CHECKLIST

Safety Briefing

Safety Briefing

108 items

Crew safety briefing before casting off.

Scope and expectations

Roles on board, the crew's experience and health, plus the purpose and running order of the briefing.

- [ ] **Welcome and roles**
  Who is the skipper and carries the responsibility? Make clear that in any safety-critical situation the skipper's instructions are followed without discussion. Say it in a relaxed tone, but unmistakably.
- [ ] **The skipper's deputy**
  Name who runs the boat if the skipper is incapacitated or asleep. Name that person out loud in front of the whole crew.
- [ ] **Ask about crew experience**
  Who can swim? Who holds licences, has sailing experience, knows knots, holds a radio certificate or first-aid training? Ask about motorboat experience and diving. The answers decide who gets which role.
- [ ] **Health and medication**
  Ask about pre-existing conditions, allergies, regular medication and susceptibility to seasickness. Where is each person's medication kept, so it can be found in an emergency?
- [ ] **Announce how the briefing will run**
  Say up front that a lot of emergency scenarios are about to be discussed, that this is routine, and that it is not a reason to worry.

Ground rules on board

Holding on and moving about, footwear, getting on and off, communication, consideration for others and waste disposal.

- [ ] **One hand for the ship, one for yourself**
  On deck you only ever have one working hand: plan every task one-handed, never carry anything with both hands, take the next handhold before letting go of the last. Never grab after a falling object. The same applies below deck. Hold only fixed handrails and the guardrail — never a wire guard wire; it gives under load and is a fall arrester, not a handhold.
- [ ] **Stay stable**
  Three points of contact with the boat, no jumping, no running: the deck moves, and you never land where you aimed.
- [ ] **When heeled, always go forward on the windward side**
  Windward is the high side: there you fall into the boat, on the leeward side you fall into the water.
- [ ] **Footwear**
  Non-slip soles, on a wet deck and in daylight alike. Bare feet are the most common cause of injury: lines, cleats and fittings are toe traps. Shoes are mandatory for harbour and anchor manoeuvres.
- [ ] **Getting on and off the boat**
  Hold on to the shrouds, not the guardrail — the shrouds carry the mast, the guardrail carries only itself. Never jump; wait until you can step across safely, because the gap changes at exactly the moment you push off. Never put a foot between boat and pontoon — several tonnes will crush it without resistance.
- [ ] **Never hold a boat with muscle power**
  No fending off with hands or feet — even a small yacht carries several tonnes of momentum and no arm will stop it. Take one or two turns of the line around a cleat or bollard and stop it by friction; fend off only with a fender.
- [ ] **The helm changes hands only on an explicit handover**
  The helm is taken and given up when the skipper or the current helm explicitly hands it over — never casually and never on your own initiative. The handover is confirmed out loud and covers course, traffic and anything unusual. Whoever is steering stays there until a relief has taken over, or for a few seconds nobody is steering at all.
- [ ] **Who operates what**
  Sails, sheets, engine and instruments are handled on command only. Anyone who thinks a change is needed reports it rather than acting: the skipper must know the state of the boat at all times.
- [ ] **Clear communication**
  Repeat commands loudly and briefly so it is clear they were received. In an emergency: alert everyone immediately, stay calm, do not improvise on your own.
- [ ] **Consideration and noise**
  Early and late hours in harbour, music, doors slamming when heeled. Lending a hand is a given on board — if you see someone struggling, help.

- [ ] Nothing goes overboard
  Above all no plastic and no cigarette butts — plastic stays for decades in the very waters we are sailing. Rubbish is collected on board and disposed of ashore.

Personal safety equipment

Life jackets, lifebelts and tethers, where personal gear is stowed, plus clothing, sun protection and gloves.

- [ ] Issue the life jackets
  Every crew member gets their own jacket, puts it on, adjusts it to fit and marks it personally (tape with their name) — otherwise someone grabs another person's badly adjusted jacket in a hurry. Practise putting it on in harbour until it needs no thought.
- [ ] Check the jacket
  Check it together: cylinder screwed in tight, firing mechanism/salt tablet intact, webbing undamaged, light working, whistle present. Show where the oral inflation tube is. An unchecked jacket may simply not inflate when it matters.
- [ ] When the jacket is worn
  When reefing, during manoeuvres on deck, as a matter of course in cold waters, and whenever the skipper says so — plus any time anyone wants to. Nobody has to justify wearing one.
- [ ] Lifebelt and tethers
  Show how and where to clip on: to the jackstays on deck, to fixed points in the cockpit — never to the guardrail. Applies from roughly force 5, in a seaway and on command.
- [ ] Stow the gear where you can reach it
  Jacket and lifebelt live in a fixed place in your own berth or cabin, not in a locker. Everyone must be able to find theirs without searching.
- [ ] Clothing, sun and cold
  Hat, high-factor sunscreen, sunglasses, long sleeves, and drink enough. Always keep a warm layer to hand, even in a summer cruising area — the water cools you faster than land does, and being cold makes you careless. Tie long hair back or it ends up in a winch or clutch.
- [ ] Gloves
  Wear them for every manoeuvre and whenever handling lines: anchor and mooring lines, warps, halyards and sheets under load, winch work. Wet lines under load cause friction injuries.

