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## B.C.U. One Star kayak award - closed cockpit kayaks.

The One Star award is designed for complete beginners and covers all the basic techniques to safely manoeuvre a kayak on flat water. Kent Canoes covers this award in one day.

The award is divided up into three parts:

- Personal paddling skills
- Rescue skills
- Safety, leadership and group skills theory.

### Part A - Personal skills:



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#### Lifting and carrying:

The key to handling any heavy or bulky objects is to practice good lifting and carrying techniques. Always ensure that any lifting/carrying is done with a straight back, using the leg muscles as required. General-purpose kayaks can initially feel very bulky (being almost the same length as a family car) and we therefore need to ensure that we do get assistance when lifting/carrying the boat to the water.

Good lifting technique is simply about using a few basic principles. There are a couple of words we can use to jog our memory every-time we are about to lift something:

SAFE:

S Stop

A Assess the situation

F Formulate a plan of how to safely lift the equipment

E Execute that plan

Another word which is a useful check before we lift something is:

LITE:

L Load - look at the load

I Individual - Can the individual(s) safely lift the equipment?

T Task - Is this a reasonable task?

E Environment - Is the environment safe? (I.e. go round slippery banks rather than over them if necessary).

The following principles are also very helpful when thinking about lifting:

1. Wherever possible, always share the load.
2. Keep the spine in line
3. Slide and glide rather than lift if possible
4. Make sure the load is properly balanced.

Always work on the basis that we only have one back so protect it!!



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### Getting in the boat.

The key to getting in a boat safely is all about weight transfer. Keep the paddles nearby, and with the boat in the water, crouch down facing the front of the boat level with the back of the seat.

Place the hand nearest the boat on the cockpit rim just behind the seat on the far side of the boat, and pull the boat right into the bank.

Place your other hand on the bank by your side, and then very gently sit on the back of the cockpit. Maintain your balance by keeping your weight on the hand nearest the bank.

Now comes the weight transfer bit!! Lift your leg nearest the boat into the cockpit. The back of the seat and your bank hand should now support most of your weight. Now all you need to do is to straighten your legs and slide gently forwards onto the seat. Once in the boat don't forget to grab the paddles!!

### Spinning the boat on the spot.

Because most modern general-purpose kayaks are based on old slalom designs they tend to be quite maneuverable. This means that they can be a little tricky to keep in a straight line when paddling for the first time.

We would therefore suggest that rather than trying to learn forward paddling as the very first stroke, it is a good idea to just get the feel of how the boat turns by practising spinning the boat on the spot using wide forward and backward strokes which are known as "sweep strokes". This will help to both keep the boat straight when forward paddling and allow direction changes as required.

### Spinning the boat

Twisting from the waist, place the paddle blade in the water by your feet, with the blade fully immersed, and with your arm almost straight. Sweep the blade towards the back of the boat in an arc. The boat will turn away from the paddle. Practice this on both sides.

Note that the first part of the stroke turns the front of the boat away from the paddle and the last part of the stroke pulls the back of the boat towards the paddle. Now try backward "sweep strokes" by placing the blade towards the back of the boat twisting at the waist to aid the positioning of the blade. If you are using curved blades, use the back face of the blade. Sweep the blade forward in a wide arc and then combine a forward sweeps with a reverse sweeps on the other side, causing the boat to spin on the spot.



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### **Forward paddling.**

General-purpose kayaks are designed to turn so beginners need to learn how to keep them in a straight line.

When learning to **forward paddle**, it's very important to look up and use your peripheral vision to pick up when the boat starts to move off course. If you look down, you will not detect when the boat is moving off course until you feel it through "the seat of your pants", by which time it is often too late to correct. So look up, point the front of the boat at an object in the distance, a tree or whatever, and if the boat starts to move off course you can visually see what is happening and instantly correct it.

The best way of correcting a boat that is moving off course without losing momentum is by applying a forward **sweep stroke**. If the boat is turning towards the left, apply a forward sweep stroke on the left to correct the movement and visa versa if it's moving to the right.

A common reason why we tend to paddle off course is because we are naturally handed. In other words right-handed paddlers will instinctively pull harder on the right than the left, causing the boat to turn to the left, and visa versa for left handed paddlers. Being aware of this allows us to compensate by not pulling so hard on the relevant side.

It's also important to sit upright when paddling and to make sure that our hands are placed correctly on the paddle shaft. They should be about shoulder width apart and evenly spaced.

Pushing forward with our top arm allows us to twist our body slightly helping us to use our back muscles as well as our arms to propel the boat forwards.



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### **Stopping.**

To paddle safely it is very important to be able to stop quickly and efficiently. Stopping a boat that is traveling forwards requires backward paddling. No great surprises there, but unfortunately just jamming the blade in on the first reverse stroke, will make the boat unstable. The trick is to quickly perform several reverse strokes with the paddle blade only partially submerged. This reduces the risk of instability and allows for several strokes to be performed quickly on each side of the boat. Practice this until you can comfortably reverse the direction of the boat within four strokes. N.B. Like the reverse sweep, there is no need to swivel the paddle, it is both simpler and quicker just to use the back of the blade.



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#### **Reverse Paddling:**

Technically it is very similar to the reverse sweep that we have already covered but instead of the paddle being pushed away from the boat in an arc, push the paddle along the side to the kayak. The key things to remember are to try and twist the body slightly (trunk rotation) from the waist which will help place the blade as far back as is comfortable.

Then run the blade along the side of the boat and clip the paddle out at around the knees. You should now have untwisted your trunk and be ready to apply trunk rotation on the opposite side before placing the paddle in on the other side and completing the cycle.

Remember to use the back of the paddle blade.

So how do you see where you are going? Simply look over one or both shoulders to see what is behind.

#### **Part B - Rescue skills:**

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This is the bit most people worry about but in fact there is no need to. To start with it is initially possible to practice getting out of the boat without getting wet!!

It is a good idea at the beginning of the day to sit in the boat, put the front of the spray deck on (if you are using one), making sure that the release strap is not tucked inside the boat. Then practice reaching forward, releasing the deck, putting your thumbs inside the cockpit level with your hips and your fingers on the outside, push your body up and back at the same time, to exit the boat. It may help in some boats to straighten your legs whilst doing this. This can be repeated several times until you are completely happy with exiting the boat.

Once you have practiced this, should you capsize accidentally, not only will you know what to do, but the whole operation is made much easier by the fact that you are almost weightless once in the water.

Once in the water, quickly gather up the paddle, swim to one end of the boat and tow it to shore. It is essential that you do not try to right the boat, since this will break the air lock and fill it with water. On reaching the bank get help emptying the boat, which will be quite heavy because of the extra water in it.



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#### **Emptying the kayak:**

Once you have got the kayak to the bank, you will need to empty it. The general lifting principles outlined above should be applied here, and always whenever possible, seek help emptying a kayak.

Kayaks should all be fitted with rear air bags, which radically reduces the amount of water that gets in them. This means that all we need to do is gently lift the front end of the boat and allow the water to drain out. Take your time and take it gently, and you will find that the boat empties easily.

#### **Part C - Safety, Leadership & Group Skill - theory:**

This part of the BCU One Star course covers the following topics, which our instructors will discuss with you:

Type of equipment we use

Safety

Hypothermia and first aid

Access to rivers in this country

The environment

The above is covered in a very basic format to give a good basic knowledge of the sport at beginner level.