

How to Paddle a Kayak

BEFORE YOU SET OUT, IT IS IMPORTANT TO GET GOOD INSTRUCTION. CHECK WITH YOUR DEALER OR LOCAL CLUB TO FIND OUT ABOUT CLASSES OFFERED LOCALLY. YOU SHOULD LOOK FOR A COURSE THAT COVERS BASIC STROKES, BRACES AND RESCUE TECHNIQUES. WITH ANY OUTDOOR ACTIVITY, IT IS ALSO GOOD TO BE FAMILIAR WITH FIRST AID, ESPECIALLY CPR AND TREATMENT OF HYPOTHERMIA.

To start, sit in your kayak. Your backside should be all the way back in your seat and your knees comfortably bent. To find the proper foot well, straighten your legs all the way out and then bring them back one "well." If your legs are too straight, you may find you put strain on your lower back. If your knees are bent too far, you may end up knocking your knee caps when you paddle.

To find your hand placement on your paddle, start with your hands about shoulder width apart and centered. If you place the center of the paddle on the top of your head, your elbows should form slightly less than a 90 degree angle. There should be an equal amount of paddle shaft and blade beyond both of your hands.

Some paddles may have the blades offset, or feathered. A feathered paddle presents less surface area for the wind to catch. However, a special technique must be used to get both blades in the water. If the paddle is a right hand control, (when the right blade is held vertical, the left blade "scoop" is up) the right hand will stay tight and your left hand loose. To learn the process, hold the paddle tight in your right hand and loose in your left. Using the right hand, rotate the paddle blade back and forth; it should slide through your left hand. Now take a stroke on your right, cock your right wrist back (left hand staying loose and somewhat open) and take a stroke on your left, and so forth. If using a left hand control paddle, reverse the process: the left hand stays tight and the right loose.

HOW TO PADDLE a Kayak

The basic paddle stroke is a forward power stroke. Place the paddle blade in the water near your toes. Pull the paddle blade back alongside the boat to approximately your hip. Lift the paddle blade and take a stroke on the other side.

If the paddle blade drifts out to the side in an arc, it will force the bow of the boat to swing away from the paddle blade. This is called a sweep stroke and is used to turn the boat.

Ocean Kayak PADDLE TIPS

Ocean Kayaks are very easy to use and very forgiving. By beginning in calm water, you can quickly get the feel of the boat and paddle techniques, and practice getting in and out of the boat by yourself. A long paddle will allow for a longer stroke, while a shorter paddle will give a shorter, faster stroke. Relax your hands when paddling - you don't need to hold a death grip! Sit with good posture, keep your torso vertical and choose a footrest position that will allow your knees to be slightly bent. For greater efficiency, use not only your arms, but your torso and shoulders as well. Start out easy until you get the feel of the paddle and the steering strokes. Most experienced paddlers use an offset (feathered) paddle, but beginners may prefer to keep the blades square.
