



How to fit a diving mask

Assisting a customer to fit a diving mask in a way that will allow him to secure maximum vision, good breathing and a comfortable, exhilarating adventure underwater is uncomplicated, yet tricky.

By asking your customer a few simple questions you will get to know his level of experience or certification. A beginner diver will require more attention than say a dive master, who will probably take offence to the lecture you were about to deliver. If a family walks in to the shop, they may have booked a snorkel trip to Mauritius and require loads of attention and advice.

Step One

Let him pick up a mask in both hands and use his thumbs to gently fold back each side of the skirt. Then he should gently place the mask on his face, but stop as soon as he makes contact with any part of his face. Release the sides of the skirt he was holding with his thumbs so the skirt will gently touch his face.

Do not apply any pressure to the mask to push it onto his face, but ask him if there is any light coming through any gaps between the skirt and his face. If he sees any light at all the mask may not be right for him. Keep in mind, if you press any mask hard enough it will appear to fit, when in reality it will not. The best fitting masks will not show any light between the skirt and the face and will seem to "stick" to the face with little or no effort to press it on.

Don't let the customer put the mask strap around his head, but give him a mouthpiece to try on with the mask as this will change the shape of his face. Facial hair or "stubble," as well as facial expressions, such as smiling or laughing will decrease the ability to fit a mask properly.

Step Two

Ask your customer to inhale very gently through his nose to verify if the mask will stick to his face with the minimal effort. If it fits, he will feel a squeeze from the mask on his face after inhalation. The weight of the mask alone should cause the silicone skirt to touch the entire way around the face and a light inhalation should immediately cause a complete seal.

Again, if you smash the mask against his face and he sucks-in too hard, you may make a "bad fitting" mask appear to fit.

Step Three

Now is the time to press hard, evenly distributing pressure throughout the mask frame,

Our cut-out-and-keep series to assist retailers with product knowledge.

Words: Fanie Heyns. Compiled with the help of Rhys Couzyn, of Scubapro, Sken and Chantal Pero, of Table Bay Diving, Duncan Pattenden, of Orca Industries, Coenraad Biel, instructor at All About Scuba, Klerksdorp, www.bluewaterhunter.com and www.scuba-diving-smiles.com



against his face. The purpose of this is to find out if the hard frame of the mask hits or makes contact with his face.

This can sometimes be uncomfortable, and if it's uncomfortable on land, it will be very uncomfortable after wearing the mask for several hours in the water. Common areas of concern are the bridge of the nose, eye sockets, eyebrow and cheekbones.

If it's uncomfortable, he should keep trying different masks until you find the best medium.

A few additional tips

- When you gently press the mask against the diver's face, make sure it does not hit his nose-bridge or forehead. Check that there is ample room for the diver's nose in the nose pocket of the skirt, if not, or if the mask skirt constantly pushes against the bottom edge of the diver's nose, it will become uncomfortable on a long dive.
- Check that the mask skirt does not cut across the corners of the diver's eyes and that his vision is not restricted by the silicon of the mask. A diving mask should not be smaller or bigger than your eye view sites.
- Make sure that the mask skirt does not come too far down the diver's top lip as this may become uncomfortable once the regulator or snorkel mouthpiece is in place. Ideally, do all fittings with a mouthpiece in the diver's

mouth as that is the shape their face will be on a dive.

Single or dual lens?

You cannot say that single lens or dual lens masks are better or worse, for they each have benefits.

Single lens masks have a clear unobstructed view ahead, but the lens usually sits a bit further away from the diver's face, meaning that internal volume is a little higher. Also, the further a lens gets from your face, the narrower your peripheral vision becomes (think of looking through a key hole, when its close up you can see plenty but as you move back, your view narrows). To compensate, single lenses are often bigger, again increasing internal volume.

Dual lens masks generally are lower volume as the lenses can be slightly recessed into the eye sockets and have wider peripheral vision because the lenses do sit so close to the diver's face. They are universal in their fit and can often be fitted with optical lenses. The negative aspect of this lens is that they are joined in the middle, so the vision is arguably more obscured than with a single lens mask.

Hairy problems

A moustache will almost always leak. If your customer is not very attached to it, advise him to shave it off. If that's not an option, petroleum jelly will help seal the mask. An experienced diver with a moustache will live with water around his nose.

Long hair, or in fact any piece of your equipment caught in the mask seal, will cause it to leak.

One solution is to wear a swim cap to keep the hair back and yes, the mask does seal over the swimming cap. By the way, this will also help keep the hair in a hoodie if your customer is planning on wearing one.

Quality of the mask

- Silicone skirts are better quality. Smell the mask, if the skirt smells of strong plastic (PVC), then it is not a pure silicone skirt. Silicone has no smell.
- Always check the quality of the buckles to make sure they can be tightened and loosened easily.
- A decent quality mask should come in a protective case or box.
- Although more expensive brand name masks will normally offer some benefits, there are some decent quality masks available at good prices and at the end of the day, the best mask is the one that fits your customer best!