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# Special American Canoe Association **Beginner's Guide!**



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from the publishers of

**PADDLER**  
MAGAZINE  
[www.paddlermagazine.com](http://www.paddlermagazine.com)



**Inside:** Tips on getting started, choosing the right boat, safety 101, strokes you need to know, how to camp, resources, schools and more!

# Special **ACA** Beginner's Guide!

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Welcome to the wonderful world of paddling! Those of us who have been at it for years know it to be a healthy, beautiful, rewarding experience and are happy to have more company on the water. This Guide, put together by a group of dedicated paddlers, has useful tips on what kind of boat to start in, where to find instruction, what equipment to get, whom to paddle with—in fact, just about everything you need to get started. All of the authors are members of the American Canoe Association (ACA), and we actively promote it as the best organization of and for paddlers in all types of boats, on all types of water. The ACA has been around since 1880, making it the nation's oldest waterway-based conservation organization, and is involved in all forms of rafting, kayaking and canoeing. We put on events and races all over the country; are deeply involved in conservation issues, access rights and public policy; and teach thousands of folks like you the skills to safely and efficiently enjoy our nation's waterways. You'll find us quietly fishing on lakes, touring in the ocean, romping around on whitewater, and just enjoying a quiet float through the beauties of nature. In short, our paddling interests are dynamic and diverse, and we want to share them with you. So read through this Guide, get properly geared up, sign up for some instruction and we'll see you on the water!

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# Getting Started

## Letter From the U.S. Coast Guard

Dear New Paddler:

You're just beginning to discover the thrill and freedom of paddlesports...the fun and relaxation of paddling a canoe or kayak through our nation's lakes, rivers and coastal waters. The United States Coast Guard wants you to enjoy your new passion for a lifetime—and that's why your safety is so important to us. Our message is "You're in Command. Boat Safely." Just like the operators of larger powerboats or sailboats, you are in command of your boat. You're operationally and legally responsible for your safety and the safety of passengers and other boaters.

Too many recreational paddlers assume they're safe because they're in small boats, in shallower water, or because they're good swimmers. The fact is that more accidents occur among paddlers, hunters and anglers than among those who use their boats primarily for cruising and other watersports. The good news is that a few simple steps greatly reduce your chances of being involved in a paddling accident.

First, wear your life jacket all the time. In 2001, nearly 600 people—80 percent of all recreational boating fatalities—drowned because they didn't have a life jacket on at the time of the accident. Good swimmers died. Boaters in shallow water died. Boating accidents happen too fast to reach for stowed life jackets—but you'll find that there are plenty of new, lightweight life jackets that are easy and comfortable to wear while paddling. Second, take a boating course. Courses are available to fit all lifestyles, including the excellent classroom courses taught by certified American Canoe Association instructors, and the new America's Boating Course, available online and on CD-ROM from the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary or United States Power Squadrons.

Third, never boat under the influence. Alcohol plays a role in approximately one-third of all boating fatalities. Sun, wind and motion on the water function as additional "stressors," increasing the effects of alcohol and even heightening the side effects of some prescription medications. Last, get a Vessel Safety Check (VSC) for your canoe or kayak every year. The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and U.S. Power Squadrons offer this free check across the country. It's not just for big powerboats or sailboats—a VSC is the best way to discover safety problems or violations before they become dangerous on the water.

The Coast Guard hopes you enjoy every minute of your time paddling your canoe or kayak. We also hope you'll do everything you can to boat safely. Wear your life jacket, take a boating course, never boat under the influence, get a Vessel Safety Check and call (800) 368-5647 or visit [www.uscgboating.org](http://www.uscgboating.org) for more information. Remember, You're in Command. Boat Safely.

Sincerely,

Scott Evans, Captain, U.S. Coast Guard; Chief, Office of Boating Safety

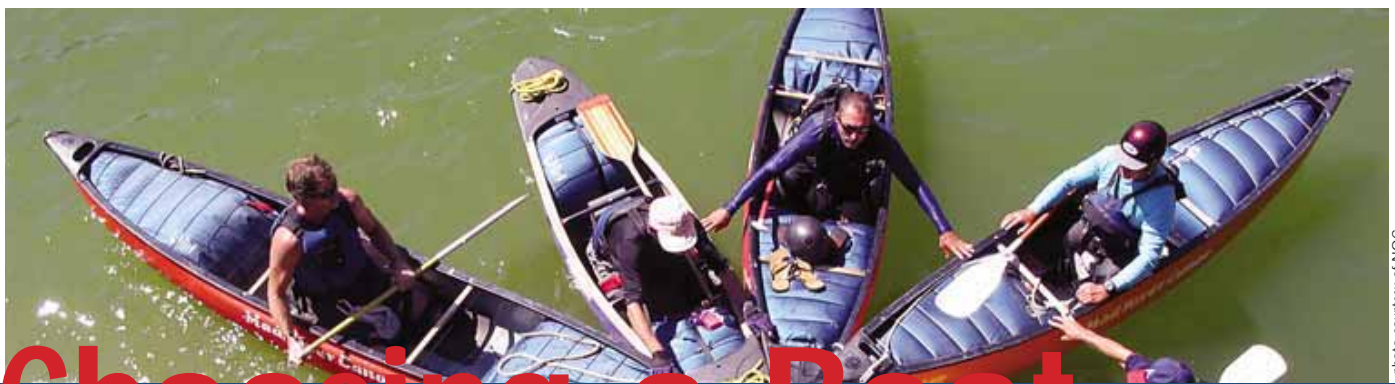


photo courtesy of NOC

# Choosing a Boat

by Becky Molina

**O**urs is the bluest of planets, sprinkled with an array of waterways, from lakes and rivers to wetlands and the open sea. Launching upon these blue spots is an equally assorted array of paddlers—canoeists and kayakers with broad-ranging desires, family sizes, budgets, skills and commitment to the sport. *Paddler's* 2003 Buyer's Guide lists more than 2,000 boat models in current production. How do you wade through such an inventory to pick the one that's right for you? Here's some help to find the perfect match.

## Buying a Boat

Don't be afraid to enlist the help of paddlesport professionals—dealers, manufacturer's representatives, instructors—they don't just want your money, they are dedicated to putting more safe and happy paddlers out on the water.



## CANOE OR KAYAK?

You'll find both craft on all of the waterways mentioned above. There are canoes and kayaks designed for lakes and rivers, day trips and weekend outings, expeditions and every other type of scenario. But some environments, and some personalities, are better suited to a canoe than a kayak, and vice versa. Consider the familiar five W's: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and the H: How.

**Who is going along?** Alone, it's easier to ply a kayak in a straight line than it is a canoe. With a partner, tandem canoeing can be a joy. Canoes also have more space to carry the kids and Fido down the river.

**What are you bringing with you?** The higher volume of canoes makes them better for kitchen sink syndrome. Go ahead—bring the grill, cooler and circus tent, but not in a kayak. Even if they did fit, gear is harder to load into kayak hatches than into open boats, where the main concern is weight distribution, not how to get your guitar through that little round hole.

**When are you going?** Kayaking is wetter, and thus potentially more chilly. Heads will likely be doused in a spill. Not the best choice for winter, perhaps, but kayaks are more seaworthy, their low profile and decked top offering protection from wind and waves. When a gale kicks up whitecaps, a kayak is less apt to swamp.

**Where do you want to paddle?** In scenic narrow sloughs, you'd rather not have a

long kayak paddle constantly jousting with overhead vegetation. Trips involving portages draw canoeists, as kayaks are heavier and trickier to carry. Open water—be it ocean coastline or large lakes—calls strongly to sea kayakers, whose boats can handle rougher conditions. In whitewater and surf, kayaks take on waves, steep drops and holes without filling up with water.

**Why are you doing this?** For excitement, for exercise or for exotic experiences? Or to view wildlife, spend time with loved ones, or just weekend fun? Canoes and kayaks can be used as vehicles to get from point to point, or simply for lazy bird-watching jaunts. Thrill junkies can get a buzz in either boat, but kayaks dominate the extreme fringes of paddlesport, where mastering the fundamental techniques requires lots of guided practice and a tolerance for water up the nose.