Moving and working on deck

The hazards on a walk round the deck: the boom, hatches, winches and clutches, running rigging, the companionway and deck fittings.

- [ ] The boom
  The single biggest hazard on board. Keep your head down when tacking and gybing, and never stand or sit under an unsecured boom. Point out the preventer and when it gets rigged.
- [ ] Hatches
  All hatches are shut under sail and from the moment of casting off. Avoid stepping on hatches: they are slippery, they break, and the ventilation knobs snap off. Point out the injury risk of stepping into an open hatch.
- [ ] Winches and clutches
  Demonstrate them: at least three turns on the drum, fingers flat, never reach into the bight. Injuries happen when a hand is pulled under the line. Show how to surge a line and ease one under load in a controlled way.
- [ ] Winch handle
  Always take it out after use and put it back in its holder. A handle left in goes overboard or becomes a missile.
- [ ] Running rigging
  Name the sheets, halyards and outhauls and show what belongs to what. Lines under load carry enormous tension — never stand in a bight and never sit on a line.
- [ ] Companionway
  Always go down facing the ladder and using both hands: hit by a wave, you otherwise fall backwards the whole way. Close the washboards when working at the boom or in heavy weather.
- [ ] Fittings and trip hazards
  Point them out on the walk round: genoa track, cleats, vents, anchor fitting, backstay tensioner. When the boat heels, every route across the deck changes.
- [ ] Slipping below deck
  A wet cabin sole at the foot of the companionway, water off the oilskins. Anyone coming in wet strips off at the companionway.

Harbour manoeuvres, lines and fenders

Who does what when berthing and casting off, handling lines and fenders, mooring lines and the bow thruster.

- [ ] Assign the roles
  Before every berthing and departure, say who handles which line, who sets the fenders and who steps ashore. Nobody leaves the boat without being told to.
- [ ] Handling lines
  Coiling, making fast on a cleat (show the cleat hitch and have it practised), throwing a line. Point out the danger of loose lines: keep the ends clear, never leave anything trailing.
- [ ] Lines and the propeller
  When casting off, clear the lines and take them aboard under control. Never let a line trail in the water while the engine is running: it can foul the propeller and block or damage the drive.
- [ ] Fenders
  Make them fast with a clove hitch to the guardrail or the foot of a stanchion. As a rule at the widest part of the hull and wherever the boat will touch the pontoon first: spread around the midships section when lying alongside, at the corners of the stern when berthing stern-to. Set the height so the fender sits level with the pontoon or quay edge — different for a high quay wall and for a floating pontoon. One fender always stays loose in someone's hand as a roving fender to absorb contact.
- [ ] Berthing alongside
  Step ashore level with the shrouds; do not jump. Fend off only with the roving fender, never with hands or feet.
- [ ] Mooring lines
  Show how the mooring line is picked up and walked forward. Mooring lines are covered in sharp growth.
- [ ] Bow thruster
  If fitted, explain how it works. Short bursts only, never sustained — the motor overheats within seconds.

Anchoring

Ground tackle and where it is stowed, using the windlass, veering and recovering the chain, anchor watch.

- [ ] Stowage and equipment
  Show the anchor and chain. Ask at handover for the chain length and any markings; if there are none, mark it yourself before the first time you anchor.
- [ ] Using the windlass
  Show the foot switch and the remote. Use it only with the engine running — otherwise the windlass flattens the battery in minutes.
- [ ] Veering the anchor
  The anchor only drops with the clutch released. Brake the chain under control rather than letting it run free: otherwise it piles up and the anchor will not set.
- [ ] Chain on recovery
  Guide the chain with a bar or your foot — keep fingers away. Watch for the chain piling up in the locker and spread it in time.
- [ ] Gloves and shoes for anchor work
  Non-negotiable: the chain has sharp edges and runs out fast.
- [ ] Anchor watch and checks
  Explain how to spot dragging (transits ashore, the plotter's anchor alarm) and who checks when.

