



Board Paddling

Coaching Manual 5th Edition



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Board Paddling - Technique

A correct paddling technique is essential to maximise speed and reduce fatigue, however a paddler's technique will vary depending on their body size, shape, gender, skill level, strength and maturity.

Like all new skills, board paddling technique is best learnt firstly in the gym using pulleys or a paddle machine, secondly in the flat water and finally in the surf and chop. Observing the technique of other paddlers is also helpful. Board paddlers may paddle on their knees or lay on their stomachs or a combination of both. These techniques will need to be looked at separately.



Kneeling Position

Key Points:

- Knees positioned approximately in the middle of the board with the outer knee against the inside rails
- Nose of the board should just clear the water for good trim
- At the start of the stroke the paddler's back is parallel to the board (or lower if it is more comfortable) and the backside is in the highest position, which is reasonably comfortable and stable
- Always look forward with the head up, to keep the back straight or slightly arched.
- When sprinting, the weight of the head and shoulders is applied to the hands. In endurance paddling the strength of the legs is used with a body rocking motion

Kneeling:

1. Catch

- The hands are bent at the wrist so that they enter at a point that is about 4 or 5cm less than the maximum extension and at a steep angle. The trunk is fully extended with the arms straight or slightly bent.
- Fingers are slightly spread
- The hands move both downward and backward. The backward motion occurs naturally so concentrate on the downward motion so that the hand enters with a minimal splash



2. Pull



- Arms slightly bent
- The weight of the trunk and head is applied to the hands by the downward movement, decreasing the angle of the hip joint. The back should be slightly arched.
- The arms should travel through the water as deeply as possible, eventually reaching maximum depth, which normally occurs when the chin almost touches the board, the biceps touch the rails and the elbows are in the water. The angle between the trunk and arms should not change until maximum depth is reached.
- The hips may move slightly forward (increasing the angle of the knee joint) to add momentum to the stroke but excess movement will rock the board too much.

3. Push



This is less powerful than the pull phase of the stroke

Maximum arm depth needs to be maintained

The hands exit the water (the stroke finishes) approximately half way between the knees and ankles.

In sprinting the push is usually reduced with the hands coming out at the knees

4. Recovery



Forearms and hands should be relaxed and then lifted out of the water (from the elbows) with little or no water being thrown up or back. The arms must bend at the elbows

The hands remain relaxed and return to the catch position by trailing near the rails of the board (inside the elbows) almost touching the knees on the way through.

As the arms return the head and back are raised increasing the angle of the hip joint and the knee joint angle is restored thus preparing for the next 'catch' phase of the stroke.

Laying Position

Key Points:

- Nose of the board should just clear the water for good trim
- There is less power per stroke than with kneeling but the speed and momentum are more constant
- Chin kept close to board at all times while looking over the nose of the board
- Legs should kick from the knee. The left leg should kick when the right arm pulls and vice versa in order to balance each other.

1. Catch

- Extend the arms with the hand still slightly relaxed and fingers spread slightly
- Hands should enter the water facing slightly inward and at a steep angle to the water.

2. Pull

- The pull can use a modified swim stroke that utilises a downsweep, insweep and acceleration phase
- Hands should not cross too far under the edge of the board and never to the midline
- When the right arm is ready to start the pull, the left lower leg makes an angle of about 45° with the board and the right leg is almost horizontal.
- As the right arm begins to pull, the left leg commences to kick moving downwards and outwards. At the same time the left arm and right leg begin recovery, the leg does this in an upward vertical motion



3. Push

- Similar to the acceleration phase of the swim stroke.
- The hand is pushed back towards the tail of the board and is kept slightly cupped and held firm.
- The hand should finish its drive in a position where the thumb is next to the rail of the board.
- The left leg continues its downward motion but moves back in towards the board and finishes up almost touching the board.
- The left arm and right leg continues to recover with the right leg finishing at an angle of about 45° to the board.
- At all times keep the shoulder and neck muscles relaxed.



4. Recovery

- The hand should exit the water as it approaches the level of the hip.
- The hand is lifted out of the water by lifting the elbow.
- The fingers should be fully relaxed and should trail just above the water (ie. shortest path back to the catch position).
- Elbows kept high so hands are able to be kept as close to the board as possible.
- Elbow is extended setting up for the next catch phase.