**And How...?** How do you want to travel? The fastest, straightest-moving boats are kayaks, though it's a mistake to think that all kayaks are faster than all canoes. How's your comfort level? Kayaking is inherently wet, and advancing in kayaking skills may mean facing fears of being upside down under water. Kayakers sit with their legs slightly bent in front of them, and without as much wiggle room as their open-boat counterparts (canoes are better for afternoon naps). Canoeists can sit, but in most canoes you're safer kneeling, especially when it's windy or bouncy. Kneeling also puts you higher off the water than sitting, lending to increased visibility. How big is your

wallet? You'll probably shell out more for a kayak than for a canoe of comparable construction and quality. How's your skill level? Or how committed are you to developing it? A novice will move a kayak from A to B with less frustration than she would a canoe, but don't be fooled. Kayaking may be more beginner-friendly, but both craft feature skill-intensive disciplines that require expert instruction and dedicated practice to master.

## TYPES OF CANOES AND KAYAKS

Design determines performance, and the material used in canoe and kayak construction affects the cost, weight, durability and amount of upkeep needed.

### General Design Considerations

Canoes and kayaks have different shapes for a reason. No one boat can do it all. Form follows function, and the exact boat for you is the one that best meets your intended purpose, size and skill level.

- Length can predict speed, all other factors being equal. That is, if you take two boats of like design, in the same conditions, with cloned paddlers, the longer one will get there first. The tradeoff? Maneuverability, in most cases. A sports car turns in a tighter radius than a semi.
- Rocker and tracking. Rocker is the amount of "smile" that you can see along the bottom of a boat, like the rail on a rocking chair. More rocker (more upturned ends) means better turning ability, at the expense of tracking, the ability of a boat to hold a straight line. For best tracking, try a boat with very little rocker (called straight or flat-keeled). But then, it'll be harder to turn...
- Width. The wider the canoe or kayak, the more stable it will be—that is, when you first enter it on quiet water, which is where most of us try out a boat and many stay. Narrower boats will seem tippier, but they will travel faster.
- Bottom shape contributes to stability and performance in different conditions, so it's not just about width. Flat-bottomed hulls are more stable upon first entering, and will remain so as long as they are in quiet water with balanced paddlers on board. Many recreational paddle craft have flat bottoms for this reason, but they're not so stable in wind and waves.
- Safety. A safe boat floats, even when fully swamped with water. Flotation systems can be integral to the design—foam-filled tanks and seats, solid kayak bulkheads, or a buoyant layer sandwiched between the inner and outer surfaces of the hull material—

## Trying Before Buying

**D**o you buy shoes or clothing without trying it on? Probably not. You'll travel many happy miles in your canoe or kayak. Using the strategies below is like making that all-important visit to the fitting room.

- Take a class first. The more skill and knowledge you have, the better you'll appreciate the differences in performance between models.
- Ask your dealer. You may be able to test paddle different models, especially if you take a class or guided tour.
- Join a paddling club. Make friends with other paddlers, learn from their experiences, then ask to sample their gear.
- Rent before you buy. Rent often—at shops, local parks and liveryies—and try as many different boats as you can.
- Attend paddlesport events. Local and regional festivals, symposia, classes and manufacturer demo days are terrific learning opportunities for beginning paddlers. You can try many different models, take instructional clinics, attend seminars, see expert paddling demonstrations and find discounts on gear.

### Bringing It Home

When you're ready to own your first canoe or kayak:

- Visit your local paddlesport shop. Choose a reputable retailer with a wide variety of models on display and a knowledgeable, experienced staff.
- Do some research. The Buyer's Guide issues of paddlesport magazines are helpful sources of information, as are product catalogues available from dealers and manufacturers, and manufacturer Web sites.
- Establish a budget, then don't spend it all on the boat. Don't forget a PFD, paddle and other accessories necessary to your safety, comfort and pleasure on the water. While higher-priced boats aren't always the best option, in general you get what you pay for.



or added after manufacture, with foam or inflatable inserts. In some models, the consumer must add flotation.

## CANOES

Solo or Tandem? In every category of canoes, you can find boats built for one or two. If you cherish solitude or total control, soloing may be the way to go, and a few lessons can ensure that you go the way you want to go. It is easier to travel and to steer with a paddler in each end, however, and tandem canoes are far more commonplace.

There are canoes and kayaks designed for lakes and rivers, day trips and weekend outings, expeditions, and every other type of scenario.

### Types of Canoes

- General recreation. This is the canoe you paddled at summer camp, and the one you rented last Saturday. Multi-purpose and usually tandem, they range from 15 to 18 feet in length and, in skilled hands, can turn and go straight reasonably well.
- Tripping or touring. Solo trippers can be from 13 to 17 feet long, while tandems top out at about 20. Tripping canoes have less rocker and are built for travel, usually on calm water, but some also handle moving rivers and big lakes if the canoeists are well-practiced.
- Other specialized canoes include whitewater canoes, which are short, deep and highly rockered; solo sport canoes, which are used for non-destination, quietwater "play"; and different kinds of racing canoes.

### Materials Used in Canoe Construction

- Plastic, including the brand name Royalex, is inexpensive and impact-resistant, but it's heavy and less able to hold a fine design line.
- Composite, or laminated, canoes are built from fiberglass, Kevlar, carbon fiber or some combination layered with synthetic glues.

They can be very lightweight, and your back will not mind the increased cost, especially after a long carry. These canoes are more fragile and thus less common on whitewater.

- Aluminum is quite durable and resistant to ultraviolet rays. It's heavy, though, and design features are limited by the nature of the material.
- Other less common materials used in canoes include wood in a variety of constructions, and fabric skin stretched over a skeleton-like frame.

## KAYAKS

Fit. A favorite kayak is like a favorite pair of jeans. Not only should the size of boat and body match, the cockpit should fit the paddler at all points of contact. You can easily customize your outfitting for optimal comfort. Single or Double. The healthy majority of kayakers are meant for one. Those for two—called double or tandem kayakers—are useful on long trips or for paddling with a child.

### Types of Kayaks

- Recreational. The most ubiquitous and often the first choice for beginners, recreational, or "rec," boats are normally 10 to 15 feet long and 24 to 30 inches wide with flat bottoms. They often have very large cockpits, and sit-on-top models have no cockpit at all (but not all sit-on-tops are recreational kayakers). The most affordable of kayakers, they are meant for calm-water trips ranging from a few minutes to a few days. Sit-on-tops are especially suitable for beginners as there is no need to learn the Eskimo roll; if you tip over, simply climb back on.
- Touring. As kayakers get longer (14-20 feet) and narrower (20-25 inches), they get faster. The line between touring and recreation types blurs: Some are classified as "hybrids" or "light

touring" and are appropriate for shorter trips on inland waterways. Sea kayakers are on the longer, narrower end of the touring spectrum, with many features that allow for safe travel in open water, including bulkheads for flotation and cockpits that accommodate spray skirts.

- Whitewater. Today's most common whitewater kayakers are 6 to 9 feet long, 23 to 26 inches wide, and highly rockered, with flat bottoms and flat sides. As with sea kayakers, a spray skirt keeps water out of the cockpit. Whitewater kayakers are also one type used for surfing.

- Other specialized kayakers are made for surfing, racing and for folding up into a backpack that can pose as checked baggage or be stored in a closet.

### Materials Used in Kayak Construction

- Plastics, usually thin-walled polyethylene, are abundant in kayak construction. It is the least expensive, most durable and most impact-resistant of kayak materials, seen in many whitewater and recreational models.
- Composites like fiberglass, carbon fiber and Kevlar make stiffer, lighter kayakers that cost more than plastic ones. The layers of cloth can be shaped into very fine lines, and these materials are used primarily for higher-end touring kayakers.
- Other less common materials include wood, and skin stretched over a wood or tubular aluminum frame. Inflatable kayakers are made of a variety of air-retentive fabrics with synthetic coatings.

—Becky Molina is an ACA Instructor Trainer in kayaking and canoeing. She is a frequent presenter at paddlesport events around the country and has contributed to two books, several articles and four instructional videos.

# Join the American Canoe Association Today!

For just \$40 per year you'll help protect our nation's waterways, promote safety, education and instruction, and become part of the country's oldest waterway-based conservation organization. Plus, you'll receive a year's subscription to **Paddler magazine** absolutely Free! Call 703.451.0141 or visit [www.acanet.org](http://www.acanet.org)



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# Getting Started

## Paddling Is for Everyone

*People with disabilities enjoy time on the water*

**Do** you or a friend have back pain, arthritis in the hands or a more limiting loss of function? With some planning and adaptation, paddling is still possible. The first step is to identify your abilities and limit or loss of function. There are ways to compensate and keep on paddling.

The type of equipment you select makes a difference. Different kayaks offer different seating options, including angle-adjustable



Photo by G. Lais/courtesy Wilderness Inquiry

Outfitters like Wilderness Inquiry help paddlers of all abilities enjoy time on the water.

