

Kayaking & Canoeing — Workbook

This workbook accompanies the Kayaking & Canoeing course and gives you hands-on exercises, structured worksheets, and checklists to apply every skill on the water. Complete each section after finishing the corresponding module, ideally within 48 hours of your on-water practice session. The templates at the end are designed to be reused trip after trip.

Boats, Paddles, and Getting On the Water

Assess and document your gear choices, practise the pre-launch routine, and reflect on your first on-water orientation session.

Exercise: Boat and Paddle Fit Assessment

Visit a paddling outfitter or rental centre and physically sit in at least two different hull types (e.g., a recreational kayak and a touring kayak). Take measurements and complete these prompts.

- Record the beam width, length, and hull material of each boat you tried. How did primary stability differ between them?

- Using the ACA sizing formula (torso height + beam width = paddle length), calculate the ideal paddle length for each hull you tried. Did the rental paddle match?

- Describe the difference in how the seat-back and thigh braces felt between the two boats. Which created the better 'power position' connection to the hull?

- Based on the water types you plan to paddle in the next six months, which hull type would you choose and why?

Worksheet: Gear Inventory and PFD Fit Log

Complete this worksheet before your first independent paddle. Return to it each spring to verify gear is still serviceable.

PFD brand and model

PFD Type (III / V / other)

PFD chest measurement (inches/cm)

Shoulder strap pull-up test result (pass/fail — vest should not ride above chin)

Whistle brand and type (pea-less recommended)

Paddle float type (inflatable / foam) and storage location on deck

Bilge pump capacity (litres or ounces) and handle length

Throw bag length (metres) and condition of rope (frayed/OK/replaced)

Date of last gear inspection

Notes on gear requiring replacement or repair

Checklist: Pre-Launch Routine — Practise Until Automatic

- Float plan written and filed with a named contact onshore
- Weather checked: wind speed, thunderstorm probability, water temperature confirmed
- River or lake flow/level checked against recommended range if applicable
- Hull inspected for cracks, missing hatch covers, and skeg operation
- All dry bags sealed and clipped to deck rigging
- PFD fitted on body — not in the cockpit
- Paddle assembled and feather angle set
- Phone in waterproof case and charged to at least 80%
- Emergency contact number saved in phone and memorised
- Return time communicated to float plan contact

Core Strokes and Boat Control

Record your stroke-drill results, diagnose your technique weaknesses, and set measurable improvement targets for your next three sessions.

Exercise: Torso Rotation Self-Diagnosis

Film yourself paddling from a side angle (phone propped on a dry bag, or ask a companion to film). Review the footage and answer these prompts.

- At the catch: is the blade planted at or forward of your foot peg, or is it catching at your knee? Measure the distance from foot peg to catch point in one stroke.
- At the exit: does the blade leave the water at your hip or does it continue past? Estimate the number of degrees of over-stroke (if any).
- Paddler's box: do your elbows drop below your hands at any point in the power phase? Describe what you see.
- After reviewing the footage, write one specific correction you will focus on for the next 15 minutes of paddling.

Worksheet: Stroke Session Log

Complete one row per practice session for the first four sessions. Tracking your drill results reveals patterns in technique regression.

Session date

Water type (pool / flat lake / moving river)

Strokes drilled (e.g., forward, sweep, draw, low brace)

Forward stroke: blade angle at catch (estimated — vertical / angled / flat)

Sweep: degrees of turn per single full sweep (count strokes to rotate 180 degrees, divide)

Draw: able to move boat sideways without hitting hull? (yes / no / sometimes)

Low brace: hip snap reflex present? (yes / not yet)

One technique win from this session

One technique focus for next session

Instructor or paddling buddy feedback (if any)

Checklist: Core Stroke Competency Checklist

- Forward stroke catch is at or forward of the foot peg on every stroke
- Forward stroke exit is at the hip — not past it
- Torso rotation is visible in video footage (shoulder drives past the paddle, not arms only)
- Full forward sweep rotates the bow at least 20 degrees per stroke
- Draw stroke moves the hull directly sideways without the blade contacting the hull
- Reverse stroke stops forward momentum and allows backing in a straight line
- Low brace hip snap righted the boat in at least three practice capsize drills
- Deliberate edging to 10 degrees held for five seconds without capsizing

Wet Exit, Self-Rescue, and Assisted Rescue

Track your rescue skill progression through structured drill logs and build a rescue readiness plan for paddling in your local conditions.

Exercise: Wet Exit Drill Progression Log

Complete all three stages in a supervised setting before paddling independently on open water. Record each attempt below.

- Stage 1 — No spray skirt, shallow water: record your time from capsize to surface for each of your five attempts. Did your time decrease? What caused the longest attempt?
- Stage 2 — With spray skirt, shallow water: describe where you reached for the grab loop and whether you found it on the first try or needed to search. What position worked best?
- Stage 3 — With spray skirt, deep water: describe your mental state during the first deep-water attempt versus the fifth. What changed?