The paddler must exhibit sound balance and a fluent movement of each stroke throughout all phases.

The paddler must also keep the board running flat and in trim at all times.

Technique Checklist	Yes	No
Paddler is stable and balanced on the board		
Entry occurs at point that will produce maximum stroke length		
Maximum stroke depth is achieved early in the stroke		
Backside movement is limited to reduce bouncing		
Hands, forearm and shoulders are as relaxed as possible through recovery part of stroke		
The back is not being raised higher than parallel during the recovery		

Drills

- Paddling technique drills should be done firstly in the gym using pulleys, bands or a paddle machine, secondly in the flat water and finally in the surf and chop
- Video analysis is the best tool for checking technique
- Slow stroking can be used to help correct any faults in a paddlers technique
- 'Catch up' stroking with prolonged recovery phase time can also be used to analyse the run and trim of the board and the balance of the board paddler
- Markings on the front of the board can be used to ensure full reach at the catch position and also prevent overreaching.
- Trailing fingers along the rail of the board is used to teach the paddler to relax and to release water cleanly at end of stroke and prevent water flicking up or splashing
- Surf drills can be done in small waves at first and before progressing to more testing conditions
- Balance training is very useful with paddler attempting to stay on their knees while paddling 100m or 200m along the beach inside the break
- Bouncing of the board can be restricted by balancing an empty soft drink bottle on the front of your board while paddling in flat water (no wind)
- Stroke length can be trained by paddling against a current
- Speed can be trained and stroke rate improved by paddling with a current
- Strength can be improved by resistance training e.g. putting an "occy strap" around the board and through the handles
- Board starts should be done in every session to get the paddler used to starting in all sorts of conditions
- Paddlers also doing ironman / ironwomen should practice picking up their boards while running and while fatigued
- Paddlers should practice exploding from the water's edge and simulating a race finish on every approach to the beach in every session
- Stroke rate (per minute) should be taken regularly
- Do stroke counts between two points approximately 100m apart at varying board speeds to check stroke efficiency

Training

- Like all training programs, a yearly coaching strategy for a board paddler should follow a step-by-step periodised approach that allows the athlete to build an adequate
- level of fitness and endurance followed by speed, while always ensuring that correct technique is of paramount importance.
- Board paddling depends largely on the athlete's ability to have a feel for the water, and to use this feel to be able to generate power and speed in the stroke. For this reason, swimming is an excellent alternative to board paddling, especially in the pre-season winter months when it may be too cold for paddlers to complete a proper session.

This does not mean the athlete should substitute all board paddling sessions, but swimming is probably far more beneficial for a board competitor than running or other activities.

There is an excellent crossover in aerobic fitness from swimming to board paddling so most paddlers use swimming to achieve much of their aerobic fitness, leaving the board sessions to concentrate more on skills and anaerobic fitness eg anaerobic threshold, VO2 max, lactic tolerance, the phosphate system etc.

A standard periodised approach using a 40-week program can be developed by structuring the board paddler's training around the outlines given below with time frames varying depending on the competitive level of the paddler and their motivation.

1. Base Preparation: (26 Weeks)

- Transition (10 weeks)
- General Preparation (8 weeks)
- Specific Preparation (8 weeks)

2. Competition Phase (14 Weeks)

- Early / Pre-Competition phase (6 weeks)
- Main Competition Phase (8 weeks)

Base Preparation

Transition

- Training should be non-specific to help prevent both mental and physical burnout
- Large variations in exercises should be employed (ie. boxing, cycling, aerobics, surfing etc) to prevent burnout with the optimal cross training activity being swimming
- Any specialised programs to overcome diagnosed weaknesses should be first implemented in this phase
- Construction of future training plans can be developed in this phase after careful consideration and evaluation of results from the previous year

General Preparation

- The volume must be increased gradually, intensity should vary from low to medium
- The emphasis should be placed on the development of paddling technique as well as on the development of physical capacities (endurance, strength, power, speed, mobility, etc) needed during a board race.
- A main component of training in this phase should be the use of paddling drills to establish good training habits and correct any faults in technique or skills (ie. starts, finishes, waves)

