

What, Why, How: My Journey Through GUE's Instructor Training Course

By Andy Wilson, NextGen Trainee Class of 2025



Image 1 - Last day of ITC group photo!

I still can't quite believe it - it's my first trip in Europe, I extended my stay in Sardinia, Italy for 8 weeks AND I've just completed the GUE Recreational Instructor Training Course (ITC)!

I was incredibly fortunate to receive a complimentary spot in the course through my role as a GUE NextGen Legacy Trainee, and I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity. This wasn't something I expected to embark on so early in my journey, and it's been an intense, eye-opening and rewarding experience that I'll carry with me for a long time.

This blog is my attempt to capture and reflect on the experience: what the ITC actually involved, the lessons that stuck with me, and how it's reshaped my perspective, not just as a diver, but as someone who hopes to teach, lead, and inspire others in the future. Whether you're curious about GUE training or just enjoy hearing about what happens behind the scenes, I hope there's something here that resonates.

The GUE ITC Experience: A Structured Approach To Teaching

GUE's Instructor Training Course (ITC) is the first step to becoming a GUE instructor and it covers topics such as the GUE Standards and Procedures, teaching methodologies, risk management, class logistics through lectures, dry-runs, in-water demos and active teaching. This ITC brought together a diverse

group of passionate and talented divers from various corners of the world to learn from each other at Base1 Sardinia, a premiere dive center in the beautiful town of Cala Gonone. I learned not just about instruction, but about communication, leadership, and what it truly means to empower students through inspiration.



Image 2 & 3 – Base1's loaded van with all our gear ready for training dives!

The course empowers instructor candidates through simplicity. Everything has a structure: SOPs, lesson plans, detailed feedback approaches during debriefs and even how to position video divers when recording skills underwater. This ensures consistent, effective and easy-to-understand teaching. Skills are broken down clearly and logically, allowing students to understand, apply and build on their knowledge with confidence. Instructor Candidates must master complex diving topics (i.e. decompression theory, gas physics, team protocols, etc...) and convey a strong emphasis on equipment standardization and safe diving as a unified team. Demos and dry runs, when presented effectively, show students *what* to do, *why* it matters and *how* to do it in a way that makes sense to students at different stages of learning. Ultimately, Instructor Candidates are evaluated not just on knowledge and teaching skills, but on leadership, professionalism and demeanor.

What I Learned: Lessons Beyond Technique

My shift in perspective is huge. As a diver, it's easy to get wrapped up in your own performance. But as an instructor, the focus moves outward, and I've become even more appreciative of the patience previous instructors have given me. The process has pushed me to think critically about my own habits and how they may affect others. It does matter which hand you use to hold and switch regulators. You do have to fin down as you troubleshoot a broken inflator. Don't forget to purge regulators before switching!



Image 4 & 5 - Base1 classroom & beach classroom 😊

Throughout the course, I was reminded again and again that communication is everything. Not just what you say, but how you say it - your tone, your timing, your body language, your ability to read the room (or the water). One of the most consistent pieces of feedback I received was that I needed to be more assertive and develop a stronger voice and presence. As someone who is petite and naturally soft-spoken, I've always known this was a challenge for me. I must often exaggerate movement or project more than what feels "normal" just to come across clearly. This awareness, reinforced by consistent and constructive feedback, helped me realize how central it is for effective instruction. The Instructors Evaluators and Trainers also pointed out something encouraging: they *did* notice improvement in me in all aspects over the days of the course. That meant a lot. But I also know I still have a long way to go. I am actively working on exuding confidence. And it's something I'm committed to continuing to develop.

It wasn't always so serious though. We had a fair share of laughter, bonding time and some inside jokes.

Where This Leaves Me: Next Steps and Continuing the Journey

Coming out of the ITC, I feel both humbled and energized. The course didn't just test what I knew - it revealed what I didn't know yet, and more importantly, I know *how* to grow into the instructor I want to become. Right now, I'm in the process of integrating everything I've learned - going back through my notes, reviewing feedback, reflecting on the dives and discussions. There's a lot to absorb.

I find myself reflecting on the times I participated in courses and how each instructor dealt with specific issues, how I've been given feedback, remembering questions I had as a new student, struggles I faced and what have been some useful tips from instructors.

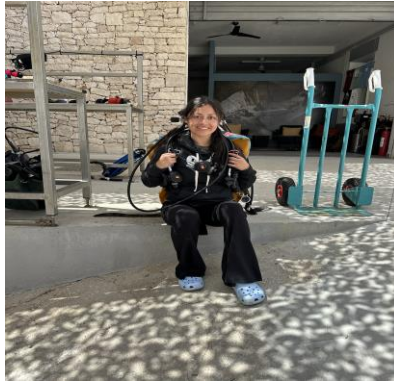


Image 6 – valve drill dry run!

Being an instructor isn't a finish line. It's a responsibility to stay current, to keep learning, and to be the kind of mentor who not only teaches skills, but also builds confidence, curiosity, and trust in new divers. That's a high bar, but it's one I want to reach, and I'm excited to walk that path with GUE's incredible global community behind me.

Advice for Anyone Considering the GUE ITC

1. Don't wait to be "ready", prepare instead. It's difficult to say or feel that you are 100% ready, and that's okay. What matters is your willingness to learn, be open and adapt. Familiarize yourself with the GUE General Training Standards, Policies & Procedures (a document readily available online), GUE SOPs, and course requirements to set yourself up for success during the ITC.
2. Get comfortable with discomfort. This course will challenge you (as any GUE course does) but that's the point. Growth happens in the stretch zones, not the comfort zones.
3. Practice effective communication skills as much as diving techniques. Your ability to explain, demonstrate, and *inspire* students will matter just as much—if not more—than your ability to maintain buoyancy and trim.

Final Thoughts

The GUE ITC taught me that being a good GUE instructor involves having good diving skills, empathy, clear communication, and a commitment to the success of your students. The course sharpened my skills, stretched my mind, and reminded me with why I fell in love with diving in the first place: the challenge, being in a novelty environment, the teamwork, and the quiet confidence that comes from doing hard things with good people. I hope this reflection has offered a glimpse into what the GUE ITC is like—not just the logistics, but the growth, the challenges, and the transformation you can expect. And if you're on your own journey toward instructing or just becoming a stronger diver, I'm cheering you on.

THANK YOU!

Huge thank you to all those who have supported me through this journey. As I have expressed to many friends, I have never felt like such an integral part of a community until I started training with GUE. Becoming a GUE instructor is one way I hope to give back to my local community in the NYC area and one day in my home country, Mexico. Stay tuned for more updates!

Thanks to: Rich Wilson - Mom & Dad - Ed Hayes & Evolution Scuba Team - Dorota Czerny - Gemma Thomas - Lauren Wilson - Francesco Cameli - ITC Candidates (Nils, Daniel, Kaddi & Kris) - Jenn Thomson & NextGen Legacy Project

