

## Trainer Kayak Selection

Any kayak can, of course, be used for training. For basic training, whitewater boats work best even if you have zero interest in paddling whitewater. This is especially true when training is conducted in a pool.

Here is why:

Because whitewater boats are shorter, we can get more of them in a pool. There will actually be room to practice all strokes and maneuvers in the pool. With a longer boat or one with more directional stability, that would not be possible.

Whitewater boats are the most maneuverable of all kayaks. They have nearly zero directional stability. This means that with a single sweep stroke you can turn the kayak nearly 180 degrees. When learning strokes, you can see and feel results. In contrast, a sea kayak might take eight sweep strokes to turn 180 degrees because they have much directional stability.

Because whitewater boats have poor directional stability, they are difficult to make go straight. When you learn to paddle a whitewater boat straight (with some bow wiggle of course), you can paddle any kayak straight and, as your skill improves you will create less bow wiggle. This is much like learning to drive with a stick shift instead of an automatic.

Whitewater boats include thigh braces for your knees. You can learn to “wear” a kayak. You can turn upside down and stay in the boat until you decide to wet-exit or perform an Eskimo Roll. Learning to safely wet-exit is a life saving skill. You can’t properly learn this skill if you simply fall out of a very large cockpit.

Because your trainer will have thigh braces, and you can wear the boat, you can learn proper kayak balance with torso rotation and hip action. This cannot be done if you simply sit in a loose cockpit.

All whitewater boats are designed to accept a watertight sprayskirt. It would be impossible to learn proper balance and bracing technique without a tight fitting sprayskirt. Your kayak would simply scoop water when you lean it over on its edge.

If an Eskimo Roll is desired, the whitewater boat is a good learning platform. All whitewater boats can be rolled.

A good sea kayak has all the above features except they are very difficult to turn in tight spaces. A good sea kayak will have thigh braces, can be worn by the kayaker, will accept a watertight sprayskirt, and can be rolled or braced. Pool training with a sea kayak must be limited to bracing, rolling, and sea kayak rescues.

Recreational kayaks are fun in the river but do not have the features needed for complete basic training. They all have some built-in directional stability and nearly always have very large cockpits without thigh braces.

Consider purchasing a used whitewater kayak to learn in. Older whitewater kayaks can be purchased for \$200 - \$500. After you learn the basics, sell the kayak for little or no loss. If you purchase a shorter whitewater paddle and learn to use a steep angle, you can use the same paddle and steep angle method for a recreational kayak or a sea kayak. In fact, shorter paddles and steeper angles are becoming more popular among experienced paddlers because it is easier on your shoulders and elbows, and it is easier to reduce bow wiggle. See the section about selecting a paddle for more information.

Some “crossover” type kayaks fit the requirements of a good trainer, are manufactured with the safety features needed for whitewater, and can be rolled. They are usually a little longer than a dedicated whitewater kayak and make superior boats for recreational trips. See the section on selecting your first kayak for more information.

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