

Introduction / Forward

Some of these documents were created as handout notes for a fourteen-night session I once taught, and to help friends get started in kayaking. Each evening included about an hour in a classroom and about two hours in an indoor pool. So if you find something is a bit cryptic, you will know why. It was not intended to be a book.

Most beginners assume kayaking is so simply they need no training and they are oblivious to some of the dangers. When one drives a vehicle on a highway, it is obvious they should not cross the centerline or drive into a bridge. Rivers and lakes often look harmless yet they do have hidden dangers as great as driving a car into a bridge.

For educational and purposes, and in the interest of safety, I have divided kayaking into four different types. I love all types of kayaking and I have a boat for each type. I am not trying to sell you on any specific type. Each type of kayak has a purpose and each type of kayaking has its own training, safety, and equipment requirements. Although there is some overlap, some kayaks can be downright dangerous if misused.

- **Recreational** = float or paddle shallow-water, lakes or rivers, generally peaceful and relaxing. Can include camping, fishing, nature photography, bird watching, quality family time, etc.
- **Sea/Touring** = generally paddle slow or non-moving water, including deep-water crossings, generally relaxing but wind, waves and surf zones can add exercise and excitement.
- **Whitewater** = float swift water, play in waves, catch eddies, generally burn calories.
- **Play-Boating** = “park and play” rather than floating downriver, very physical. Includes loops, cartwheels, surf, etc. Burn tons of calories.

Equipment Needed / Used:

- **Recreational** = medium length (10-13 ft) boats, large cockpits, some directional stability. Great for general kayaking in shallow-water, but not suitable for whitewater or deep-water.
- **Sea/Touring** = long (15-21ft) fast boats, smaller cockpits, often thigh braces, lots of directional stability. Easy to go straight. Difficult to turn. Often have skegs or rudders. Great for all types of slow or non-moving water including shallow water and deep-water crossings.
- **Whitewater** = short (6-12 ft) boats with little or no directional stability. Turn very easy. Difficult to go straight. Good for floating and playing. Great boats for pool training.
- **Play-Boating** = specially designed whitewater boats, usually very short and low volume.

Training Needed:

- **Recreational** = basic training that covers strokes, hazards and hypothermia.
- **Sea/Touring** = basic training that covers strokes, hazards, hypothermia plus sea kayak deep-water rescue training.
- **Whitewater** = basic training that covers strokes, hazards, hypothermia plus swiftwater training that covers eddy turns, ferries, Eskimo rolling and basic swiftwater rescue.
- **Play-Boating** = accomplished whitewater boating plus additional skills

I have attempted to make a clear distinction between “deep water” and “shallow water”. There is a huge difference between exploring the shallow areas of a lake and crossing a lake. A capsized in deep water can result in death unless you have the proper equipment and training to reenter the kayak, empty the water, and get underway in about two or three minutes. Even the best paddle clothing is not designed to keep you warm for an extended swim in cold water. I also avoid using of the term “flat water” because it does not eliminate hazards of deep water, very swift non-whitewater rivers, and flooded rivers.

Moving water in rivers creates river hazards. Moving water can hold you and/or your kayak against an object or trap you in a recirculating wave. The faster water moves, the greater the pressure and the hazards. Whitewater is created when water moves quickly over rocks and other obstacles. Smart whitewater paddlers float in groups that include experienced people who can perform rescues and provide guidance to those less experienced.

Unless the water and weather are suitable for swimming, you must be properly dressed to survive a swim in cold water. Hypothermia is a huge risk that can be easily avoided with training and gear.

Weather, water level, and water temperature are factors that must be considered for every trip.

A rescue can be as simple as emptying the water out of your kayak and reentering. It can also be much more complex involving ropes, knots, pulleys, webbing, and several people. Although there are some overlaps, sea kayak rescues are quite different from swift water rescues.

Many trips include camping in remote places. Kayakers are typically tent campers and will select a base camp. Some kayakers like to pack their camping gear in their kayaks and camp as they float a river. Experienced backpackers will adapt quickly. The rest of us need some help to have a warm, comfortable, and safe camping experience.

The paddling skill needed for kayaking can be self-taught or learned from a book, video, on the water from friends or in an organized class. I suggest learning the “correct” way before poor habits are developed. In some circumstances, having good paddling skills

will help separate you from a hazard. Many experienced kayakers enjoy learning and perfecting their skills. Many workshops fill with experienced kayakers because they recognize the opportunity. Most beginners avoid training for something so simple.

There are a few kayaks manufactured that are of the “crossover” variety. Although some of them are very good boats, they are not good for every kind of kayaking. I own two different brands and recommend them highly for a specific purpose and skill level.

Tandem kayaks are not recommended for beginners or anyone else who values a relationship with their spouse or paddling friend.

Eskimo Rolling is challenging skill sought after by many, and not needed by most. It should be a requirement for some types of kayaking. Accomplishing an Eskimo Roll can be very rewarding. Not all kayaks can be rolled.

Revised: January 16, 2013 by Chris Collins