



## Learn to Surf

### Launched 2013

In 2013, brown girl surf launched **Learn to Surf**, a fee-for-service program offering beginner surf lessons to diverse people in the San Francisco Bay Area. The program welcomed women, girls, men, gender expansive and nonbinary individuals spanning ages 7 to over 50 with varying degrees of ocean experience.

Founder Farhana Huq designed a surf lesson methodology based on her personal experience as a curvy brown woman who struggled with conventional surf lessons and the one move pop-up, an approach often taught in commercial surf schools and that Huq found difficult to do. Drawing on her background in athletics and leadership coaching, Farhana instead re-imagined surf lessons as immersive experiences, designing an approach that broke surfing down into small, accessible steps while giving students space to reflect and progress according to their own level of comfort.

Farhana's methodology, originally developed as part of her coaching practice - [Surf Life Executive Coaching](#) - which she then brought to brown girl surf, combined ocean experiences with mindfulness, reflection and empowerment through four accessible steps:

1. **Observation and Reflection:** Encouraging students to observe their surroundings and reflect on their emotions and somatic sensations while remaining on the sand, fostering a connection to the ocean and environment.
2. **Gradual Ocean Entry:** Guiding students to enter the ocean incrementally, progressing from ankle-deep water to knee-deep, and eventually to diving under waves, based on their comfort levels.
3. **Paddling and Belly Riding:** Teaching students foundational techniques such as paddling and belly riding in white water to build confidence and skill.
4. **Progressive Pop-Up Technique:** Breaking down the "pop-up" into five manageable steps, encouraging students to practice each step progressively in the water.

Central to her approach was integrating reflection points at each stage of ocean connection, allowing participants to connect their inner awareness to their natural environment. Farhana intentionally integrated feminine elements into her teaching process, focusing less on the pop-up as the end goal, and more on nurturing individuals towards establishing a transformative and holistic relationship with the ocean.

Unlike traditional surf schools which often operate through centralized models of charging customers and hiring instructors to deliver lessons, brown girl surf adopted a decentralized, trust-based, affiliate structure in line with its "starfish philosophy." As brown girl surf received lesson inquiries from the public through its platform, its model was to refer lessons out to a network of surf instructors. These instructors operated as sole proprietors, paid directly by clients while contributing a small fee back to brown girl surf. In theory, it was an ideal structure allowing brown girl surf to build a flexible network of instructors who received near full payment of each lesson given. In practice, brown girl surf trained one affiliate in its methodology who then helped manage the intakes, self-referring the majority of lessons with Farhana fulfilling the rest.

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**Location:**

Most surf lessons were conducted at Pacifica State Beach in Northern California, just south of San Francisco. This beach, while an ideal training ground for beginners, faces ongoing environmental challenges such as flooding, coastal erosion, and water pollution caused by sewage and stormwater runoff.

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