# Becoming a More Efficient Coach

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Introduction

No matter what the level of rugby you coach, the task of taking on any team is a somewhat daunting one if you add up the time spent in planning and preparation, in taking coaching sessions, during the game day and in after match analysis. If undertaken diligently the amount of time spent in planning and preparation can add up to be considerable, if not unreasonable. The challenge is to become a more efficient coach. That is, to be able to increase your hourly output, to be able to repackage material you have used before and use it again, to be able to dip into pools of resources that others might have made available and reorganise them for your own use. The paramount challenge is to do justice to the task at hand with the time and resources at your disposal. This paper will outline some techniques and strategies you can follow which, if used correctly, should be able to increase both the efficiency and quality of the material you produce as a coach. The techniques revolve around adopting a certain approach to your preparation and using some of the advanced features of the commonly available computing desktop productivity tools.

Tools and Techniques for Game Planning

A modern word processor, such as Microsoft Word, has a number of features which you can utilise to improve your efficiency when it comes to preparing resources and creating planning documents. Specifically, the ability to draw objects within a word processing document and then store these away, with text if necessary, so that they can be recalled with a couple of keystrokes. This makes developing complex documents simple and very fast.

For example, how could you create a diagram for a traditional back row move revolving around an 8 to 9, 9 to 10, 10 switch with 8 move as shown? The diagram consists of a number of standard objects such as triangles and circles which represent the scrum and involved players. The steps necessary to a create diagram like this are as follows:
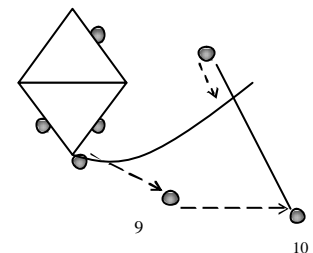
1. Create the elements

The first stage is to draw the required components using the Word drawing tools.

Switch on the standard drawing toolbar available in Word if it is not already visible (e.g. **View**->**Toolbars**->**Drawing**).

To create the scrum, from the toolbar select the **AutoShapes** option and pick a triangle to represent half the scrum. Draw the triangle somewhere on the page and then make a copy of it by using one of the standard copy techniques (e.g. **copy** and

paste or select the triangle and hold down the control key while you drag to make a copy). While you still have the second copy of your triangle selected from the **drawing** menu select **Draw**->**Rotate or Flip**->**Vertical** to create the necessary inverted triangle.

You can now drag the two triangles together to form your scrum by selecting one and dragging it until it aligns with the other. To turn the two objects into one just select them and group them together. You can select both triangles by clicking on one and while holding down the **SHIFT key** click on the other. From the drawing toolbar select **Draw** ->**Group.** The two triangles will now behave as a single object. What you have is a standard shape which you can use over again.
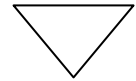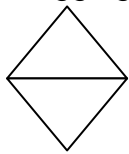
Similarly you can create images to represent players by selecting the **Circle** tool from the toolbar and dragging to create a circle of suitable size. To distinguish opposition players you can change the circle fill effect by selecting the **paint tool** from the drawing toolbar and setting the circles desired fill style and colour. You now have symbols to represent players. If you want to put a number alongside a player just select the **text box** tool from the toolbar and draw a small text box. Set the font size to somewhere around 9 point (you can change this at any time) and from the drawing toolbar options set the line colour to white so you can't see the edges. The size of the text box, relative to the font size, will determine the text you can put inside. Now you can make a copy of your player symbol by using one of the copy techniques and group it with the text box you have created as outlined previously. You can edit the number inside the text box at any time. (Don't panic if you make any objects too large because you can resize the objects at any time by either dragging on one of the handles visible when it is selected, or by changing its size via the properties menu i.e. right click on the object with the mouse button and from the drop down menu that appears select the last menu option **Format <object type>**. Using the dialogue box which appears you can change the colour, size, layout of text around the selected object.
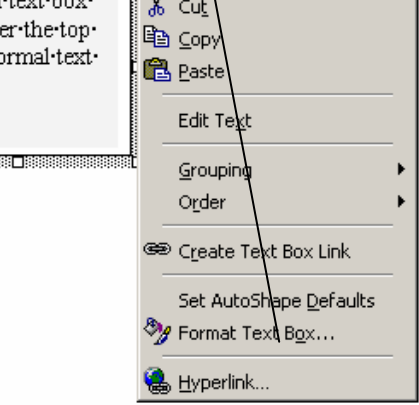
The drawing menu contains a number of arrow and line types which you can use to simulate movement within your diagram. Just select the line or arrow draw tool and draw between the two required locations. If you want to draw a dotted line, with the line selected just change the line style from solid to dotted.