These and many other adaptations are detailed in the ACA manual, *Canoeing and Kayaking for Persons With Disabilities*. The manual includes information on the full range of disabilities and their implications for paddling, equipment and adaptations, accessibility, safety and risk, and a host of teaching suggestions and guidelines for instructors. Contact the ACA for specifically tailored information and assistance to meet the needs of anyone with a disability who wants to paddle. You'll be glad you did.

—Janet Zeller

back rests; lightweight paddles decrease fatigue; a longer paddle may allow a less tiring stroke; a break-apart paddle allows the blade angle to be changed if your wrist tires; lightweight boats and carts aid in moving the craft; tandem options provide more paddling opportunities for those who fatigue quickly or have some loss of upper-body function.

Though paddling does involve the whole body, adaptations can compensate for loss of function. For example, if your back fatigues quickly, a number of different back rests can be attached to a canoe seat. In a kayak, slipping a knee roll (a simple roll of closed-cell foam) under your knees can maintain a slight bend to help relax back muscles. Can't grasp the paddle for long periods of time? A hand grip can be created from bike inner tubes and cable ties, allowing the paddler to hold the paddle lightly and even flex fingers, without putting down the paddle.

## Opinions from Two Pros

### To Kayak or Canoe? How Do I Choose?

Canoeing and kayaking both have their own rewards. Below are three things to consider when deciding between the crafts.

1. How and where are you going to paddle? Deciding whether to canoe or kayak is sort of like choosing a car. Do you need a family car, a car that gets good mileage or one that can carry a lot of firewood? It all depends on what you're going to be doing. If you're going to be paddling rivers or lakes, carrying a lot of gear, having to portage frequently or possibly fishing, then a canoe is probably the craft of choice. If you're going to be paddling great distances in unprotected waters with winds and waves, or in a surf or ocean environment, then a kayak is probably your best bet. If you're mostly going to be paddling on small lakes, protected coves or inlets, then either would do. Pick the craft that will cover most of your needs and desires. You can always rent a boat for that occasional odd journey.
2. Physically, how do you feel in the boat? We all come with different sizes, shapes, physical abilities and limitations. Before deciding on one type of paddling over the other, take a class or two, join a club or attend a canoe/kayak demo day at a nearby dealer. This way you'll be able to develop skills, gather information, try out a lot of different boats and see how it feels physically to paddle them. Some people like the close feeling of being one with their boat that kayaking offers, while others like the sitting position of the canoe because it allows them more freedom. Try and then decide.
3. What is your gut telling you? Some people like country music, some like jazz, some both. There's no right or wrong, just a preference. The same thing with paddling. There are canoe people, there are kayak people, and then there are those of us who want to do it all. Pay attention to the feeling you get when you are in a canoe or kayak. As you go through this process try to keep an open mind, listen to others, but then make your own decision. Remember, that with time, your skills and desires may change. Just go with the flow and remember it is alright to have more than one boat. I do.

—Bob Foote is an open canoe instructor trainer educator, basic coastal kayak instructor and freestyle instructor for the ACA. He teaches canoeing and kayaking throughout North America and Europe. Info: [www.bobfoote.com](http://www.bobfoote.com).

### Karen Knight

I asked myself this same question when I was looking to get into paddling. I had tried canoeing in a college class years earlier and as I contemplated the question (canoe or kayak?) memories from the class came rushing back to me. Memories of me and my tandem partner losing our balance and dumping into the cold New England river and memories of being frustrated as we hopelessly paddled in circles, unable to make the canoe go straight. With those experiences still fresh in my mind, it didn't take long for me to decide that I wanted a boat that would be relatively easier to paddle and make go straight, one that I could paddle myself and would be suitable for trips along the coast of Maine where I lived. I wanted a kayak. For years I enjoyed kayaking, but over time, I discovered I enjoyed other types of paddling and a kayak wasn't always the "best tool for the job." Eventually, I took up canoeing and this craft has brought me the best of both worlds. Nowadays it's hard for me to decide on whether to canoe or kayak.

—Former World Freestyle Canoe Champion Karen Knight is an ACA Instructor Trainer who teaches paddling skills throughout the world.

### Bob Foote

When I first got into paddling some 30 years ago, I didn't have to ponder the question on whether to canoe or kayak. I knew from the start that I wanted to paddle rivers and I wanted to do it in a canoe. I liked the challenge of paddling a canoe, its diversity, the space it offered for carrying gear, plus kneeling in a canoe just felt better on my back than sitting in a kayak. I have canoed on rivers and lakes all over the world, but a few years ago, I started to paddle more on the ocean, where I found a kayak the way to go. One of the main things to consider: determine how and where you are going to paddle most of the time.



# Equipment 101

## Paddlesports Glossary

by Becky Molina

### Basic Terminology

#### Blade

The broad part at the end of a paddle

#### Bow

The forward end of a canoe or kayak

#### Hull

The bottom shape of a boat, which determines how it will perform in various conditions. Canoes have a hull only; kayaks have a hull on the bottom and a deck on top

#### PFD

Personal flotation device, or lifejacket. In the U.S., PFDs must be approved by the Coast Guard. Wear it!

#### Shaft

The long skinny part of a canoe or kayak paddle

#### Stern

The rear end of a canoe or kayak

#### Swamp

To fill (a boat) with water

#### Trim

The bow-to-stern leveling of a canoe or kayak that affects boat control. In most cases it should be nearly level, with the stern slightly lower in the water

### Canoeing

#### Grip

The part of a canoe paddle above the shaft, where the upper

hand grips the paddle. Grips can be shaped like a "T" or like a pear or a small football

#### Gunwale

Usually made of wood, vinyl or aluminum, gunwales (pronounced "gunnels") run along the top edge of a canoe hull, stiffening and helping the hull hold its shape

#### Painter

A rope tied to either end of a canoe for rescue and anchoring to shore

#### Portage

To carry a canoe over land (or the trail you carry it over) to get from one waterway to another or avoid a rapid

#### Thwart

Cross pieces in a canoe, thwarts go from gunwale to gunwale and help the boat hold its shape. Seats function as thwarts, too, and some thwarts are appropriately spaced and constructed for kneeling on the bottom of the canoe

### Kayaking

#### Back band (back rest)

Provides support for the lower back while kayaking and helps with erect posture in the boat. Located behind the seat, and usually made of padded fabric, plastic or foam

#### Bulkhead

A cross-sectional wall inside a kayak, made of composite, plastic or foam. Bulkheads provide structural support and

cross-sectional bulkheads create watertight compartments for buoyancy and storage

#### Cockpit

The enclosed central compartment of a kayak, in which the paddler sits

#### Deck

The top part of a kayak that keeps the hull from filling with water

#### Foot pegs/bulkhead

(also known as foot braces) Adjustable structures inside the cockpit on which a kayaker places the balls of her feet

#### Roll

The technique of righting a capsized kayak while still inside

#### Sit-on-top (SOT)

A kayak without a cockpit, sit-on-tops are usually self-bailing with various seat and foot brace configurations. Many are for recreational use, but some are designed for touring and racing

#### Spray skirt

A neoprene or nylon skirt worn by a kayaker that attaches to the rim (coaming) of the cockpit to keep water out

#### Thigh (knee) braces

Usually found in whitewater and touring kayaks, these structures inside the cockpit give the paddler important points of contact for boat control

#### Wet exit

Coming out of a capsized kayak

# Essential Equipment

## Gear for getting going

Your gear carries you out and home, protects you from the elements and assists you in emergencies. All of it should be in good condition and fit your body, skill level and setting. Putting a child in an adult PFD isn't a smart idea, for example, nor is using that leaky, beater kayak you borrowed at the last minute from your sister's boyfriend. Make sure the gear is right before you start because once out on the water, it may be too late.

### The Must Haves

#### Don't launch unless you have these items

- **A PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICE.** It's widely held that humans have difficulty breathing underwater. Be sure your PFD fits, and wear it properly and religiously. The overwhelming majority of serious accidents (deaths and close calls) in paddlesports occur when paddlers are not wearing a Coast Guard-approved PFD.
- **A PADDLE.** Though the boat may seem the most elemental piece of equipment, it's the paddle that connects your muscle motor to the water. Consider these features:

**Design.** Different paddles are made for each discipline of paddlesport. The best one for a lazy family river trip may not handle a long-distance race.

**Length.** Kayak paddles are usually measured in centimeters, with touring ones longer than those for whitewater. Canoe paddles usually come with overall length in inches, but some specialists prefer to use

shaft length alone as the main indicator in matching a paddle to a person. Your boat width affects paddle size, too.