Specific Preparation

- Volume and intensity in this phase is still progressively increased but should vary according to the individual's needs
- The emphasis is gradually changed from the development of physical capacities to more sport specific fitness
- Paddling technique is still a primary objective in this phase and should never be overlooked
- Sport specific skill development (e.g. kneeling through waves) and the use of drills and video in training remain as primary activities, preparing the board paddler for competition

Competition Phase

Pre-Competition Phase

- Training volume should be reduced whilst the intensity remains high
- Physical conditioning reaches the maintenance phase
- Skill development continues and can be evaluated in a competitive arena (ie. at carnivals)
- Expansion of competitive experiences takes place through progressively increased levels of competition

Main Competition Phase

- Should include a short cycle of specific conditioning, while also including recovery sessions to emphasise the need for competition preparedness
- Sprint work and anaerobic fitness are emphasised during this phase
- 1st half of this phase should use medium to high intensity and volume
- 2nd half of this phase should use high intensity and low volumes
- Refinement of skill occurs during specific conditioning, but with no major changes to technique

SAMPLE YEARLY TRAINING PLAN

This is only intended to give coaches some ideas. It shows plans for an average and an elite paddler but in practice it will vary greatly for different individuals depending on:

- How long they have been paddling
- Their goals, dedication, motivation & ability
- Availability of time & resources
- Climate, conditions etc.

The table below indicates the number of weeks for each phase for an average and elite athlete and the number of training sessions done per week in weights, swimming, running and board.

	TRANSITION		COMPETITION		
	PREPARATION	GENERAL	SPECIFIC	EARLY	MAIN
AVERAGE	10	8	8	6	8
ELITE	12	12	12	8	8
WEIGHTS	3	3	2	1	1
SWIMMING	2	4	4	3	2
RUNNING	2 (long)	2 (long)	1 or 2 (sprints)	1 or 2 (sprints)	1 or 2 (sprints)
BOARD	AS NEEDED	2	3	5 *	5 *

**carnivals included*

Board Paddling Progression from Beginner to Advanced

BEGINNER

- 3 – 4 sessions / wk of 45min – 1hr
- Sessions would involve flat water training concentrating on technique, rhythm, timing and increasing time spent paddling on knees
- At least 1 session a week would need to be spent in surf practising techniques involved with wave negotiation and wave catching
- When learning paddling technique the paddler should work at a low intensity to allow the timing of the movements to be processed. Once the paddler has a good technique at low intensity it can be increased to a medium intensity. The surf training is more likely to be purely skills training with a lot of time spent in the wave zone getting out and in through the surf. A lot of beginner paddlers may be on their stomachs in surf training
- The distance covered in the sessions should be around 3 – 4km

INTERMEDIATE

- 3 – 5 sessions / wk of 1 – 1.5hr. The number of sessions may vary if the paddler also includes swim, ski and iron sessions in the program.
- Sessions would include at least one flat water session a week to reinforce technique and improve paddling stamina. Some advanced paddling techniques can be taught on flat water before introducing them in the surf. As the technique of an intermediate paddler will be improving it is good to practise the same skills in surf and choppy water at least 2 – 3 times per week.
- It is in this stage that the paddler will most likely start to race so it is vital to practise the skills involved in racing (starts, paddling in packs, race tactics, and finishes).
- The paddler will need to practise increasing the intensity of training in the intermediate phase of board paddling. Being able to hold form at a high intensity will be important by the time this paddler is ready to race. For this reason a range of speeds will be practised at training.
- The distance covered in the sessions should be around 4 – 6km

ADVANCED

- 3 – 7 sessions / wk of 1 – 2hr. The number of sessions may vary if the paddler also includes swim, ski and iron sessions in the program.
- Sessions would include at least one flat water session per week and more if the athlete was a specialist board paddler. This allows for a continuation of technique as well as training sets to be carried out in flat water to monitor progress.
- The majority of training will be done in surf simulating race conditions. This will involve starting of the beach, negotiating the surf, chasing runners and finishes at speed.
- While all levels of intensity will be practised during the pre season the advanced paddler will do most of the training at a high intensity during the main competition phase. This will involve timed efforts and stroke counting to ensure race pace is being held.
- The distance covered in the sessions should be around 5 – 9km.