If you want to draw more complex lines to represent curved running paths then you can select from the drawing toolbar **AutoShapes**->**Lines**->**Curve** and then draw the curved path which links the appropriate objects.
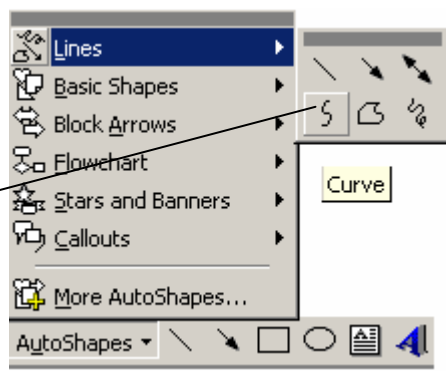
Note that drawing curved objects takes a little bit of getting used to because the line is draw in segments. Each time you lift the mouse button and press again you add a segment to the curve which means you can bend the line in different directions. To finish drawing the curve just double click. You can change the line properties by selecting arrow or dotted line, etc from the toolbar. You can also group the curve with other objects you have drawn, such as players, to make more complex shapes.

Tips for Drawing Objects

Some tips on creating and managing drawn objects:

Control + arrow – allows you to move an object by a small amount in any direction.
Colour + Fill Effects – can produce some very pleasing results.
Control + Drag – allows you to make a copy of an object.
Control + click – allows you to select more than one object on the screen.
Draw->Align – allows you to control the alignment of a range of selected objects.
Draw->Distribute – allows you to adjust the vertical and horizontal spacing of objects.
3D and SHADOW – these can make the object appear to float above the page.
*White Select Arrow* – is a good way of getting hold of graphic objects.
Layer Problems – If you lose one object behind another then the best way to get it back is to move the object above it until you can see it.

2. Automating the Drawing Process

Once you have spent time creating the required shapes you don't need to create them again, just store them away so that they can be recalled with a couple of keystrokes. You can store them away as (what Word calls) **AutoText.**   To do this first select the required object and from the Word Menu choose **Insert**->**AutoText**->**New**. In the dialogue box which pops up type a word or series of letters you want to recall the object by.. For example, N9 could be a shortcut for number 9 or L1 for lineout setup one, etc. Click **OK** to close the dialogue box once you have entered the code. What you have done is to store away a copy of your object so that it can be recalled at any time by entering your key (e.g. N9) and then pressing the **F3 function key**.

3. Building Complex Shapes.

Now that you can automate the process of drawing simple objects you can create more complex shapes like lineouts, backline positions, restart set-ups, back row moves, starter moves. To create patterns or moves just draw (**keyword + F3**) a number of simple objects onto the page and **Group** them to create a more complex shape. For example, the starter move to the right is created with simple player objects, curved lines and straight lines. Having created this complex object, there would be nothing to stop you saving it away as AutoText so that it could be recalled with a couple of simple keystrokes for later use.
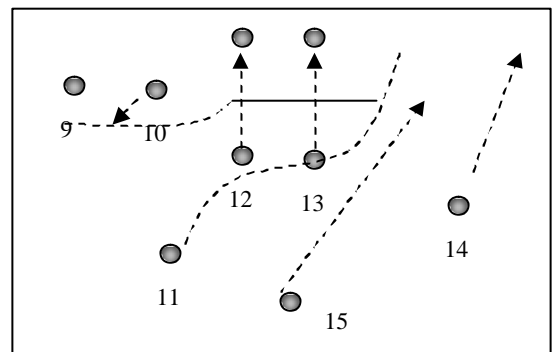
4. Increasing Your Efficiency