**Blade size.** The bigger the blade, the more work you'll do with each stroke. Racers use low surface-area blades so they can stroke at a high rate of repetition without stress injury. Larger blades are better suited to a slower cadence.

**Material.** Plastic and aluminum paddles are everywhere. They are inexpensive, durable and low-maintenance. Wood is prized for its beauty and warmth but can vary greatly in weight, strength, cost and symmetry, and requires attentive upkeep. Fiberglass and carbon fiber make for pricey, stiff and super-lightweight high-performance paddles.

• **A BUDDY.** Beginning canoeists and kayakers should never paddle alone. There's safety in numbers, especially when someone needs to go for help in an emergency.

## Dressing the Part

Looking cool is one matter, being too cool is another. Because immersion is a major cause of hypothermia, dress for it. When the sum of air and water temperatures is below 120 degrees, check out specialized paddling wear like wet suits, dry suits, and the large variety of fuzzy, rubbery apparel available. Think in layers. Layers trap air (which provides insulation) and allow for personal climate control. Synthetic materials dry quickly, wick moisture away from the body and retain their insulating ability when soggy. A coated nylon or Gore-Tex paddling jacket guards against wind and spray. Top yourself with a fleece

or wool hat to reduce heat loss.

In the tropics, or anywhere it sizzles, lightweight full coverage and frequent application of waterproof sunscreen are your best defense, along with frequent swims to cool off. A hat with a wide brim shields you from harmful UV rays. Sturdy footwear is a must, but bulky shoes won't fit inside most kayaks, are cumbersome under canoe seats and can seriously compromise swimming. Try lightweight, low-profile watersport shoes, river sandals or neoprene booties.

## The Gear Bag

Securing items to your craft avoids the "paddler's garage sale" syndrome, which sends group members scrambling to recover your stuff as it spreads downstream. Bring drinking water, snacks and an extra layer. Store these items, along with your sunscreen, bug repellent and first-aid kit, in a waterproof drybag. If you wear eyeglasses or sunglasses you'll need a strap for attaching them to your head. A large car-washing sponge is good for eliminating puddles.

For safety, you may want to carry rescue gear (rescue sling, throw rope, tow system) specific to your craft and setting. String a plastic whistle onto your PFD for attracting attention. Pack a spare paddle. Electronic communication and navigation devices—GPS, cellular phones, VHF radios—are becoming more common, especially in offshore and wilderness settings. Wherever you paddle, know local laws and Coast Guard regulations pertaining to signaling devices and nighttime visibility.

## Additional Gear for Canoeing

- **BAILER.** A scoop can be made by cutting the bottom off of a one-gallon plastic milk or bleach bottle (leave the lid on). It comes in handy for getting water out of your boat.
- **KNEELING PAD.** An optional but much-appreciated comfort item for canoeists, some of whom glue theirs into their boat. Use non-

absorbent, waterproof foam, like the kind found in sleeping pads.

- **THWART BAG.** Accessible to the paddler and attached to the boat, this is a prime place to store sunscreen, raingear, jelly beans, and other oft-needed items.

## Additional Gear for Kayaking

- **SPRAY SKIRT.** Wearing a spray skirt keeps water out of your kayak, but be sure you know how to attach it and practice detaching it quickly. Made of coated nylon or neoprene, spray skirts have specific sizes for both kayakers and their boats.
- **PUMP.** A hand pump helps get water out of recreational and touring kayaks.

- **PADDLE LEASH.** By attaching your paddle to your touring boat, you can keep better track of it when you drop it, or when you stop to take photos or pass out cookies.

- **PADDLE FLOAT.** An inflatable or foam device that assists in solo re-entry into a touring kayak from deep water.

- **HELMET.** For those venturing onto whitewater or into the surf.

—Becky Molina

## Skills

# So You Want to Learn to Paddle?



photo by Charlie Wilson

**>>>Take a lesson from an ACA-certified instructor! by Kent Ford**

A few days of lessons should have you feeling a difference in your paddling. It might be as easy as improved comfort pulling up to the dock, or rolling or surfing with greater reliability. Wouldn't that be worth it?

### Reduce the chance of a bad experience

You've probably seen people who have had a bad experience from the first days of trial-and-error learning. This approach can be cold and wet and is a lot less fun than learning correctly. Paddling's different than other sports because it's often counter intuitive. To roll, you don't pull down on the paddle, you don't lift your head, and you don't reach way out. Floating into a river rock you lean toward it, not away from it. There are many more examples where your instinct can lead you astray. A practiced instructor can save you the pain of learning from bad experiences.



## A three-day investment

You don't have to stay in instruction for long. Three or four days is ideal for learning the basics and impacting your progress, letting you develop a solid foundation of skills far quicker than if you learn piecemeal from friends or by trial and error. Let someone else handle the logistics and pick the location. You just paddle.

## The money argument

Still not convinced? Consider the price. Typical classes run \$30 a day and up, depending on the course. As part of the class you get to try different boats and gear, so you'll be able to make an educated decision before parting with your hard-earned dollars. Many schools offer certificates or discounts toward your next purchase. And besides, what use is that boat if you can't enjoy it fully? A few tips might help.

## The Best Part

Now for the best part: Class atmosphere is fun. Learning happens best when everyone lets down their guard and loosens up. Instructors know this, and frequently are able to spark a group's spirit. Best of all, by taking a class you can meet other people from your area who are at your skill level, so you can continue getting out on the water. It's fun and you'll probably meet some fascinating people.

## Where Should You Look for a Lesson?

When looking for a school, word of mouth rules. The best schools have glowing reputations, so ask other paddlers, particularly in the local club. If you want to do a little poking around on your own, here are some questions that might help.

- What sort of instructor-student ratios are typical? Five-to-one is the industry standard.
- What is the typical class size? Eight to 10 is ideal. When instructors teach together, they tend to learn more tricks that, in turn, help you the student.
- What sort of diversity is on the teaching staff? A paddling school with several young rad dudes, several high school teachers, racers or rodeo stars, and several well-traveled and hardened veterans is likely to be better than one with less diversity.
- Other questions to ask: Do instructors have any formal teaching training? Do they have experience on rivers out of the region? Are they members of national organizations? Do they have safety and rescue training? Are they ACA-certified (not required, but a good symbol of professionalism)?

## Learning From Friends

Tempted to try the "buddy school" of instruction? If you have friends who can be patient and professional in giving you an introduction to the sport, it might be your best choice. But it can be a gamble. Are they really going to start you with at least half a day of flatwater strokework, then take you on an easy enough section so you can get comfortable with basics before you get gripped?

All too often people get dragged too quickly into paddling that isn't conducive to learning. Some of these people end up quitting the sport. As for safety instruction, you'll want a set of explanations that are at least more comprehensive than the typical commercial-trip safety briefing. When was the last time you had that sort of thorough instruction from your friends? In paddlesports, many hazards may not be obvious unless pointed out. Knowing what is dangerous helps you realize how much is good clean fun. You want someone showing you the difference, so you can enjoy the fun parts without uncertainty.

—Author and videographer Kent Ford has produced 16 instructional paddling videos ([www.performancevideo.com](http://www.performancevideo.com)). Ford's background includes 20 years of teaching paddling, international racing, coaching for the U.S. Team and working as public address announcer at the last three Olympics.