Sail handling and running rigging

Setting, reefing and dropping sail, tacking and gybing, behaviour when heeled and in gusts or heavy weather.

- [ ] Setting, reefing, dropping
  Walk through the whole sequence once and assign the roles. Reefing is practised in harbour or in calm weather — not for the first time when it is needed.
- [ ] Tacking and gybing
  Call the commands and have them acknowledged. Point out the danger of an accidental gybe (dismasting, head injury) and explain the preventer.
- [ ] Heeling
  Say in advance that the boat will lie over, that this is normal and not dangerous, and what it means for moving about on deck and below.
- [ ] Gusts and heavy weather
  When do we reef, who wakes the skipper, what happens to hatches and loose objects. The rule: better to reef once too early.

Engine, tanks and drive

Starting and stopping the engine, shifting gear, checking cooling water and oil, autopilot and emergency tiller.

- [ ] Starting and stopping the engine
  Ignition key, glow plugs, throttle in neutral, and check the cooling-water jet after starting — if it does not come, the engine is running dry. Everyone does it once themselves.
- [ ] Never stop the engine with the key
  Explain why: shut down with the stop cable or stop button, or you damage the electrics.
- [ ] Engaging gear
  Always move the lever forward and back through neutral, and only at idle, or the gearbox takes damage.
- [ ] Cooling water
  After starting, check that the cooling-water jet is coming out of the exhaust. If it does not: engine off immediately and call the base.
- [ ] Oil check
  Show the dipstick and check the engine oil level together once, then daily before starting. Servicing and gearbox oil are the base's job; if the level looks wrong, call them rather than topping up yourself.
- [ ] Autopilot
  Show how to switch it on and off. Course changes with the +1/−1 and +10/−10 keys. Press standby to take the helm back immediately; otherwise the pilot holds its course stubbornly, including straight at an obstacle. Every crew member presses standby once themselves.
- [ ] Emergency tiller
  Fetch it from its stowage, fit it and at least indicate how it is used. The crew must know where it is before the steering fails.

Electrics and onboard systems

Battery master switch, distribution panel and fuses, power consumption and shore power, the tool kit.

- [ ] Battery master switch
  Show where it is. It gets switched off if there is a smell of burning insulation, and it protects against flattening the starter battery by accident. On a short circuit: off immediately.
- [ ] Panel and fuses
  Explain the panel and show the main fuse. Ask at handover whether there are spare fuses on board and where they are.
- [ ] Using power
  Charge phones and other devices while motoring or on shore power, not at anchor. The fridge stays on and is opened only briefly; if the battery is low, turn it down a step rather than off. Switch off cabin lights and unused instruments; navigation and anchor lights stay on.
- [ ] 12 V / mains
  Show the shore-power cable, the inlet and the mains sockets, as well as the 12 V and USB charging points. The mains sockets — and usually the water heater and air conditioning too — only work with shore power connected.
- [ ] Tools and spares
  Show where they are stowed. Tools go back after use so they can be found in an emergency.

Gas and galley

Gas bottle and shut-off valves, what to do about a leak, using the cooker and oven, avoiding fires while cooking, the fridge.

- [ ] Gas bottle and main valve
  Show where the bottle and the shut-off valve are. Every crew member must be able to shut the gas off safely — quiz them, do not just show them.
- [ ] Gas on only for cooking
  Off again immediately after every meal, and closed as a matter of course under sail: that way only the short run of pipe is ever pressurised, not the whole system.
- [ ] Burning off the line
  Explain it: close the main valve first, then let the flame burn until it goes out by itself — that leaves the pipe empty. Never leave the cooker burning off unattended.
- [ ] Why a leak is dangerous
  Escaping gas sinks and collects in the bilge: risk of explosion and of suffocation. If you smell gas: touch no switch, close the main valve, open the hatches, ventilate the bilge.
- [ ] Cooker and oven
  Show the gimbals, the flame-failure device and the pot holders, and demonstrate the cooker once: only with the holders does the pot stay where it is when the boat heels.
- [ ] No cooking when heeled hard or in a seaway
  At sea always cook in oilskins as protection against scalding. No deep frying in oil — fire risk and a slippery sole.

- [ ] No naked flames
  No candles and no smoking below deck: the boat is always moving, and practically everything in the interior burns.
- [ ] Fridge
  Decide what you need before opening it, and keep the lid or door open only briefly.