The **AutoText** is stored away in what is called a Word template which can be searched while you are in any document. This means that once you have created the AutoText in a document you can use it again **ANYWHERE** just by entering the key-code you gave it (e.g. N9) and pressing **F3**. Once the diagram or object has been inserted into your planning document you can edit it by ungrouping the components and changing it as you wish. If you create something new which you think you might use again then just save it away under a new code as AutoText as above. This way you can re-use objects over and over again without needing to redraw them.

Plus or Minus

As with using all technologies there are trade-offs you need to consider. You have to invest time and effort in creating the objects and AutoText before you can get the rewards provided by not having to create them again. You will find that once you have a reasonable collection of objects it becomes very quick and easy to create quite complex

patterns and set-ups of a high quality which you can print and give to the players. [A template called ARU-Symbols is available with a number of pre-defined Rugby Union objects to save you time.]

Preparation Tools

The challenge, when preparing daily and weekly training session schedules, is to be able to create them in a format that will enable them to be re-used possibly later in the season or with different skill level groups or ideally from season to season. A technique which goes a long way towards increasing the flexibility and efficiency of training session planning is to utilise the Mail Merge feature of Microsoft Word. By moving to an electronic version of the Coaches planning diary it is possible to build up a collection of typical session plans and resources which can be re-purposed and used over and over again.

The technique for creating an electronic coaching diary involves creating a **data file** which will hold the components of all sessions and a **planner template** which will be used to print out the information. In order to plan and prepare your sessions you will need to populate the data file with what you intend to do during each component of your weekly/daily session. Then using the mail merge features of Word it is a simple task to merge the data into the planning template to create an easy to use session plan which can be distributed to senior players and support staff. Because the data for each session is held in a neutral format which has nothing to do with how it is displayed it is quite easy to re-use or edit/update the data and print it again.

The process involved with creating this electronic coaching diary is fairly straight forward:

1. Create The Base Table.

The first step is to create a new Word document and then within this document to create a table ready to take the components of the training plan. Your table would need to have columns to contain the following sorts of information as a bare minimum:

∗ Date of Session	∗ Team Name	∗ Training Cycle
∗ Objectives	∗ Equipment Required	∗ Introductory Comments
∗ Warm-Up Phase	∗ Skill/Continuity Phase	∗ Unit Phase
∗ Warm-Down	∗ Injuries sustained	∗ General Comments

A component of such a table might look as follows (**NOTE** the table would be much too wide to fit onto a standard page so the page would be setup "landscape") :

Date	Team	Macro Cycle	Objectives	Equipment	..
12/3/01	Wesley 1st XV	3-1	• Work on core stability development. • Body height into contact.	• Cones • Skipping ropes • Hit Shields	.. ..
…	…	…	• …. • ….	• .. • …	.. ..

The headings across the top of each row of the table are important because they will be used later to identify which components of the table you will include in your daily/weekly session. This document, which contains the table, will become known as the **Data Source** so you need to save it away noting its name.

2. Create the Merge Document

Now create a new Word document which is going to become your daily/weekly planning guide. The document should be constructed such that its layout mirrors that of the

"ARU Level 2 Coaching Principles and Record Book". The headings used across the top of the table you constructed in the Data Source file give a guide to the sorts of things you would need to include in the Session Planner document. A typical diary planning sheet might look something like:

The general layout follows the ARU Record book and you will notice that space has been left to merge the data from the Data Source with the diary planning sheet eg. Date , Equipment, Macro Cycle, Warm-Up, etc.
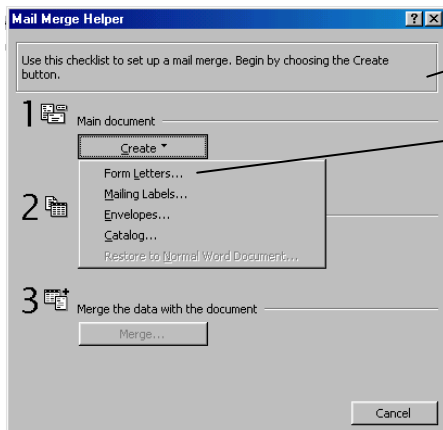
Save the document away giving it a suitable name so that you can find it again easily. You have the two critical components to create an electronic coaching diary.

