothing more than our head, arms, legs, body and breathing. The easiest way for us to achieve this, just as we did with the tack, is to actually break the gybe up into its component parts: the beginning, the middle and the end.

The great thing about this, other than having less to think about on the whole, is that we can practice a particular section of the gybe in isolation and then, when we feel comfortable, combine it with the other parts and hey presto, we start to get results without confusion or inhibition.



Whether planing or not, the technique for a gybe is fundamentally the same and equally achievable



JIM COLLIS TECHNIQUE

THE BEGINNING & THE MIDDLE

The great thing about any turn is the fact that most of it quite simply consists of steering. To learn, improve and fine-tune our gybes, probably one of the most important things to do before anything else is to get very good at steering away from the wind and then progress to steering through the downwind position and out the other side. All that then remains is for us to change our feet and the rig, sailing away from a smooth gybe. For this extravaganza of steering that makes up the beginning and middle of a gybe, whether planing or not, all we need to concentrate on is what our head, arms, and body are doing.

TO STEER AWAY FROM THE WIND:

Head - Turn your head to look through the sail and downwind (where you want to go while remaining aware of others around you!)

Arms - Front arm straight, keeping the rig away, back arm 'sheeting in' to draw power from the rig. Move the rig forwards and slightly to windward (towards the wind) allowing your body to drop back so there is constant counter balance between you and the rig.

N.B. Move your hands down the boom – front hand close to the harness lines and back hand right down towards the clew: this helps to give good distance between you and the rig for counter balance and excellent power control.

Body - Change your body's position according to the conditions and how you feel - drop your hip over a bent back leg, keeping your front leg straight. You are steering downwind and so need to adopt a more 'control' oriented body position.



The beginning - steering away from the wind

TO STEER THROUGH THE DOWNWIND POSITION AND OUT THE OTHER SIDE:

Head - Turn your head to look towards the clew of the sail and the exit of the turn (remaining aware of those around you!)

Arms - Front arm straight, keeping the rig away, back arm 'sheeting in' to draw power from the rig. Move the rig across the board to the outside of the turn, allowing your body to move across the board and to the inside of the turn. Maintain a constant counter balance between you and the rig.

N.B. Keeping your hands down the boom: front hand close to the harness lines and back hand towards the clew, helps to give good distance between you and the rig for counter balance and excellent power control.

Body - Change your body's position/shape according to conditions and how you feel. Keep your hip dropped over a bent back leg, keeping your front leg straight. You are still downwind and so need to adopt a more 'control' oriented body position.

As we are practicing this steering, so the other aspects of the 'KISS' formula, our legs and breathing, should be working as always in the background.



The middle - steering through the downwind position

Legs - Adjust leg and feet positions on the board to keep it controlled and us stable.

As you steer downwind and continue through the downwind position, have your legs in a normal sailing position: front leg straight, keeping the nose down and back leg bent, allowing your hip to drop back over your back foot to counterbalance the movement of the rig. Have your feet further down the board – front foot just in front of/ in the front footstrap, back foot just in front of the back footstraps and over to the leeward (downwind) side of the board. *N.B.* The back foot is placed on the leeward (downwind) side of the board, just in front of the back straps, to provide a solid base for your hip to move over when steering or 'carving' the board through the downwind position. This allows your body to naturally counterbalance against the rig by being on the inside of the turn as the rig is moved to the outside.

Breathe - Slow breaths to stay relaxed rather than hyperventilating and thereby tensing up!



Legs/feet and breathing working effectively in the background

Top Tip:

Practicing steering downwind and then back upwind again whilst continuing in the same direction (doing progressive 'steps' downwind) is a very good way of building confidence and a solid foundation for great gybes. See how far downwind you can steer before steering back out upwind again.

THE END

Having looked at the start and the middle of the gybe, we have actually steered ourselves pretty much all the way round the turn, all that is left to do is to change our feet, rotate the rig and sail off having completed a smooth gybe!



Practicing on land pays huge dividends to our confidence and builds invaluable muscle memory

See if you can steer all the way through the downwind position and then back again!

Bonus Top Tip:

Alongside practicing this end section of foot movements and rig rotations on land to improve muscle memory and gain confidence, we can also do this in very light winds on a big board and small sail by performing light-wind freestyle moves, such as clew-first beach starts, rig 180s & 360s, clew-first sailing, and sailing switch stance. When we feel confident with our feet movements and rotating a rig, we can then combine it with our refined steering...and hey presto we are gybing smoothly and seamlessly!