Water, heads, seacocks and hatches

Seacocks, the heads, fresh and black water tanks, bilge pumps, plus checking hatches and valves and stowing before departure.

- [ ] Seacocks
  Show where every seacock is (heads, sink, shower, engine cooling, log). Explain open and closed positions. Fix the responsibility: one named person checks every valve and hatch before departure and reports back.
- [ ] Using the heads
  Show how it works and where the valves are, and demonstrate a flush. Pump at least ten more strokes afterwards, or the hose stays full and blocks over time. Close the seacock after use. Leave the heads clean.
- [ ] What may go into the heads
  Only what has been eaten first. No paper, no tampons, sanitary towels or wet wipes — paper goes in the bag provided. Anything else blocks the pump and has to be taken apart by hand.
- [ ] Never pee over the side
  The most common cause of fatal man-overboard cases. Men use the heads sitting down too.
- [ ] Water tank and drinking water
  Show the deck filler and the gauge if there is one. Without a gauge, take the tank capacity from the boat's papers as a guide. Fresh water is scarce: short showers, tap off while brushing teeth, wash up in sea water where you can.
- [ ] Black water tank
  If fitted, explain how it works and where it may be emptied — harbours and protected areas impose heavy fines.
- [ ] Bilge pumps
  Show where the electric pump is and, if fitted, the manual one, and let someone work it once. Check the bilge, and show the bailer and bucket as a backup.
- [ ] Hatches and valves before departure
  Close every hatch and seacock, or water comes in as soon as the boat heels. The named person checks and reports to the skipper.
- [ ] Stow for heeling
  Tidy up before departure: nothing loose on the table, the bench or in the galley, locker doors shut, books and bottles secured. Anything that flies when the boat heels hits someone or breaks.

Navigation, radio and electronics

VHF radio and distress calls, GPS and chart plotter, echo sounder, paper charts and pilot books.

- [ ] Using the VHF
  Switching on, squelch, channel 16, transmitting and receiving. Every crew member holds the microphone once.
- [ ] Making a distress call
  Show the DSC distress button (open the flap, hold the button down) and practise the voice call: “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday – this is [boat name] – position – nature of distress – number of people on board – assistance required”. Put a card with the boat name, MMSI and the distress format up next to the radio where it can be seen.
- [ ] GPS and chart plotter
  Read off the position and write it down as latitude and longitude, plot it on the paper chart, show the MOB button and have it pressed; it stores the position of the person who went overboard.
- [ ] Echo sounder
  Setting it and reading it. Ask at handover for the draught and the transducer offset and write them down in the cockpit. If the offset is unknown, assume it measures from the transducer and allow the full draught as a safety margin.
- [ ] Charts and pilot books
  Show where they are kept. Even with a plotter on board, the paper chart is the backup.

Emergency: man overboard, injury, illness

Man overboard: the first reaction, the roles, the manoeuvre and getting the person back on board. Plus the first-aid kit and seasickness.

- [ ] MOB – first reaction
  Whoever sees it shouts “man overboard”, throws the lifebuoy or horseshoe immediately, and points at the person continuously with an outstretched arm. From then on that person does nothing else.

- [ ] MOB – the other roles
  One person presses the MOB button on the plotter, one sends the mayday, one works the engine and helm. Assign the roles by name and have them repeated back.
- [ ] MOB manoeuvre
  The skipper picks the manoeuvre that suits the boat, the crew and the waters, and explains the sequence and where each crew member stands. Practise it at the start of the trip so the roles are second nature.
- [ ] Lifebuoy, horseshoe, flashing light
  The horseshoe must come free in two movements, its line must run clear, the danbuoy and floating line must be intact, and the light must work. Check every line connection.
- [ ] Recovery on board
  Talk it through concretely: how does an exhausted or unconscious person get back on board? Bathing ladder, main halyard on a winch, recovery sling. Settle this step properly — it is the hardest part of the whole manoeuvre.
- [ ] First-aid kit
  Show where it is, check the contents together, check the expiry dates. Who has first-aid experience? That person is the point of contact in an emergency.
- [ ] Seasickness
  Prevent it early: fresh air, eyes on the horizon, take the helm, eat and drink enough, take tablets in good time before departure. Never leave a sufferer alone below deck — lethargy and crew dropping out become a safety problem for the whole boat.

Emergency: fire, flooding, abandoning ship

Firefighting equipment and what to do in a fire, flooding, the life raft and the order for abandoning ship, distress signals.

