

Choosing a Kayak Paddle

Long Paddles:

A long paddle requires a low entry angle (image on page 3) with the blade at some distance away from the boat. Every forward stroke equates to a partial sweep stroke. The boat must have directional stability in the form of length, a skeg or a rudder. Otherwise the bow will swing drastically.

Bow swing will be great on shorter boats since the blades cannot be kept close to the boat on the forward stroke.

Some people say longer paddles cause pain in their shoulders and/or elbows.

Touring paddles are typically 220 cm – 240 cm in length and have longer shaped blades than whitewater paddles. 230 cm has been a long time standard for touring paddles. Shorter touring paddles can be ordered.

I had my touring paddle shortened so the distance between the blades is the same as it is on my whitewater paddle. The blades have a different shape so the overall length is still greater. The shorter paddle does not cause pain in my shoulders or elbows and I can maintain the same forward speed with no extra effort. – Chris Collins

Short Paddles:

A short paddle permits a steep entry angle, keeping the blade close to the boat on the forward stroke. A short paddle can be used on any length boat. The short paddle might not work on an extra wide recreational kayak.

Bow swing on the forward stroke will be minor since the blade can be kept close to the boat.

Some people say the short paddle is easier on their shoulders and elbows.

Whitewater paddles are typically 190 cm – 205 cm and have shorter shaped blades than touring paddles.

Feathering:

Feathering is necessary to reduce repetitive wrist motion. Only the uneducated paddle with zero angle feathering. The required feathering angle will vary with paddling style and experience. Older paddles had a 90 degree feather and most paddlers find them very awkward to use. Modern paddles use 15 – 60 degrees for a feathering angle. Play-boaters favor 15-30 degree paddles. Werner Paddles considers 45 degrees to be today's standard feathering angle.

The left Dufek stroke is made difficult with lots of feathering. The “on-side” roll requires rocking the wrist more with greater angles of feathering. Perhaps these are two reasons why play-boaters prefer less angle. Recreational and touring kayakers will probably prefer 45-60 degrees of feathering. If you are not sure, select 45 degrees for your first paddle.

Paddle Weight:

Paddle weight is something we like to reduce. Generally, the less weight you get the more dollars you pay. This is one case where you pay for what you don't get, and you will be pleased. Because whitewater paddles must have added strength to take the abuse they get, they cannot be made as light as touring paddles. Touring paddles can be made very light with hollow shafts, foam filled blades and high-tech materials.

Swing Weight:

To feel the swing weight, balance the paddle in one hand and swing it back and forth by rotating the forearm. Reduced swing weight greatly reduces paddle fatigue on long paddles. Compare two paddles to feel the difference.

Overall Weight:

To measure overall weight, simply balance the paddle shaft on scales. Paddles vary from about 20 – 40 oz.

Paddle Shafts:

Paddle shafts come in various diameters to fit different sized hands. They also come in straight and bent shafts. Bent shafts are intended to reduce side motion on the wrist. Werner Paddles recommends a method of holding either paddle shaft to reduce this motion.

Two-piece paddles are handy for storage and travel. Often they will pack inside a boat. Full length paddles are expensive to ship. Sometimes the shipping cost savings can almost outweigh the extra cost of a two-piece paddle.

Whitewater Paddles:

Whitewater paddles generally have shorter and wider blades than touring paddles. Since a steep entry angle is intended, the asymmetrical shape is reduced causing a less noticeable angle on the edge of the blade. This shape is stronger and works better in shallow water such as found in many whitewater situations.

Whitewater paddles range in length from 190 – 205 cm. Whitewater paddles can be used on any length boat but might not work on an extra wide recreational kayak.

Touring Paddles:

Touring paddles generally have longer spoon shaped blades and can be narrower than whitewater paddles. Since a shallow entry angle is intended, the asymmetrical shape is greater producing a more noticeable angle on the edge of the blade. This angle is intended to approximate the angle of water surface to the blade. Since strength is less of an issue, touring paddles can be made much lighter making use of foam filled blades, hollow shafts and high-tech materials.

Touring paddles range in length from 220 – 240 cm but can be ordered shorter. Touring paddles do not work well with shorter boats or with boats that lack plenty of directional stability.

Entry Angle:

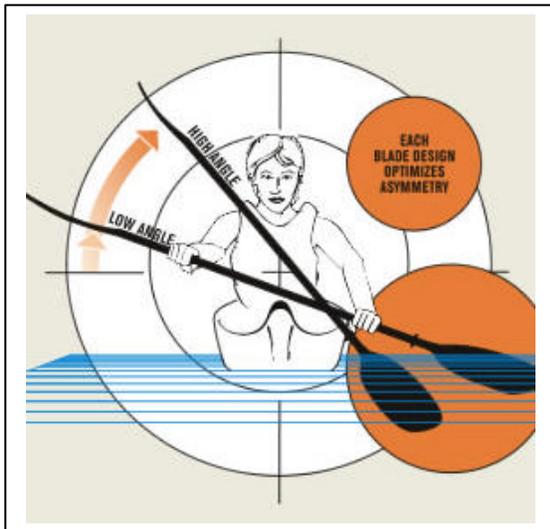
The pros and cons of high and low entry angle are described in the text above. The graphic below shows the difference. A high angle entry with a long shaft, puts the upper hand above the head. Upper hand should be no higher than about eye level.

Asymmetrical Shape:

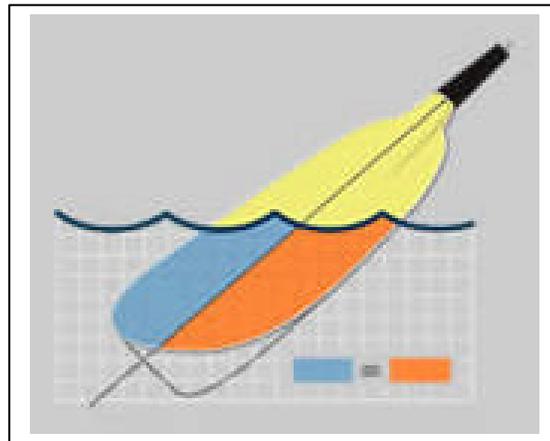
The asymmetrical shape helps reduce shaft torque or twist by keeping an equal amount of blade surface on each side of the shaft. Can you see why not to bury the entire blade in the water?

Additional Information:

See www.WernerPaddles.com for information and/or a free catalog.



High Angle Vs. Low Angle Entry



Asymmetrical Shape

Graphics are used with permission and are courtesy of Werner Paddles 800-275-3311.

Revised: January 16, 2013 by Chris Collins