

Online yachtmaster? – Does it *really* match-up to chalk-and-talk?



This winter Claire Ellis has taken-on an online RYA Coastal Skipper / Yachtmaster Theory Course. Here she tells us how she's getting on. Former Commodore, now Site Coordinator, Claire Ellis joined the Club in the mid '90s and started sailing from scratch, becoming a regular racer: single-handed in her Laser EPS and now her RS Aero, and also as a crew in a Tasar and a Flying Fifteen. She's a Senior Instructor for dinghy sailing, and Claire's sailed on various big boats and completed the RYA Day Skipper Theory course, conventionally run in the classroom environment some years ago.

“The exam's coming up: that'll be the *real* test. And then there's the practical which has to be done in a real boat, with real people assessing you. There's no online equivalent for that! The course covers the theory side – and this must be in-the-bag before you apply for the real-deal on a yacht.

The online course lets me take on practice tests and choose when I'm ready to take the exam – so long as it's within the six month window when I started. Of course it's been great as a lockdown project in that time of year when the darkness and poor weather means you're mostly indoors. Since last spring my mum's been staying with me because of Covid 19. I've been able to fit my course-work around my daily routine with her. I can work at my own pace and can re-visit any section and re-watch the on-screen demos as often as I need. When I submit my test answers, I get an immediate response, which is great!

It all began in November 2020 and I'm just coming to the end of the course (in January 2021). I haven't worked on it every day, and I've deliberately spent longer time on some parts of the course. Despite the six-month window to complete the course, I could put it on hold for a period of time if need be. It cost £230 – and you can buy an extension of £30 per month if you're not finished. Combined with the absence of travelling on dark evenings, this flexibility's a real bonus.

The online information is excellently presented and explained with animated sequences where this helps understanding. All the supporting documents, charts and almanac that you need are provided. But you're not left entirely at sea on your own. Qualified instructors can be contacted seven days a week by email (or phone if necessary) to give further clarification and they respond very quickly.

The course's neatly divided into sections – and there're test questions at the end of each to check understanding. These tests give options to revise and retry where the answer is not correct - before submission of your final result which is then recorded to enable the trainers to assess your progress. The correct answers are provided to support learning once answers are submitted. Although you cannot alter your recorded test score once submitted, these section tests can be worked-through for revision as often as you wish and will be available to you after taking the final exams to support revision for the practical exam. The section-by section test results are important: they indicate to the trainers in determining your readiness for the final exam.

Yes, of course there are some drawbacks. I sometimes miss a trainer being immediately available to discuss any questions I have, although the support is always there when I contact them for help. And then there's the assessment of your answers. Done by a computer, it's looking for specific words and phrases. It's usually very good about interpreting student answers, but it does encourage you to be very precise and think what they're really asking for. *"Turn right, a bit after the headland..." won't do!"*

Claire concludes, "For the *final* verdict, ask me again after the exam. The practical? - Well maybe if I pass the theory! – and if Covid 19 guidelines ease enough to be able to do it ! I think I'd rather do it in the summer! *Perhaps even the Med'!*"

Claire's RYA Coastal Skipper/Yachtmaster Online Theory Course was provided by Navathome. Other products are also available.