- [ ] Fire extinguishers
  Show how many there are, what type (powder/foam) and where, and check the inspection label. Explain how to use one: pull the pin, aim at the base of the fire from close range, not at the flames.
- [ ] Fire blanket
  Show where it is in the galley, within reach of the cooker. Used for fat and pan fires, for burning gas at the cooker and for burning clothing: the blanket is laid over the fire and smothers it. Never use water on a fat fire.
- [ ] What to do in a fire
  Raise the alarm, send a mayday, fight the fire. Only attempt to put out a fire that is just starting — burning GRP is extremely toxic and the smoke kills before the flames do. When in doubt: get out and abandon ship.
- [ ] Engine fire
  Keep the engine bay closed, shut the diesel valve, and introduce extinguishant only through an existing extinguisher port — if there is none, leave the engine bay shut. Do not open the hatch to look, and prepare to abandon ship at the same time.
- [ ] Short circuit / cable fire
  Battery master switch off, shore power disconnected, then extinguish: as long as current is flowing the fire keeps reigniting.
- [ ] Flooding
  Taste the water (fresh or salt?) — that tells you whether it is a tank or a leak. All pumps on, electric and manual, and bail with the bucket as well. At the same time find the leak and plug it — with the wooden bungs at the seacocks if there are any, otherwise with sailcloth, rags or plastic. First suspects: seacocks, stern gland, log.
- [ ] Life raft
  Show where it is, how it is secured, how it is released and where the painter is. The container stays sealed and is not opened; a knife for cutting the painter must be within reach. Be clear: you only take to the raft if the boat is burning or sinking beyond saving. You step up into the raft — you leave the yacht only when she leaves you.
- [ ] Order for abandoning ship
  In this order: send the mayday → secure the raft to the boat, launch it, give the painter a sharp pull → load it → board it → cut the painter.
- [ ] Distress signals
  Show where they are stowed. What is on board (parachute flares, hand flares, smoke float), how many, and which one when? Handling: away from the body, not upside down, downwind and turned away. Point out what misuse costs and what it leads to.

Trip organisation and daily routine

Watch system, the alcohol rule, knots, keeping the log, plus passage and weather planning.

- [ ] Watch system
  Set it out: who steers when, who keeps lookout, who relieves whom. Make clear when the skipper is always called (traffic, a change in the weather, uncertainty, land in sight) — better once too often.
- [ ] Alcohol
  The blood-alcohol limit for the skipper depends on the flag state and the cruising area — in many places it is as strict as on the road, or stricter. The skipper states the rule for this trip explicitly and communicates it at the start, to avoid arguments later. It applies at anchor too: boat and crew must be able to get under way at any time if the berth or the weather turns bad.

- [ ] **Practise knots**
  Bowline, clove hitch, sheet bend, figure of eight, reef knot, and coiling a line. Everyone must have the bowline cold.
- [ ] **Keeping the log**
  Who writes it up? Position every 3 hours as numeric GPS values while under way, the forecast once a day, plus course, wind and engine hours. Record every damage, defect and loss immediately — it is decisive at handback and with the insurer.
- [ ] **Passage planning and weather**
  When and where the weather is fetched, how the day's leg is discussed, who gets a say. A crew that knows the plan thinks along with it and notices sooner when something is off.

Closing the briefing

Assigning standing jobs for the trip and for emergencies, questions and comprehension checks, repeating the key points, a practical drill.

- [ ] **Assign the jobs for the trip**
  Name them and have each person confirm: the skipper's deputy; checking and closing every hatch and seacock before departure, including the report back; lines and fenders during berthing and departure; the windlass and lookout during anchor work; checking the anchor while at anchor; first aid and the first-aid kit; keeping the log; fetching the forecast; shutting the gas off after cooking.
- [ ] **Assign the emergency roles**
  Man overboard: lookout pointing continuously at the person, MOB button on the plotter, the distress call on VHF, engine and helm. Fire: raising the alarm, extinguishing, the distress call, shutting off gas and diesel. Flooding: working the pumps, finding the leak, the distress call. Name a substitute for every role in case someone is out of action or asleep.
- [ ] **Questions**
  Ask actively rather than just “any questions?”. Spot-check: where is the main gas valve? Where is your own lifebelt? What is the first thing you do if someone goes overboard?
- [ ] **Repeat the key points**
  One hand for the ship · the MOB reaction · shut off the gas · send a distress call.
- [ ] **Practical drill under engine**
  Run a MOB manoeuvre with a fender as the “person” at the start of the trip, with all the roles.

Acknowledgments

I took part in the safety briefing and understood all safety-relevant topics covered.

Date	Name	Signature