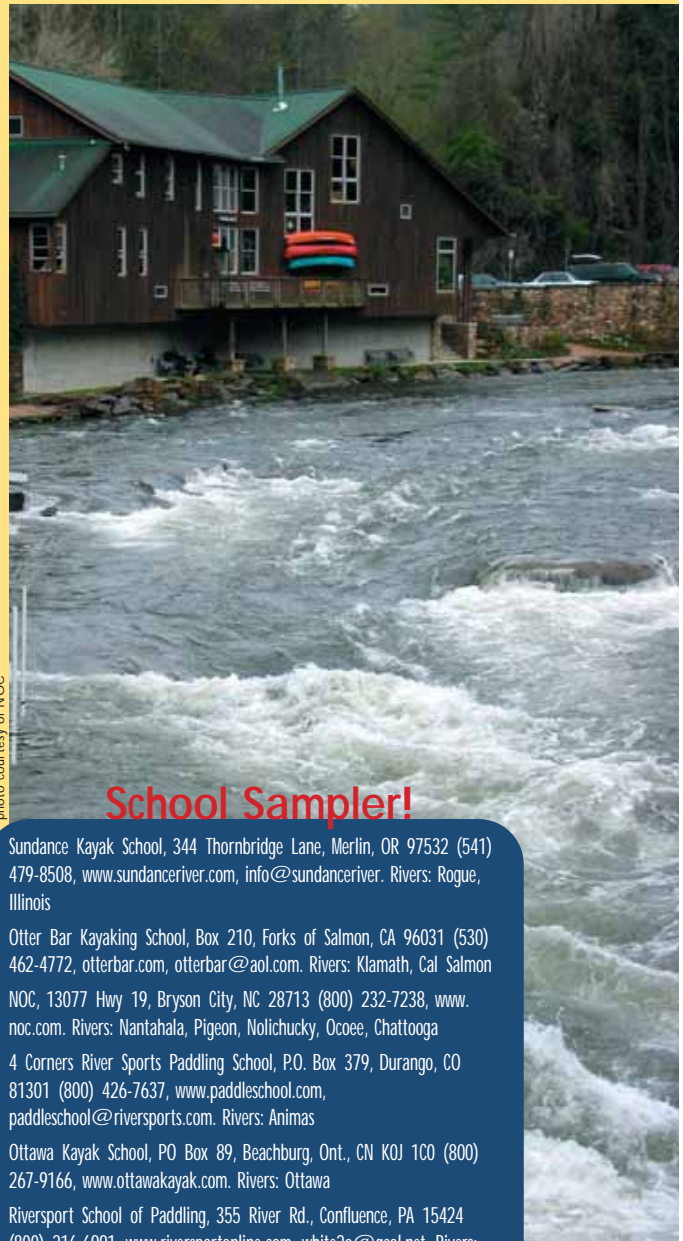


photo courtesy of NOC

## School Sampler!

Sundance Kayak School, 344 Thornbridge Lane, Merlin, OR 97532 (541) 479-8508, [www.sundanceriver.com](http://www.sundanceriver.com), [info@sundanceriver.com](mailto:info@sundanceriver.com). Rivers: Rogue, Illinois

Otter Bar Kayaking School, Box 210, Forks of Salmon, CA 96031 (530) 462-4772, [otterbar.com](http://otterbar.com), [otterbar@aol.com](mailto:otterbar@aol.com). Rivers: Klamath, Cal Salmon  
NOC, 13077 Hwy 19, Bryson City, NC 28713 (800) 232-7238, [www.noc.com](http://www.noc.com). Rivers: Nantahala, Pigeon, Nolichucky, Ocoee, Chattooga

4 Corners River Sports Paddling School, P.O. Box 379, Durango, CO 81301 (800) 426-7637, [www.paddleschool.com](http://www.paddleschool.com), [paddleschool@riversports.com](mailto:paddleschool@riversports.com). Rivers: Animas

Ottawa Kayak School, PO Box 89, Beachburg, Ont., CN K0J 1C0 (800) 267-9166, [www.ottawakayak.com](http://www.ottawakayak.com). Rivers: Ottawa

Riversport School of Paddling, 355 River Rd., Confluence, PA 15424 (800) 216-6991, [www.riversportonline.com](http://www.riversportonline.com), [white2o@qcol.net](mailto:white2o@qcol.net). Rivers: Youghiogheny, Cheat

Madawaska Kanu Centre, 247 River Rd., Barry's Bay, Ont., CN K0J 1B0 (613) 756-3620, [www.mkc.ca](http://www.mkc.ca). Rivers: Madawaska, Ottawa, Petawawa

Ace Adventure Center, P.O. Box 1168, Oak Hill, WV 25901 (800) 787-3982, [www.aceraft.com](http://www.aceraft.com), [ace@aceraft.com](mailto:ace@aceraft.com). Rivers: New, Gauley

Zoar, Mohawk Trail, Charlemont, MA 01339 (800) 532-7483, [www.zoaroutdoor.com](http://www.zoaroutdoor.com), [info@zoaroutdoor.com](mailto:info@zoaroutdoor.com). Rivers: Deerfield

Jackson Hole Kayak School, P.O. Box 9201, Jackson, WY 83002 (800) 733-2471, [www.jhkayakschool.com](http://www.jhkayakschool.com), [jacksonholekayak@wyoming.com](mailto:jacksonholekayak@wyoming.com). Rivers: Snake

Bear Paw Outdoor Adventure, N3494 Hwy 55, White Lake, WI [www.bearpawinn.com](http://www.bearpawinn.com), [bearpaw@neworth.net](mailto:bearpaw@neworth.net). Rivers: Wolf

Idaho River Sports, 1521 North 13th St., Boise, ID 83702 (800) 936-4844, [www.idahoriversports.com](http://www.idahoriversports.com), [irs@mindspring.com](mailto:irs@mindspring.com). Rivers: Payette

Boulder Outdoor Center, 2707 Spruce St., Boulder, CO 80302 (303) 444-8495, [www.boc123.com](http://www.boc123.com), [surf@bc123.com](mailto:surf@bc123.com). Rivers: Colorado, Poudre, Clear Creek, Boulder Creek

# Avoiding the Unexpected Plunge

**Keeping Your Body in the Boat** | by Pamela Dillon,  
ACA Executive Director and Instructor Trainer Educator

**Talk to any paddler** and most will have a story to tell about ending up in the water unexpectedly. Many will chuckle at the memory; some may portray it as a "close call." Still, it's a fact of life in paddling that, if you spend time on the water, you'll take an unexpected plunge. Most of the time, it's no big deal, especially if you're a swimmer and wearing your PFD. But if the water's cold, there's no help and you can't easily self-rescue, it can be risky.

Here are the somber facts: According to the U.S. Coast Guard, nearly 90 percent of people who die in boating accidents find themselves in the water unexpectedly. Many who drown are classified as "swimmers." Most fatalities occur in boats less than 16 feet long on calm water. Even so-called "strong" swimmers can succumb to the effects of a sudden plunge. The best protection: Wear a properly fitted lifejacket and know how to swim.

There is nothing inherently "dangerous" about boats. You can float a canoe or kayak all day and it will stay upright, even in wind and waves. But place people and gear inside haphazardly and the result is an out-of-balance and out-of-trim hull. Paddle that boat into open water, move around to land a fish or grab a piece of gear, and, too often, people end up in the water.

Understanding boat stability is vital, especially when learning. Two opposing forces—gravity and buoyancy—act against your boat. These forces are equal when a floating boat is at rest. Your boat's stability is related directly to the below-water hull shape and center of gravity created by the load. The lower and closer the load is to the boat's center line, the more stable (assuming you have adequate freeboard). The problem develops when weight is added above the gunwale line, resulting in a raised center of gravity. For instance, kneeling in a canoe places your weight lower than sitting in a seat. Weight above the gunwale is unstable. As the load is moved off-center, the boat's buoyancy responds to the hull shape change to try to balance it. If this elevated center of gravity gets dramatically off-center, such as when a person leans over the side, the force of buoyancy may not be able to counteract it. The result: a swamp or capsize. To prevent this "unexpected" plunge, do these things:

- Maintain three points of contact while moving around. This is most easily understood when moving around in a canoe, but the premise also holds for kayaks. Like a stable three-legged stool, three points of contact retains stability. If you move a foot to step forward, hold onto the boat with both hands. When lowering yourself into an open-cockpit kayak, create three points of contact by using the paddle to span the sides of the cockpit and the shore.
- Load the boat properly. Stay within the limits of the boat's capacity rating, or follow the guidelines in the owner's manual. Keep weight centered both from side to side and bow to stern.



When carving a turn, lean your boat while keeping your body upright.

- Keep your shoulders inside the gunwales. When retrieving something, reach with your paddle (T-grips are great for this) or guide the boat close to the object so you can grab it without leaning over the gunwale. When carving a turn, lean your boat while keeping your body upright. To practice, rock the boat back and forth with your hips, keeping your torso upright. Also, practice leaning the boat over, keeping your shoulders inside the gunwales. This is great way to develop balance and technique, but practice

at an area where you can recover from an "expected" wet exit.

Getting wet is part of paddling, but get wet by choice and not by chance. These techniques take practice. With practice they become instinctive and will keep you upright. Of course, wind, current, wakes and waves affect the stability of even carefully loaded boats. The best way to deal with these variables is to take hands-on training. Paddling instruction will teach you balance, stabilizing strokes, safe exit and entry, and even ways to roll up after a capsize. Skill courses are fun, incredibly beneficial, and can increase your overall paddling enjoyment. Contact the American Canoe Association for courses near you.

# Self-Rescue: A Primer

**Know the following skills to stay safe on the water**

by Gordon Black, Director, ACA Safety Education and Instruction



photo courtesy of NOC

When you have an accident you're the first person at the scene, so you might as well save yourself. We all know we should wear a lifejacket, and clothes and shoes appropriate to the conditions in case we end up in the water. But what then? Self-rescue is a vital skill for all paddlers. Whether canoeing or kayaking on flatwater, rivers or the ocean, the skills apply across the board.

