

BE SMART, BE SAFE HAVE FUN

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO SAFER PADDLING



ALWAYS WEAR YOUR LIFE JACKET

Wear it Like a Pro

The first sign of a rookie paddler is someone who isn't wearing a life jacket. Experienced paddlers wear life jackets whenever they're on the water.

Make it Fit

Adjust your life jacket so that it's snug and comfortable. It should not lift up when pulled by the shoulders.

Modern life jackets come in all sizes, with models for children, women and men.

Don't Tempt the Odds

85% of fatal canoeing accidents and

48% of kayaking fatalities involve people who were not wearing a life jacket. Don't be a statistic. Wear your life jacket.

FOR MORE ON FITTING LIFE JACKETS, GO TO:
safeboatingcampaign.com/life-jackets



KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Be Honest With Yourself

Good paddlers know their limits. If you don't feel comfortable in a given set of conditions, return to shore.

The Right Boat for the Conditions

Most kayaks, canoes and SUPs are designed for use on protected waters and moderate currents.

Specialized boats are used for whitewater, surf and exposed lakes or ocean. Know the capabilities of your craft. These venues require additional training.

Explore Your Limits Safely

Improving your skills is one of the joys of paddling. Practice in safe conditions with instructors or expert paddlers to expand your personal performance envelope.

Impairment = Accidents

Do not go paddling if you should not be driving. Drinks and drugs are even more hazardous on the water. Coast Guard and state BUI laws apply to all vessels, which includes recreational canoes, kayaks and SUPs.



CARRY THE PADDLING ESSENTIALS

Safety

Always carry drinking water.

Keep signaling devices (whistle, mirror, flares) in a pocket of your life jacket.

Sit-inside kayakers should carry a paddle float and pump.



Communications

A handheld VHF radio allows you to communicate with the Coast Guard and commercial boat traffic. Use Channel 16 for emergencies.

A Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) will relay your precise location to rescue agencies if you're in distress.

Carry a cell phone in a waterproof case, and always be sure to tell a friend before you go.



Comfort

Carry extra layers of clothing in a waterproof "dry bag."

For longer outings, bring energy bars or a lunch.



PLAN FOR CHANGING WEATHER CONDITIONS

Treat the Forecast as the Best Case

When the forecast calls for ideal paddling weather, it will probably be a beautiful day—just don't count on it.

Don't forget to check tides or river levels, and note the time the sun will rise and set.

Prepare for the Worst Case

Be aware of how changing weather affects paddling, and plan accordingly.

For canoeists and kayakers, air temperature is less important than wind speed and direction. And while rain can be a nuisance, lightning is dangerous.

Have an exit strategy at all times. If a fast-moving thunderstorm appears, where is the nearest safe landing?

Pay Attention

Scan the horizon for dark clouds, and be aware of changing temperatures and wind directions, which often precede a squall or thunderstorm.

Don't wait for bad weather. If you sense a change for the worse, get off the water right away.



DRESS FOR IMMERSION

Cold Kills

The human body loses heat about **25x** faster when immersed in cold water than it does when dry.

Avoid cotton clothing like t-shirts and jeans, because they retain water and accelerate cooling when wet.

Modern Miracles

Today's paddling gear uses high-tech fabrics and technology to keep you dry, comfortable and looking your best.

A wetsuit or drysuit allows you to stay warmer when immersed in cold water.

Ask your local paddling shop to recommend clothing for the conditions you plan to paddle in.

Dress Your Children Well

Remember: Children lose body heat faster than adults. Smaller adults lose body heat faster than large adults.



TELL A FRIEND

Share Your Plan

Telling a trusted friend where and when you plan to paddle ensures that someone will know where to send help if you get into trouble.

Make it Routine

Keep a basic float plan on your computer or phone, and make a habit of filling it out and sending it to a friend every time you paddle.

Include the Four Ws

Who: Your name and the name of everyone paddling with you.

Where: Your planned put-in, takeout and paddling route.

When: Your estimated launch and return time—and when to notify authorities if you don't check in as scheduled.

What to Do: A plan for what to do if you don't return or check in as scheduled.



MAKE YOURSELF SEEN

Dress For Visibility

Choose a brightly colored life jacket and paddling clothing that will make it easier for others to see you on the water.

Carry a light, especially if there's a chance you'll be on the water early or late in the day. High visibility strobes and running lights are available at your local paddling shop.

Practice Defensive Paddling

Never assume that power boaters can see you. Avoid high-traffic areas whenever possible, and proceed with caution when you can't avoid them.

Be aware of factors like fog and glare that make you more difficult to spot. If you're between a powerboat and the sun when it's low on the horizon, the operator almost certainly won't see you.

Know the Rules of the Road

Learn the 'Rules of the Road' that govern all boat traffic, from kayaks to container ships. Knowing these simple rules will help you anticipate where other boats will go, and allow you to stay out of trouble.



TAKE A PADDLING CLASS

What You'll Learn

Safety: You'll learn and practice the skills that make paddling safe and enjoyable.

Style: You'll learn good paddling technique from skilled instructors.

Who You'll Meet

A paddling course is the best place to meet fellow paddlers.

Your class mates are likely to be safety-minded and have similar skills and interests.

A good instructor can become a mentor who will help you become a better paddler.

Why It's Fun

You'll be on the water, learning new skills in a safe and friendly environment.

Where to Find a Class

Check with your local paddle shop for a list of paddle classes in your area. You can find a list of ACA-certified instructors at americancanoe.org/instruction



In California, certified paddling courses are available at aquatic centers from Humboldt to San Diego. Check them out at [BoatCalifornia](http://BoatCalifornia.com).

LEARN MORE

Watch the 8-part Safe Paddling Video Series, and find paddling tips, gear lists and safety resources from Canoe & Kayak magazine, the ACA Canoe-Kayak-SUP-Raft Rescue and the United States Coast Guard.

canoeandkayak.com/safety

americancanoe.org/instruction

uscgboating.org

nasbla.org/education

To see California flatwater and whitewater paddling safety videos, please visit:



Scan this Quick Response code with your smart phone to be directed to *Safer Paddling*, a highly acclaimed instructional video series produced by *Canoe & Kayak Magazine*.



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