

ITC Canoe Safety Clinic: Canoeing Basics

Parts of the canoe:

- Bow - front and Stern - rear
- Bow and stern seats
- Thwarts - cross support (do not sit on them!)
- Gunwales [gunnels] - side edges
- Keel - narrow strip along the bottom (desirable for lake paddling, is not on all boats)

Parts of the paddle:

- Grip/handle
- Shaft
- Blade
- Tip

Boarding and Debarking the Canoe:

The boat should always be all the way in or out of the water. It should not be left to let waves bang it against the shore. Balance and the location of your center of gravity are the most important issues to keeping the boat upright. Stay low, stay in the middle (side to side) when stepping into and out of the canoe. Hold both gunwales. Enter the boat only when it is in the water.

Basic Paddling Strokes:

Steer from the rear. The stern is the seat of command. The person in the stern needs to be able to tell the person when and how to paddle, and to be able to tell the swimmers if they get too far apart or too far ahead.

- Power stroke - used by both the bow and stern to propel the canoe forward. The blade is put in the water perpendicular to the canoe and the paddler pulls straight back. The blade is brought forward lying flat, close to the water's surface (called feathering).
- J-Stroke - used by the stern to turn towards the side on which you are paddling. The paddle is put in the water perpendicular to the canoe and the paddler pulls straight back and near the end of the stroke makes the curved part of the letter J, pushing the blade out and away from the boat.
- Sweep Stroke - used by the stern to turn the bow away from the side on which you are paddling. The paddle is put into the water at an angle with the BACK of the blade facing away from the side of the canoe just under the surface of the water. The paddler strokes out and away and the back towards the canoe in a half circle shape.
- Draw Stroke - used by both paddlers simultaneously to move the canoe sideways closer to a dock, shore, another canoe, or a swimmer. The blade is put in the water a couple feet from the boat, parallel to the side with the back of the blade facing the paddler. Both paddlers draw the paddle toward the boat.

Other Paddling Considerations:

- Paddling position - sitting can be more comfortable, but kneeling can be safer in windy conditions
- Paddling in windy conditions or high waves- keep the boat perpendicular to big waves, kneel in the wind

- Switching positions - stay low and to the center (laterally) of the boat as you leap frog, don't forget to communicate
- Paddling alone - turn the boat around and paddle from the bow seat or kneel in the middle (bow to stern) of the boat
- Getting into the boat from the water - people in the boat shift their weight to counter balance the person entering the boat, person in the water grabs the thwarts as far toward the opposite gunwales as possible

Leading Swimmers:

- Stay beside them about a boat length away
- Swimmer should be able to see the boat when he/she breathes
- Look behind you regularly (every minute or 2) to be sure that you are following a relatively straight line between where you came from and where you are going, adjust as necessary
- **Do not get ahead of the slowest swimmer in your group**
- Do **not** let the lead swimmer get so far ahead of the boat that they cannot hear you
- Use whistle and horns if a swimmer cannot hear you
- Use whistle and horns if another boat does not see you and is headed toward you

Emergency Procedures (use air horns to seek attention of other boats):

- Tired or ill swimmer - Have the swimmer hang onto the bow of the boat.
- Capsized Canoe - Don't leave a capsized canoe. It floats and will make you more visible.
- Capsized Canoe - Perform a canoe over canoe rescue. The upright canoe maneuvers itself until it is perpendicular to the swamped canoe. Both paddlers then move to the middle (bow to stern) of the boat, kneeling on the bottom and facing each other. While the swimmers of the swamped canoe turn their boat upside down and push down on the far end of the canoe, the paddlers lift up on the end close to them and slowly pull the canoe over their upright boat, letting the water out as the swamped boat leaves the water. When the rescued canoe is balanced across the middle of the upright canoes, the paddlers flip the boat upright and slide it back into the water. Help the swimmers get back into their canoe by locking gunwales.
- Oncoming boats - use air horns to seek attention of other boats

Safety issues:

- Helping in an emergency - boats need to attend to their own swimmers before going to rescue others
- Equipment - every boat should have at least 5 life jackets, a whistle, and an air horn
- Swimmers need to wear bright caps
- **Swimmer may not swim ahead of their escort canoe**
- Communication is KEY!