The first step of any self-rescue is to avoid a rescue situation in the first place. That means stay within your abilities and always have a game plan in case you capsize. If you do find yourself in the water, stay in contact with your boat and hold on to your paddle if possible. Wind, or even gentle current, can move the boat away from you surprisingly quickly. Position yourself upstream, or upwind, of the boat, and hold on to it with one hand. If possible, also hold your paddle in the same hand, which will free up the other hand for swimming. If another person was in the boat with you, now is the time to see if they are ok and get them to swim to the same end of the boat that you're holding on to.

If you're near the riverbank, or close to shore of a lake or sea, use your free arm to swim yourself and boat in to land. It is generally easier to empty and re-enter the boat on shore. Take care if your swim happens in a river. Standard river-swimming tactics include rolling over on your back and keeping your feet on the surface to avoid foot entrapment and ward off rocks. Watch out for obstacles such as boulders, downed trees and man-made objects like old cars and fences. Swim quickly to shore to reduce your exposure to these and other hazards. When you're close enough to shore that the water is only knee deep and you're out of the current, go ahead and stand up—but watch your footing and beware of possible foot entrapment between unseen rocks. Be thankful you're wearing shoes to protect your feet.

If you tip over far from shore and swim you'll need to get back into your boat, then bail or pump out any water. Having help from others is much

easier than getting back in by yourself. Prudent paddlers always travel in groups, but because boaters can become separated by wind, waves or weather conditions, self-rescue must be practiced. Sea kayakers probably have the most different rescue techniques because swimming to shore isn't always an option. Although a swimmer can re-enter a kayak by climbing up from the stern and then swinging his or her legs around in front and into the cockpit, this maneuver takes balance and practice. It's also hard to do in heavy seas. To make a sea kayak more stable many paddlers use a paddle float, an inflatable bag that attaches to one end of a paddle. When holding the other end tightly to the boat (or fastening to deck rigging), the paddle forms an effective outrigger, making the kayak more stable and easier to enter. Sponsons—cylindrical inflatable bags—can also be attached to either side of a kayak to improve stability for re-entry. Other techniques exist for open-water reentry to kayaks and even canoes, but they—like the ones mentioned here—need to be practiced. Take a basic rescue course beforehand, and don't wait until you need to self-rescue to try one.

## Avoid Getting Lost

In our modern world of cellphones, maps and GPS units, most people don't concern themselves with getting lost. But in the absence of high-tech gadgetry, not knowing where you are and how to get back home can be problematic. And in an emergency knowing where you are often isn't enough; you need to be able to reach safety, or get help to come to you.

A few precautions can make a big difference if you become lost, or darkness finds you still far from your take-out. A GPS can help you find your way, and can help you direct rescuers to your location. Even a low-tech map and compass (and the skills to use them) are important. Before the trip, leave a float plan with friends and check the map to find the closest road or access point. Take a list of emergency phone numbers for the area you're paddling in. For a sea kayaker, or anyone using shipping channels, navigational charts are a must. To contact help or attract attention, use a whistle, signal mirror, cell phone or radio. But all of those have limitations (i.e. battery life and poor reception). You can also use flares, noise-making devices and signal lights, which are mandated by the U.S. Coast Guard for some craft in some locations. If you have to make a fire to alert possible rescuers, keep it smoky during the day and big and bright at night. Wearing bright and/or reflective clothing and lifejackets also helps. Have a backup plan in case of emergency. Skills to avoid trouble are key, along with training in rescue, first aid, and how to get to safety and help. Take the trouble to get some training and knowledge, and you'll stay out of trouble.



**Imagine** watching two canoes headed for island campsites as the sun drops over the horizon. One passes the first and quickly slips out of view. The second veers with the waves and wind, paddlers changing sides frantically. The quicker team will set up camp with time to wet lines for a fresh-caught walleye dinner. The slower pair will boil macaroni by flashlight. Just a few simple skills separate the smooth and fast from the frustrated, and pan-fried walleye from mac and cheese. Here are four tips to help tandem paddlers drive a canoe straight and fast, as well as a few hints to improve forward stroke efficiency.

# Tips for Tandem Canoeing

by Charlie and Diane Vasey-Wilson

## Getting Into It

The rear gets in first and out last. The stern, or rear paddler, has a wider, more stable, stance in the canoe and can easily observe the bow paddler's entry and exit. Align the canoe parallel to shore before getting in or out, with the bow paddler holding the boat steady for the stern. Parallel placement protects the hull from damage, eases loading gear and works everywhere, from docks and high banks to sandy beaches.

Put weight toward the back. Adjust paddlers and gear to keep the rear a little deeper in the water than the bow. A canoe trimmed with stern deeper than bow stays on course, or tracks, while a bow-down boat veers off course like an arrow with the feathers up front. Without gear to adjust trim, the heavier paddler should sit in the rear.

## Paddling as Partners

Paddle on opposite sides, in cadence. Canoes run straight, fast and stable with one paddler on each side stroking to the same cadence. The stern observes which side the bow is paddling on, and paddles on the other side to the cadence the bow sets. The bow should switch in a predictable pattern to reduce fatigue—not more often than every 10 strokes. The bow's pace must be regular and slow enough to allow the stern extra time to steer. Thirty strokes a minute is fine, but a faster pace improves speed and steering.

Switch paddling sides at the same time. The stern easily notices when the bow paddler switches sides and should change too. When the canoe drifts off course, usually turning toward the side the bow is paddling on, the stern can, respectfully, ask the bow to switch, which will swing the canoe the other way, back on course.

## The Tandem Forward Stroke

Change the mental image. The wheel-like "forward stroke" we used at summer camp and saw in *The Last of the Mohicans* is weak and pitiful, causing Daniel Day Lewis to ditch two canoes over a waterfall. The last half of the stroke wastes energy pulling the boat down into the water.

Hold the paddle to extend reach. A paddle is effective only when the blade is perpendicular to the stroke or canoe's direction of travel. To make the most of each stroke, keep the shaft vertical as long as



For effective tandem paddling, keep the shaft vertical, stack your hands and square the blade to the water.

possible. Grasp the paddle with hands shoulder width apart, the top hand over the top grip, the shaft hand loose to allow the shaft to rotate. The shaft hand will seem higher than expected to improve forward reach.

Keep the

blade square to the stroke. Keeping the shaft vertical in the water and the blade square for more of the stroke will improve the stroke's efficiency. To do this, swing the shaft arm's shoulder forward to place the blade in water a foot forward of the knee. Keeping the shaft arm's elbow locked, swing the shaft arm shoulder from the reach through the stroke to power it with triceps, lats and extensor muscles.

Stack your hands. The top hand should be directly above the shaft hand during the power portion of the stroke. "Stack" the hands, with top hand extended outside the gunwale, keeping the top arm almost straight. The incorrect tendency to keep the top hand in front of the body angles the shaft across the rails and turns the canoe off course.

Short strokes, forward of the body. When the blade has been pulled to the paddler's knee—just over a foot of travel—take it out. Swing the shaft arm and shoulder forward to the next stroke. Keeping the stroke short and forward of the knee keeps the blade efficiently squared up and the stroke parallel to canoe's centerline. Carrying the blade behind the body pulls the stern off course.

Watch a few canoes on the water. Those moving right along—doing it right—have their hands stacked, present vertical shafts, and use short strokes in front of their bodies. Those having trouble have the top hand in front of their throats and carry long strokes behind their bodies. Paddled correctly, tandem canoes combine the joy of companionship with speed. Any team can paddle like pros after a teamwork-tuning afternoon: Paddling in cadence on opposite sides, arms locked, hands stacked, with short strokes in front of the body. Tandem canoeing is a wonderful, physical partnership, and a superb way to travel across water—and it's easy when partners know the basics.

GETTING THERE:

# Basic Paddling Skills

by Becky Molina

Whether you're in a canoe or kayak, the following concepts will help you develop good form as you take to the water.

- **Sit up straight.** Your mother was right: Posture is important for balance, efficiency and safety. Imagine that the heaviest parts of your body—head, chest, abdomen, hips and rear end—are blocks in a tower. Keep them evenly stacked for beginning techniques; it's when they come out of alignment that the tower (and your boat) is more likely to topple. Staying loose in the hips allows the boat to rock under you.