3. Linking the Data with the Diary Planner

In order to create the training session plans all you need to do is to connect the information (fields) in the Data Source document with the spaces you have created in your dairy planning document. Once this is done as you add new rows to the Data Source they will appear as additional pages within your diary. Open your diary planner document (as shown above). Then from the menu choose **Tools->Mail Merge** and a dialogue box will pop up. Click the Main Document button and select **Form Letters**. When prompted select Active Document because you are going to use your diary planner as the merge document. Now click the Get Data button and choose Open Data Source. Navigate to your data source document and select it. When prompted select the Edit Main Document option.

An additional tool bar will appear at the top of your screen which will allow you to insert the 'merge field' into the dairy planner. That is, the columns from your data source. The important buttons on this new toolbar are the **Insert Merge Fields** button which allows you to link the two documents together.

Move to the first location in the diary document where you want to insert data and then from the drop down list under Insert Merge Fields select the name of the field you want to insert. For example, the first couple of fields you might want to insert are the date of the session, the name of the group involved, the phase of the Macro Cycle, the Session Objectives, Equipment required, etc. All you need to do is to move to the location where you want to insert the data and click on the Insert Merge Fields button to select the appropriate field from the list.

As you can see from the figure to the right, the Insert Merge Fields list contains the names of the columns you created in your data source.

Insert Merge Field ▾ | Insert Word Field ▾ | ABC | 1 | ... | Normal

Date
Macro
Group
Session_Obj
Equipment
Introduction
Skills_Units
Warmup
Comments
Warm_Down
Injuries
Items_for_Next

Coaching Diary for Des Thornton — 2001 Season →   →   Wesley College First

Training session format¶

| Date : ¤ | Group : ¤ |
| Session Objectives:¶ ¤ | Equipment Required:¶ ¤ |

▪ Session Plan   →   *Macro Cycle[]*¤

Introduction¶
¶
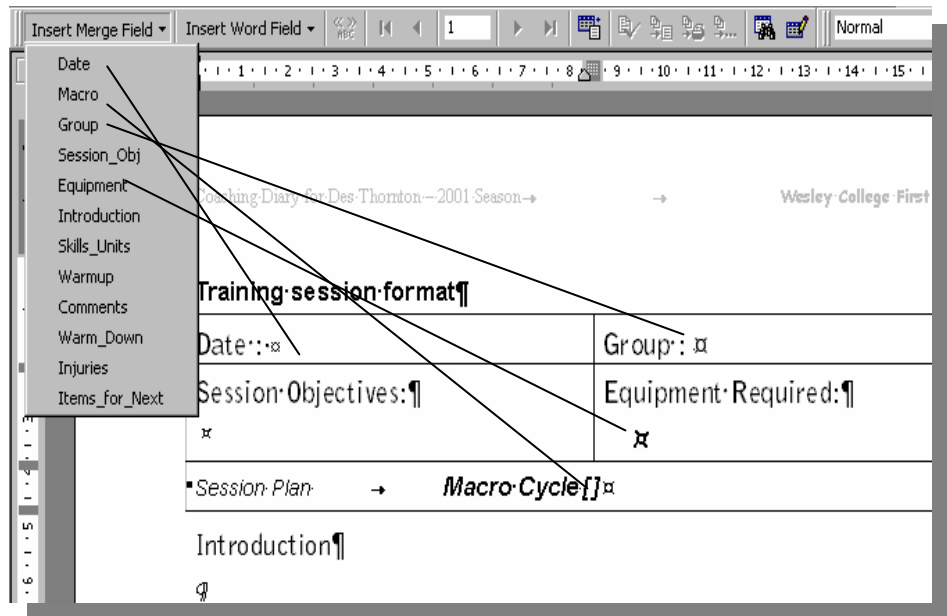
4. Putting it all Together

