

Paddler's Safety Checklist

For Flatwater

- Remember to watch for water and weather changes – beware of fog
- Keep an eye out for other boat traffic
- Pay attention to all safety warnings
- Be sure you are visible
- Have emergency lights
- Keep your shoes on
- Remain prepared for an unanticipated swim

For Large Lakes

- Stay close to shore
- As you travel away from shelter, make sure you have the necessary skills to travel back
- Watch conditions for winds and fog
- Understand wave height, wind speed (Beaufort Scale), fetch and how it will impact your travel
- Stay aware of all boat traffic and traffic patterns
- Learn re-entry techniques BEFORE you need them.
- Know how to re-enter your boat and how to assist others back into their craft.

For Whitewater and Rivers

- Stay on the inside of bends
- Use adequate flotation in your craft
- Walk around low-head dams
- Watch for hydraulics. Looking downstream, if a hole is “smiling”, it is probably friendly. If it’s “frowning”, it is probably unfriendly.
- Beware of strainers! Strainers are fallen trees, bridge pilings, undercut rocks or anything else that allows the current to flow through it while holding you. Strainers are deadly.
- **If in doubt, get out and scout!**
- Avoid loose line entanglement
- Keep your group together

Key Tips

The above general practices will help you set off on the right course when packing and securing your gear in a canoe, but here are some key tips.

- Keep maps, routes, camping permits, and other paperwork handy and stored in a waterproof map case. Secure it to your seat, along with a compass, with some rope.
- If paddling solo, always keep a spare paddle within reach. Velcro straps or heavy duty elastic bands are two options that will secure the item, but will also let it break free with a quick pull.
- Always have water, sunscreen, bug repellent, a knife, and a flashlight within arm's reach.
- Bring a pair of padded, fingerless gloves to avoid blisters and keep your hands warm when paddling in the rain.
- Pack raingear on top - and outside - of plastic bags so you can easily access it when the skies open up.
- Knee pads will help keep your joints from getting stiff or sore from kneeling when paddling through rough water.
- If you plan on fishing, bring a clamp-on rod holder. If you're concerned about scratching your canoe, place a small piece of marine carpet over top of the gunwales first.
- Communicate with your paddling partner at all times.
- Invest in a properly fitting and comfortable PFD and wear it at all times.
- Once you have all your gear, there are some important tips for your time on the water:
- Load and unload the boat while it's in the water. This will be easier on you and the canoe. Make sure the load is balanced.

- Safely secure all of your equipment to the canoe. The exact way in which you do this may depend on the type of water you'll be paddling, and with what level of ease you want to be able to free your items from the canoe if you capsize. Be deliberate in your placement of items. Keep frequently used items handy and easily accessed.
- As a rule, the person in the back should be the more experienced, skilled canoeist. In the group of canoes, the most experienced boaters should be in the first and last canoes with the first aid equipment. Canoeing alone is not advised, and it is everyone else's responsibility to remain between the first and last boats.
- Stay low and steady in the canoe. Avoid making sudden movements and do not stand up. In rough waters, you can get down onto your knees for even greater stability.
- Canoe close to shore. Not only is this safer, it's where you'll find the most interesting scenery.
- Make sure to leave some space around your feet. If you capsize, you don't want your feet to become trapped, holding you underwater.
- If you capsize in a current, don't try to stand or put your feet down. If your foot gets caught in something, or between two rocks, the current can hold you down and drown you.
- If you capsize, stay with the canoe where it is safe to do so. In swiftly moving waters, you want to remain upstream of the boat. A canoe full of water can weigh as much as a car — you don't want to find yourself between a rock and that much weight.
- Of course, during the on-land portion of your trip you'll want to be low-impact campers. Pack out all of your garbage, do all of your washing (even with biodegradable soap) at least 200 feet away from the lake or river, and consider using a white gas stove or environmental stove instead of a traditional fire for cooking.

Paddling any waterway is a great way to experience the natural environment and adopt a slower pace to life, one more in tune with nature's rhythms. After successfully loading up your canoe, take your time and enjoy the journey!