

From back-kicks to human submarines

I was really curious about how the GUE fundamental course would be like. For me personally I set the goal: don't stress too much about certification! Learn as much as possible and especially - learn how to proper back-kick!

Honestly, I think back-kicks are kind of underrated in their importance, at least in some diving communities. During one of my very first dives we came across a freshwater medusa in a German lake. Until this day, I didn't even know freshwater jellyfish existed. Anyways, I was fascinated but struggled hard to just watch the 2cm big medusa and not "fall" into it all of the time.

After that, a friend of mine explained to me how back kicks work in general. I tried a bit and even got some okayish results but lost the focus on practicing over the time. Two years later he said after a training dive right before Fundis: it's not looking too bad, but you seem to struggle where to put your feet after the kicking phase. And he was absolutely right, as I had to learn in detail the following days!



My Fundamentals took place in an indoor diving center, only a few weeks after I completed my occupational scientific diving training in Germany. Having warm water and perfect visibility around was a welcoming contrast to the murky waters of the Baltic Sea. The first day focused on theory, equipment configuration and dry runs of finning technique. In the evening, we also conducted the swimming test, so it was a full and exhausting day. But I was also happy to be able to completely focus on diving the following days.

On the second day we started our very first dive with trim checks and the different finning techniques. I actually thought there are only three different kicks (Frog, Back and Helicopter-turn) so I had much fun to try the others out! Not so much fun was the back-kick: despite the right technique was shown to me, I kicked myself more upwards than backwards during the first attempts. Luckily, a few dives to practice remained.



The third day started again with practicing the different kicks. In the indoor diving center, there was a shallow plateau, formed similar like a crescent moon. Each of us students was moving across the "crescent moon" using one of the kicks and then returning through the open water to the beginning of the plateau. I checked my dive computer from time to time while kicking through the open water to be assured my buoyancy was stable. At some point I found the situation kind of amusing: For each round, I was using the finning technique we were encouraged to practice, holding the exact depth no matter if above the plateau or in the open water. I actually felt like a human submarine! And this feeling became even stronger: For a valve- and S-drill exercise we positioned

ourselves around a pillar so that every person of our dive team had one edge assigned. Unfortunately, there was a light current towards the wall due to the water bubbles of the other divers in the tank. Holding the position at the pillar edge became challenging as I was constantly driving away a bit.

Our instructor told us to prioritize keeping our position stable, so I had to "re-park" into my spot again from time to time. As I had just learned the helicopter-turn technique, I could slowly turn, back-kick and then readjust my position. During the Valve- and S-drill I could follow the movement protocol better than expected, so the previous dry runs really paid off.

On the last day I told myself again not to stress about the certification but I am ambitious, for sure. So it hurt a bit when my instructor Sebastian von Koss said: "I'm not sure about rec or tech pass yet. I have a tendency to tech but you still have to work on your back kick". Uff! Well - challenge accepted! During the last dive, I tried to constantly remind me of "one good back kick is way more efficient than 5 bad back kicks when I'm stressed". So: slooowing movement down, no hustling. Kick, bring knees and fins together and only after that lower the fins into the loading position. Sounds easy, was actually hard to actively fight my misleading muscle memory. But it worked! I found myself quite stable during the valve-drill, S-drill and the other exercises. Then it was my turn to set the SMB. I pulled the spool out of the pocket only to find that the double ender was not fixed anymore. And to even top this, I realized that the SMB itself unrolled in my pocket. For what else could you wish during an exam situation? Anyhow, this was unexpected but still relatively easy to deal with. When we surfaced, Sebastian von Koss told my buddy Line and me that we successfully completed the course and even both received the tech pass.



I am so thankful for everything I learned during this course! GUE provided me with the training I needed exactly at the right time. Now, I can start into my first scientific diving projects with confidence and start preparing for the Tech1 course.

I want to thank Jenn for organizing all this, Sebastian von Koss for gifting me a spot in his fundamentals class and GUE in general for successfully supporting young people through the NextGen Legacy project!