Worksheet: Self-Rescue and Assisted Rescue Drill Record

Record each rescue practice session. Return to this record before any multi-day trip to confirm your rescue currency is current (recommend practising every 60 days).

Date of drill session

Water temperature (°C or °F)

Rescue type practised (paddle float / cowboy scramble / T-rescue / canoe-over-canoe)

Role (victim / rescuer / both)

Time from capsize to back in boat (minutes:seconds)

Number of failed re-entry attempts before success

Water pumped out before re-entry? (yes / no — note: this is required)

Paddling partner or instructor present? (name)

One thing that went wrong and how you will correct it

Rescue skills ready for solo open-water paddling? (yes / not yet)

Checklist: Rescue Readiness Checklist — Before Any Open-Water Trip

- Completed minimum five wet exits with spray skirt in water matching today's temperature
- Successfully completed paddle float re-entry at least three times in the last 60 days
- Paddle float is accessible from the cockpit without entering — on forward deck within arm's reach
- Bilge pump is accessible and functional
- T-rescue practised with the specific paddling partner joining this trip
- All paddlers in the group know each other's PFD colour and boat colour
- Float plan filed and confirmed received by named contact
- VHF radio or satellite messenger charged and tested
- Cold water protocol confirmed: water below 15°C — wetsuit or drysuit worn

River Reading, Trip Planning, and Transport

Plan an actual day trip from scratch, practise river feature identification, and document your boat transport setup.

Exercise: River Feature Identification Field Exercise

Visit a moving-water location rated Class I or easy Class II. Stand on the bank for 15 minutes and map the features you observe before getting in the boat.

- Sketch or describe the location of at least two eddies in the section ahead. Where is the eddy line? From which direction would you approach to enter each eddy?

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- Identify any standing waves. Do they appear to break (whitecap forming) or are they smooth? What does this tell you about the depth at that point?

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- Describe any features you are uncertain about and explain what additional information you would need before deciding to run or portage the section.

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- After paddling the section, return to your pre-paddle assessment. Was your read accurate? What surprised you?
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Worksheet: Day Trip Planning Sheet

Complete this worksheet for your first independently planned day trip. Bring a printed copy in your dry bag.
Trip date and planned duration (hours on water)

Put-in location (name, GPS coordinates, access road)

Take-out location (name, GPS coordinates)

Total distance (km or miles)

Water type and maximum class expected

USGS / WSC gauge station name and current flow reading (cfs or cms)

Guidebook recommended flow range for this section

24-hour weather forecast summary (wind speed, precipitation probability, high/low temperature)

Water temperature (°C or °F) — source and date of reading

Float plan filed with (name and contact number)

Emergency return time (time after which contact should call SAR)

Nearest hospital or emergency access point to the river

Known portages or hazards on the route

Group experience level (all paddlers, honest assessment)

Checklist: Roof Rack and Transport Checklist

- Boat seated in saddles or J-cradles with hull positioned correctly for hull type
- Two cam straps over hull: one on bow-third crossbar, one on stern-third crossbar
- Cam straps twisted 3–4 times before cinching to prevent harmonic flutter at highway speed
- Cam strap tension: snug but hull not deformed — check by pressing hull at midpoint
- Bow line attached from bow toggle to vehicle front tow hook
- Stern line attached from stern toggle to vehicle rear tow hook
- Shake test passed: lateral and vertical push produces no movement in cradles
- Red flag or high-visibility tape attached to stern if boat overhangs by more than 1 metre
- Strap tension re-checked after first 20 minutes of highway driving
- Boat stored with cockpit slightly downward for drainage when returned home

Your Action Plan

1. Book a pool or flat-water session with an ACA- or BCU-certified instructor within the next two weeks — this is the single highest-leverage investment a new paddler can make
2. Purchase or borrow a PFD, fit it using the five-point check, and wear it for the entirety of every on-water session from day one
3. Complete five supervised wet exits with spray skirt in water warmer than 15°C before paddling independently in open water
4. Practise the paddle float re-entry three times in a pool or calm bay until the sequence is automatic, then time yourself — target under four minutes
5. Identify one local Class I river or calm lake suitable for beginner strokes practice, and locate the nearest upstream flow gauge
6. Film your forward stroke from the side after your second session, review for torso rotation and catch position, and set one specific correction for session three
7. Build and file a float plan template (use the template in this workbook) and practise leaving it with a household member before your first unsupported trip
8. Visit a local paddling outfitter and sit in at least two hull types side by side — note how beam width affects your initial stability perception before purchasing or committing to a rental
9. Complete the Core Stroke Competency Checklist with a paddling partner or instructor within your first four sessions
10. Schedule a T-rescue practice session with your regular paddling companion at least once every 60 days — mark it in your calendar now