Now that the data source is linked with the diary planner you need to create a single session plan by clicking on the ABC icon on the toolbar. You will now see the data from your data source file appear in the planner document. You can cycle through the data in the data source by

▪ **Training session format¶**

| Date :: Tuesday 15th May¤ | Group : *Wesley College Team*¤ |
| Session Objectives:¶ Reinforce the defensive roles.¶ Work on improving the handling at pace and into contact.¶ Increase the tempo so we have more options at the breakdown.¶ Continue to work on individual weaknesses.¤ | Equipment Required:¶ Cones¶ Balls¶ Tackle Suites¶ Hit Shields¤ |

▪ Session Plan   →   *Macro Cycle[4-1]*¤

Introduction¶
Review of the game against Guilford and the observations I made. We still need

using the arrow icon available on the toolbar. ⏮ ◀ 1 ▶ ⏭ The number indicates which row in your data source you are displaying. The buttons with the blue lines allow you to move to the beginning or end of your data. You can now print the session plan or any of the other session plans you have entered data for. If you want to print all of the session plans for the season or those you have created up to date you can just click on the merge or print icon on the toolbar and Word will combine all of the records from the data source into the diary planner. (**Note** : Be careful you don't press print when you only want to merge!). [A sample Diary planner and Data Source document are available]

Tips on using this Diary Planning Approach

Don't forget -	You enter the data into the data source file and NOT into the diary.
To create new rows –	Just press the tab key while you are in the end cell.
To re-use material –	Copy from cell to cell in the table or copy a whole row. (Note: Don't forget you can use the select and control drag option to copy text.)
Keep backups -	Make a habit of backing up copies of your data source to a floppy disk or some other drive to ensure you don't lose it.
Use Find -	To find specific instances of a drill or activity in your data source so you can re-use it or modify it.
Real Gains -	Occur when you have enough material in the data source to help you re-use material efficiently and effectively.

Internet based Resources

In order to be an effective and efficient rugby coach you not only have to be well versed in the current trends and up to date techniques of coaching, you also have to have access to a wide range of expertise and resources which can help you in your coaching endeavours. These resources may well emanate from your local ARU development office or be available within your own club structure. However, more and more resources are being made available in electronic form via the Internet. The sorts of things that are available are discussion lists about the nature and activities associated with coaching Rugby Union; advice and programs on fitness and avoiding injury; current information about the Laws of the game and a myriad of drills and game strategies.

As with all resources you acquire you need to be able to make informed value judgements about their worth and suitability for your coaching philosophy and approach. You need to be cognisant of the skill level of the players you are working with and the type of playing style you are attempting to develop.

At this point you might want to look at some of the following sites:

Coaching Resources

Australian Rugby Union Coaching - http://rugby.com.au/central/main.asp?sectionID=21
Rugby Coach – http://www.homestead.com/rugbycoach.
Coaching Rugby – http://www.coaching rugby.com/
Rugby Fitness – http://www.rugbyfitness.com.au/
Rugby Science – http://www.rugbyscience.co.uk/

We are also starting to see the emergence of software packages targeted specifically at Rugby Coaching. Some typical examples are:

Coaching Software

CanCoach from Canada - http://www.cancoach.com/rugby/
Game Planner from the UK – http://www.GamePlanner.co.uk/

Concluding Comments

If your level if computer literacy is not high then you might be a little daunted by some of the instructions which appear in this paper. However, let me reassure you that none of the techniques described are as difficult as coaching correct scrum technique or a number of ball release drills. I have been using the techniques for a couple of years now and have a fairly rich suite of resources I can use and share with others. Let me reassure you that once you overcome the minor idiosyncrasies which all software seems to have and gain in self confidence you can quickly and easily improve your coaching efficiency.