The end section, although it seems like there is lots going on with the foot change and the rig rotation, is actually as simple as the beginning and the

Top Tip:

Rather than heading straight out onto the water to practice this, it is a good idea to build up some muscle memory by practicing on land on a finless board (ideally the one you will be using on the water) and with a small rig (so that it is light and easy to manoeuvre...no 8.5m sails!)

middle parts mentioned above, this time all we need to focus on are our legs and arms.

Legs - Adjust leg and feet positions on the board to keep it controlled and us stable. Move your feet in a "heel to toe" fashion, moving the front foot to just in front of the back foot and on the same side of the board and then stepping up towards the mast-foot with the back foot, trying to keep movements smooth and minimal.

N.B. This "heel to toe" technique is a very effective way to achieve minimal and smooth movements whilst keeping weight on the same side of the board so as to keep the board steering or 'carving' through the turn, but don't contort yourself into an awkward position if your body doesn't like it! The aim is to place the heel of your front foot where the toe of your back foot was: this is definitely something to practice on land.



The end - changing our feet

JIM COLLIS TECHNIQUE



"The end - rotating the rig"

Arms - Arms straight/rig away for effective counter balance and stability. While you are changing your feet, keep the front arm straight/rig away from you and the back arm 'sheeting' the sail in, so as to maintain a stable framework and good counterbalance between your body and the rig as you change your foot positions.

Once the feet are changed, rotate the rig 180 degrees from clew-first back to normal by releasing the hand nearest the clew and allowing the sail to float behind you, and then grasp the new side of the boom and slice the rig forwards as you drop your body back. As the rig rotates remember to always oppose the rig's position by keeping your arms straight/rig away - rig back, body forwards; rig forwards, body back - and try to keep hand movements on the boom minimal and smooth. Remember, wherever the rig is, you are not! *N.B.* To make the rotation as smooth as possible, as you release the rig allow your hand nearest the mast to slide up the boom to just by the mast so as to facilitate an easy 'crossover' with your hands to the other side. When you slice the rig forwards, just as with steering downwind in the beginning, allow your hands to slide down the boom - front hand close to the harness lines and back hand further down still - so as to give good distance between you and the rig for good counter balance and excellent power control as you exit.

As we are practicing this foot change and rig rotation, so the other aspects of the 'KISS' formula: our head, body and breathing, should be working as always in the background...

Head - Looking where we want to go and aware of everything around us. Keep your head looking towards the exit of the turn, as it will help to make us more balanced and dynamic in our arm and leg movements.

Body - Change your body's position/shape according to conditions and how you feel: if over-powered or threatened get lower, and if underpowered or inefficient become more upright.

N.B. With your arms straight/rig away, your body will naturally move in constant opposition to the movement of the rig and keep you counterbalanced. Remember, wherever the rig is, you are not!

Breathe - Slow breaths to stay relaxed rather than hyperventilating and thereby tensing up!

Top Tip:

A lot of people get held back in the development of their gybes as they get bogged down in the intricacies of the skill, such as timings for the foot

and rig change. The only aspect about timing that we need to concern ourselves with though, is that we have actually steered ourselves around the turn enough before changing our feet and the rig, whether we are planing or not. As we get more confident with the skill, we should experiment with changing our feet and the rig at different times to try to carry more speed out of the turn. However when learning, practicing and consolidating the gybe, rather than worry about intricate timings and confusing ourselves with too much going on in our heads, move your feet and rotate your rig once you have steered yourself through the downwind position and when it feels comfortable to do so, and focus more on what your arms and legs are actually doing!

As mentioned at the start of this article, we can either make our lives difficult by over complicating things and being over informed (becoming frustrated at our lack of success), or we can make life easier by keeping it simple. The gybe can be broken down into its component parts of beginning, middle and end, so rather than beating our head against a brick wall with a 'list' of 30 things to think about, we can practice a part of the turn in isolation, refine it and tune it until we are happy. Then we can combine it with the other parts for better, quicker and far more satisfying results! Hopefully, this episode on gybes has been useful, whether you are a first timer or an old hand looking to fine tune your performance on the water. *Next month we will be moving onto the last episode in this Fluid Foundations series: looking at beach and waterstarts, and seeing if we can apply the same simplistic approach to get an energy saving and more stylish way of getting up and away!*

In the meantime, get out there and see if keeping it stupidly simple makes a difference to your sailing!

The Fluid Foundations Series is written by Jim Collis - Pro Coach, Instructor Trainer and Test Editor for Windsurf magazine. If you'd like any more information on coaching or training to be an instructor please contact Jim on jimcollis@windsurfevolution.co.uk or visit www.windsurfevolution.co.uk