- **Use the big muscles.** Instead of bicycling your hands out and back with each stroke, keep arms relatively straight. Paddling with arms alone is inefficient and fatiguing. Your chest, back and stomach muscles are much sturdier, so they're better suited for the task. Paddling slightly stiff-armed is a method for learning efficient strokes. It forces use of the larger muscles.

- **Be shoulder safe.** Shoulder injuries are not uncommon in paddlesports. To protect your shoulders, keep your hands in front of your body. When placing a paddle blade behind you, turn to look at it, rotating your shoulders into a safe position.

- **Different strokes.** An entire vocabulary of strokes exists for every direction a boat can travel. Take a class to learn them all properly. Until then, remember these rules:

- **Keep the paddle blade perpendicular to the desired direction of travel.** Forward strokes run parallel to the boat's centerline. To move sideways away from the bank or dock, put the blade in the water parallel to your boat and pull



photo by Tim Murphy

yourself over to the blade. This is called a draw stroke.

- **Steer at the ends.** You'll get more mechanical advantage from turning strokes by doing them close to the ends of your boat. Sweep strokes are great for turning, tracing broad arcs to and from the bow or stern.

## Canoeing 101

### Getting Into It

Align the canoe parallel to shore before entering or exiting, with the bow partner holding the boat steady for the stern. You can brace your paddle shaft across the gunwales as you step into the center with the outer foot first. For maximum safety, settle into a three-point stance, knees spread and rear end resting on the front edge of the seat. Adjust people and gear to trim your boat, keeping the stern slightly deeper in the water than the bow.

### Holding On

Place one hand on top of the paddle's grip (not around the upper shaft), and the other hand loosely on the shaft (and not down at the

throat, where the shaft meets the blade). Your hands should only be about an arm's length apart.

### Paddling as Partners

Good tandem canoeists paddle on opposite sides, in synchronicity, causing their canoe to run straight, fast, and stable. The bow partner sets the rhythm and chooses a side; the stern takes the other side and matches the cadence.

### Going It Alone

When paddling a tandem canoe solo, you'll

control it best if you move as close to the middle of the boat as possible. Shift gear to get the right trim.

## Fine-Tuning the Forward Stroke

To paddle a canoe straight and true, picture yourself putting these techniques into play:

- **Stack it up.** To make the most of each stroke, keep the shaft as vertical as possible. Stack your hands, with your grip directly above the shaft hand during the power portion of the stroke. The incorrect tendency to keep the top hand in front of the body angles the shaft and turns the canoe off course.

- **Do the twist.** Rotate your shoulders away from the paddle at the catch of your forward stroke by twisting at the waist. Place the blade in the water well forward of your knee. Unwind your torso to power the stroke, keeping arms straight.

- **Keep it short.** When the blade is at your knee, the stroke is over. Making the stroke short and out in

front keeps the blade square and the stroke parallel to the canoe's centerline. Carrying the blade behind the body pulls the boat off course.

## Kayaking 101

### Getting In

Before getting it wet, hop into your kayak on flat ground to adjust the foot pegs and back band to fit you. Then, with kayak in the water parallel to shore, place your paddle shaft behind the cockpit or seat, extending one blade to rest shoreside on firm ground to lend stability when entering.

### Get a Grip

A white-knuckled death grip can lead to discomfort. Relax. Hold the paddle shaft with thumbs and forefingers forming rings, like you're making the "OK" sign, and keep your other fingers loose. Now you can orient your blades and gain reach without stressing your wrists. To find the right hand position, put the center of the shaft on top of your head, then hold it so that your arms form right angles at the elbow.

### Use the Blades Properly

Many kayak paddle blades are asymmetrical. The spooned powerface is designed for grabbing water with each forward stroke. The other side (backface) is used also for certain strokes. Some blades look lopsided, a feature affording hydrodynamic advantage. Keep the long edge on top.

### Going Forward

Plant the blade as far forward as you can comfortably reach, rotating your torso without leaning forward. Keep the path of your stroke parallel to the boat. Use a more relaxed shaft angle (45 to 60 degrees) for touring, and bring it more vertical—which places the blade closer to the boat—for a power boost.



# Camping by Canoe or Sea Kayak

*How to organize your own multi-day paddling adventure*

by Jackieeppe

**N**ow that you've bought a boat, taken a lesson and enjoyed a few day trips it's time to think about going for a weekend trip or more. You want to wake up and hear the chuckling of a stream mixed with the trills of early morning birds outside your tent. You begin to wonder what you would need and how to get started camping with your boat.

When you close your eyes and imagine yourself camping thanks to your sea kayak or canoe, what do you see? Settling on a destination can be the most difficult part of planning the trip. Do you see yourself on a glassy early morning lake with the moon just sinking, casting a line? Or are you ready to launch beside a short set of rapids with the morning fog gently lifting off the water? Maybe you're beside a tent just finishing brunch and thinking about dinner. If you have one of these visions, or something like it, you can canoe or sea-kayak camp with just a little planning.

Once you've decided on your destination, assemble your team. Maybe it's you and your spouse or you and some buddies. Make sure you're comfortable with your companions (you'll be spending a lot of time with them in close quarters) and that you all share the same vision for the trip. If your spouse thinks the best part of camping is sleeping late and great meals and you want to cover as much ground as possible with only jerky, rice cakes and water on the menu, it'll be difficult for either of you to have a good time. Create a well-rounded team, one that includes folks who have all the skills the trip needs: planning and organizing, rescue, first aid, navigation, cooking and entertainment. It's good to share the responsibility if you're designing your own trip, but it can also be fun to go with somebody who has experience and knowledge to guide and teach you about tripping.

The usual worries of first-time kayak or canoe campers include: Am I strong (or skilled) enough for this trip? Who will I be partnered with—will they do their share and will they be fun to be with? Will the paddlers be equally strong, or might I be left behind? Will the paddling be leisurely or constant? Will there be enough to eat? Will the food be palatable? What will we do if a canoe capsizes? These are excellent questions and should be discussed by the team beforehand, with plans made to accommodate everyone. If goals are clear and agreed upon, all team members are more likely to be happy campers.

Many popular trips have established and maintained campsites. If at all possible, use these campsites to avoid additional impact on the waterway. If you have some camping experience already, you can transfer what you know and like to canoe and sea-kayak camping. If not, it's still an easy leap: The trick is to make a few lists to help you get organized. I like to think in these terms: kitchen, bedroom, transportation, repair and personal gear. I keep an inventory of all my camping/canoeing equipment and go down the lists to make sure that I don't forget anything. Of course, there's a lot of stuff on my list that I'd never take canoeing, but I think about each item and leave it behind on purpose, not because I forgot it. This mental process makes it more likely that I'll have everything I need.



photo by Wiley/Wales



## Selecting a Site

Whether you're traveling by canoe or sea kayak, it's good to have a campsite picked out beforehand so you know exactly how much distance you need to cover. At some locations you can register for sites beforehand, guaranteeing a place to rest your head; at others it's first-come-first served, meaning you might not always get your No. 1 choice. Pick a site that has ample flat space for your group's tents, and a common area you can hang a tarp over for cooking and general relaxing. Make sure your boats are pulled up well above the water line, and that they're secured with a strong rope. If it looks like rain, turn them over to avoid filling. If you're sea kayaking, make sure your boats (and tents!) are well beyond the high-tide line.

## Kitchen

The kitchen that I take might be huge (three two-burner stoves, griddles, a 20-inch frying pan, Dutch oven, cooler, dish pan and more) if I am responsible for feeding a crowd. For smaller trips I might only have a backpacking stove, a pot and a big spoon. The kitchen always includes a tarp. Its size depends on the group size. I try to have just enough food for the trip. In a group, I eat last—sometimes a lot, sometimes a little. I usually make up a snack bag for each member of a group so they'll know they won't starve (a real concern to some folks).

## Bedroom

Your trip will be fun, interesting and successful if you're sure to get enough sleep. If you're rested, everything else is small stuff. To sleep well you must have a dry, comfortable tent and bag. If it rains, make sure you pack the tent with the ground cloth folded over the dry canopy, and the wet fly separated from the canopy by the ground cloth. Dry everything out at the earliest chance. You'll need to pack your sleeping bag and pad carefully so they won't get wet, perhaps double-bagging them. Whatever you need to sleep comfortably should be packed with your sleeping bag. Your pad, a pillow if you need it, and perhaps earplugs.

