

Kayaking 101

**So what's the first thing you do before kayaking?
put your life jacket on**



Getting In and Out of a Kayak with Ease!

Getting in and out of a kayak is probably what most beginners fear the most. It can be awkward and challenging but here's how to do it with ease.

The key is keeping your weight low and centered.

At the dock

- In shallow water you can lift your paddle vertically - set one end into the bottom of the water snug against the kayak side steady it. If you're in deeper water lay your paddle within reach and you'll use the dock edge to steady you.
- Sit on the dock edge dangling your legs over and balance the cockpit edge with your feet to line up your entry position - drop the tie line into the cockpit.
- Using the dock edge to steady you, swing one foot then quickly the other into the center of the cockpit - quickly crouch down - then sit.
- Take your paddle in your hand, rest it across the cockpit and adjust the tie line so it won't drag when you paddle.

Paddling Techniques



Lean Back

Rest your back comfortably on the seat - this keeps the boat stable. Your movement should come from your torso.

The Grip

With both arms comfortably in front of you take the paddle in both hands - over-handed with thumbs under. As a general guide, line up your knuckles with the upward blade edge.

Pull and Push

Each paddle stroke is a pull with your downward stroke while the upward arm pushes the paddle shaft away from you. This combined effort distributes the work. Keep your arm comfortably in front of you (like bicycling). No need to hold on too tight - you'll find the rhythm.

Leaning your arms too far forward and over extending your waist will just give you back and shoulder aches. Instead - since your torso muscles are stronger than your arm muscles, get used to using your torso to turn into the stroke - side to side. This lends more power to the stroke and saves on your arm muscles.

As you change sides the paddle shaft should comfortably rotate to line up your knuckles with the upward blade - sweeping the water to the end of the kayak.

Paddling is rhythmical - it should feel like an extension of your upper body and flow without thinking about it. Once you're "not thinking about it" your whole body is relaxed and paddling is effortless - in harmony with the kayak.

Turning the Kayak

Turning your kayak is easy. You can turn by simply paddling only one side - opposite of the side you want to turn into.

You can turn quicker by placing your paddle in a vertical direction into the water on the side that you want to turn to.

Once you are headed where you want to be - resume paddling.

You can make the kayak go backwards by first slowing the kayak to almost a stop and reverse your paddling direction.

Lifting A Kayak

Before lifting a kayak or paddling, make sure you've stretched and warmed up the muscles you're asking to do the work - it's very easy to throw your back out and this isn't fun.

A heavy load isn't always the cause of back problems, simply lifting the wrong way could twist or concentrate the entire load to one area which causes muscle strain. Your precious leisure time shouldn't be spent watching everyone from shore while you nurse back pain - so here's how to avoid doing this . . .

- Bend with your knees - lift with your leg muscles
- Preview your path for any obstacles or uneven ground
- Use both hands to lift
- Avoid quickly hoisting the kayak - move in stages
- Keep the kayak close to your body

To move your kayak to the water edge, it's best not to drag it because you'll scratch up the bottom and thin the hull material.

The easiest way to lift a kayak is to have the benefit of a friend - you can each grab an end.



Kayaking Awareness

Learning how to kayak isn't all about technique. There's also kayaking awareness. That means learning and experiencing the mechanics of paddling, but also about your surroundings. How it affects you, how you affect the area where you are paddling and the safety of your paddling companions. Well, here are some things to think about ...

About Stability

you'll hear the terms "*initial stability*" and "*secondary stability*". Here's what that's all about.

- Initial stability is the side to side movement. If you're just learning how to kayak, you'll get used to the feel of this (initial) motion very quickly.
- The secondary stability is the point at which a hull will flip (the point of no return). In other words; how far it will lean before overturning. After you get used to the initial stability you will understand that the "secondary stability" is far more important. This is the motion that limits your movement.

Sudden Weather Changes

It's worth repeating that before setting out to paddle - you should know the expected weather conditions and any forecasted changes. If the weather changes suddenly, a wind comes up or clouds form that threaten rain - you need to make appropriate safety decisions.

When the Wind comes Up

When learning how to kayak, the wind can pose particular challenges. On calm water even a brisk breeze can make it suddenly difficult to paddle. You will find yourself paddling like crazy but don't seem to be getting anywhere!

In this situation paddle at an angle to the wind and make your way closer to the shore line where you will find it easier to paddle. From there, you can paddle the perimeter of the area. This may take longer but you won't be as tired.

Lightning

On golf courses they sound a safety signal to alert golfers that rain/lightning is approaching. On the water, there is no signal - you must be aware. When storm clouds suddenly appear - rain is likely and often lightning can accompany it.

Lightning is serious in open water. If you hear a rumble of thunder off in the distance - don't ignore it - it's likely headed your way. Paddle quickly to the nearest shore and seek the safest cover you can find until the storm passes.

How to Upright an Overturned Kayak

this is something that takes skill and patience . . .

- First, place your body across the beam of the hull - with your arms on one side, your feet on the other
- Place your feet at approximately body width apart on one edge
- Place your hands a bit wide apart on the other side and grab the rim (or as close to it as you can)
- On the count of three . . . with all your strength - push down with your feet while pulling the cockpit rim to "flip it" until the kayak turns. This usually takes a few tries.