## Personal

When you consider clothing, think in terms of a "wet set" to paddle in and a "dry set" for camp. For a summer camping trip in Maine, my wet set would be synthetic shorts, coolmax T-shirt, and sandals or booties. I'd also have a short-sleeved paddling shirt in easy reach. My dry set would include long underwear or tights, a long-sleeved synthetic button front shirt (mostly for bugs), wool or fleece socks and sandals or sneakers, and a back-up fleece. I always carry a hooded light rain jacket and rain pants. Before I leave camp in the morning, I take off my dry set and put on my wet clothes for paddling. Sometimes I don't ever use my dry clothing, but I know it's there if I get uncomfortable. I have a small sack of toiletry items: bug dope, sunscreen, personal medications, toothbrush and paste, soap and deodorant. I carry my clothing and bedroom (except for the tent) in a 70-liter drybag. The tent usually goes into its own drybag. My thwart bag holds my navigation gear, paddle jacket and headlamp.

## Tool bag

My tool bag varies. It might include a saw, a repair kit for stove, canoe, paddle, tent, etc., a comprehensive first-aid kit and water filter for one trip, and only a tiny first-aid kit, filter and duct tape for another. If I have a large group and a fire would be fun, I often take hardwood, split wrist size. That way, I can have a small, effective cook fire that folks can sit around.

## Transportation

Transportation includes the vehicles we will use to get to the put-in (and perhaps take-out), as well as the canoes and their associated gear. It also includes "to-dos." I want to make sure that my car is ready to roll: tires and spare inflated properly, oil changed on schedule, battery in good shape, and solid roof rack and straps for the boats. The gear list includes paddles, PFDs, kneeling pads, throwbags, sponges and bailers.

Whether you're in a kayak or canoe, a day in the life of a leisurely camper might look like this. The cook is up first to make coffee and begin breakfast. After breakfast, each person packs a lunch to take in the boat. The kitchen gets cleaned up and packed, tents get broken down, and everybody gets into their paddle clothing. The boats are floated, packed and then launched, the group paddling close enough so everyone is comfortable with the spacing. A break is taken sometime around mid-morning and again at lunch, with camp made by mid or late afternoon with time to swim, bird watch, fish, read or hike before dinner chores. Sound nice? You can do it!

—Jackie Peppe teaches outdoor sport and survival skills year-round, from guiding winter camping trips to teaching families to canoe. She's been a registered Maine guide since 1994 and holds ACA (American Canoe Association), PSIA (Professional Ski Instructors of America), WMA (Wilderness Medical Associates) and ARC (American Red Cross) certifications. Reach her with any camping questions at [jackie@followjackie.com](mailto:jackie@followjackie.com).



# Skills



Photo by Dunbar Hardy

## Teaching Kids 101

There are as many different ideas about how best to teach kids to paddle as there are teachers. Many of the ideas will sound familiar to anyone involved in teaching kids any activity. Most agree that frequent praise is critical. Small group sizes on the water (five or fewer boats in a group, with one or two instructors per group) provide a level of safety and an ability to give individual attention that's not possible with larger groups. The great thing about kids is that they are like sponges—put them near water and they will absorb.

No matter what your educational philosophy, longtime ACA Instructor Trainer Becky Molina believes that the proof is in the pudding. "Teaching is not merely the practice of presenting material, but rather ensures that learning will occur," she says. "If students can leave the class performing a skill on their own without the instructor, practicing the skill correctly and applying it when necessary to new situations, and perhaps even able to teach the skill to others, then we can be sure that learning has occurred." Becky has developed some basic principles that have proven to work well when teaching kids:

- **Hands-on:** Most kids are hands-on learners; they tend to be better than adults at playing and they are good at figuring things out if guided and allowed to do so. For example, if you demonstrate a stroke and have kids practice it, they often can give you examples of when the stroke might be useful, then even go further to suggest how a complementary stroke would serve the same purpose in the other direction. Kids are usually quicker learners than adults.
- **Language:** We can't teach kids without changing the language we use with them. Our kid language needs to be limited (do more, talk less), age-appropriate (6-year-olds may not understand "parallel" and "perpendicular"), and consistent (not using multiple terms for the same thing).
- **Focus attention:** Kids are more prone than adults to distraction, so the instruction needs to be exciting and focused. Multiplying a child's age by two gives a rough idea of their attention span in minutes. So with 10-year-olds, the activity should change approximately every 20 minutes.
- **Encouragement:** Most kids aren't practiced in separating their social and emotional needs from the task at hand. They need down time to hang out with peers and recharge. They need to be treated with respect, encouragement and a high level of enthusiasm.

—Excerpted from *Paddling With Kids* (Appalachian Mountain Club, Boston, Mass., 2001), by Bruce Lessels and Karen Blom.

## Resources

### Getting Started in Paddling: Resources for the Paddler by Gordon Black

Many people have felt a stirring interest in paddling. Maybe they see a canoe or kayak atop an SUV heading down the highway. Or they remember the fun of paddling as kids at camp and wish they could take their own kids out. Or they see a TV clip featuring someone on whitewater. The problem is that these stirrings often peter out through lack of information about what to do next. Questions frequently arise that seem to have no ready answer: Where do I go to find good places to paddle? Who could I paddle with? Where could I learn more about paddling? Here are some resources to help find some of the answers.

The American Canoe Association (ACA) is a national organization for paddlesports of all kinds. It maintains a detailed Web site that can serve as an information starting point ([www.acanet.org](http://www.acanet.org)). Browsing the site can help you locate local clubs and paddling courses in your area and can provide information on other diverse aspects of paddlesports. Perhaps the best way to get started is to get formal instruction. See Kent Ford's article "So You Want to Learn to Paddle" (page BG 23) for what to expect from expert instruction and how to choose a good class. There are many venues for formal instruction, ranging from professional paddling schools to courses taught by local clubs.

Regardless of where you take a course, you'll want to practice and refine your new skills on some local bodies of water (and, ideally, meet some neighborhood paddling buddies). Here are some ways to track down these nearby paddling opportunities:

There are a remarkable number of paddling clubs in the U.S. In fact, virtually every significant city in America has at least one group devoted to paddlesports (check the ACA Web site for a listing of clubs). These groups typically offer some instructional courses and almost always sponsor guided trips on local bodies of water. These trips are a great way to discover nearby paddling opportunities and other information. (For example, put-in sites are often at the ends of unpaved side roads, and without an experienced leader you would be unlikely to discover them yourself.)

If you're having trouble tracking down a local club, try going by an outfitter's store. Outdoor retail stores do more than just sell merchandise. They also serve as a kind of information central for people wanting to know more about outdoor sports and activities. Drop by a store and talk to a sales clerk about where you might find other

paddlers in the area. Retailers, like local clubs, often sponsor instructional programs and guided tours, so ask if they have paddling trips planned. Or, alternatively, hang out in the parking lot until someone pulls up in a car with roof racks, and ask them where to find the local paddlers.

Another way to find out about paddling is through outfitters. These companies often rent boats, lifejackets, paddles and other gear you'll want but don't have when you start out. Some will even provide a shuttle to and from the water. These companies—often known as "liveries"—are a great place to get started in paddling, as they typically know the local waterways and can give you the basics about safety and tips to make your outing more fun. Some outfitters offer guided raft trips, in addition to just renting equipment. These trips often take place on more challenging water (such as whitewater rivers) where most folks can benefit from expert guidance.

Another source of information is outing clubs found at colleges. The club organizer usually has lots of information about nearby paddling options. Sometimes a friendly phone call to the director is all it takes to get you a local paddling contact.

Remember that the paddling community is a tightly knit group, but it often lacks high visibility from the outside. If you're persistent and ask around, you'll surely end up with a name and a number. Call that one person, express interest, and bingo!, you're tapped into a wide network of people who love being out on the water.



**ACA. We are people who paddle. Any boat, any water.**

### Where to Learn More

- The American Canoe Association ([www.acanet.org](http://www.acanet.org), 703-451-0141) is the oldest and largest paddlesports organization in the world, and yes, they are about kayaking, too. Contact them for information on instruction, public events and paddling clubs in your area or to order books and videos on technique and safety.
- The Professional Paddlesports Association ([www.propaddle.com](http://www.propaddle.com), 800-789-2202), a trade organization for paddlesport retailers and liveries, can help find paddling businesses near you.
- The U.S. Coast Guard's Office of Boating Safety ([www.uscgboating.org](http://www.uscgboating.org), 800-368-5647) regularly promotes boating safety with its "You're in Command...Boat Safely" campaign.
- Read up on what's up in the world of paddling. Pick up a magazine like *Paddler* ([www.paddlermagazine.com](http://www.paddlermagazine.com), 703-455-3419) or find books and videos aimed at beginners.

**Join  
the American Canoe Association  
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Call 703.451.0141 or visit [www.acanet.org](http://www.acanet.org)

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