Competition

Below are some techniques to achieve the above skills. They are not the only way and they may need to be varied to suit individuals e.g. they are written for a right handed person so a left handed person may need to make some reversals.

1. Starting

There are two techniques when it comes to board starts; the carrying method and the dragging method, with the underlying principle the same. A good board start is one that is able to successfully transfer the speed developed from running into board speed. In training it is beneficial to start slowly and then to increase the speed of the start once the paddler has perfected the start technique at the slower speeds. It is important to always practice the preferred starting technique of the paddler in every training session thereby exposing them to, and giving the paddler experience in all sorts of conditions. It is also very important to do some starts in the pre-event warm up so the paddler knows what conditions to expect

Key Points: (for a right handed person)

- Prior to the start, the paddler should check the water depth and profile of the sand bank directly in front of their start position
- Paddler should lean forward, bending at the knees and hips. The left foot is placed on the start line, with the right foot and left arm back ready for the start



For the **carrying start**, the centre left rail of the board rests on top of the right hipbone with the nose pointing slightly in to the wind and the right hand holding the right rail (thumb on the deck, fingers on the rail or in the holding groove).

The left hand is left free for swinging while the paddler runs

1. As the paddler reaches water deep enough to jump on (usually just below knee deep) and the left foot is forward, the left hand grabs the left rail
2. The paddler achieves the jump on by leaning forward, lowering the board and pushing forward and upwards (off the bottom) with feet which then leave water, and land on the kneeling pads (the feet should leave the water before or as the board hits the water)
3. The paddler must look at the kneeling position on the board when jumping on

For the **dragging start**, the paddler should have hold of the front left handle with the tail of the board on the ground and the board by their side. The paddler should run to knee deep water then jump on the board.



To jump on the board, the paddler should:

1. Throw the board forward with their right arm (left arm if left handed)
2. Bend over grab both rails near the front of the pads
3. Using their feet, push off the sand in a forward direction
4. Look at the board
5. Jump on in the kneeling or lying position



An alternative method of getting on the board for laying down paddlers is to pull the board forward with their right arm and dive onto it

- The kneeling paddler should jump onto the board allow it to skim, then reach forward and set themselves in the catch position in one fluent, smooth motion
- The laying paddler should jump onto the board allow it to skim and commence paddling

Some common faults include

1. Not looking at board when jumping on, so may miss the board and fall off
2. Jumping too high so landing too hard on board damaging knee, board or both
3. Pushing board forward with arms then pulling it back to get on
4. Feet dragging in the water after the board hits the water, slowing you down
5. Slowing down before jumping on the board
6. Not jumping on at the correct depth

2. Bunny Hopping

Bunny hopping the board is used when there is a long sand bank that is too deep to run on at top speed. It can be used successfully by both the kneeling and the laying paddler.

Key Points:

- The hands are positioned on the sides of the board with the thumbs on the deck and fingers on the rails
- Hands should be alongside the knee pads, with the closest hand being slightly forward
- The paddlers legs are staggered with the outside leg forward and are moved in a synchronized manner driving off the bottom in a modified bounding motion
- After driving with the legs, all the weight should be placed on the arms and shoulders allowing both the legs to fully clear the water so that the board can plane across the surface and then repeat the action



3. Negotiating the surf

When paddling out through the surf, the methods for negotiating the wave will vary immensely between paddlers, between races and even between starting alleys on the beach. A wave coming in will rarely be a uniform line of water that has equal size and force. It is for that reason that it is essential to do adequate training sessions in the surf to allow the board paddler to know what their abilities will allow them to do.

Whilst some may be able to successfully 'kneel' over a wave, a paddler just beside them may have to use a different technique because the wave may be uneven, or they may be slightly off balance or in the wrong position on the board. There are essentially three main methods for negotiating a broken wave going out through the surf. They are to either 'kneel' or 'sit' over the white wash or to 'roll' under it.

Key Points:



To kneel over a broken wave

1. Point board at right angles to the oncoming wave
2. Don't stop paddling, so that the foam is hit with speed
3. Adjust your timing so that you finish a stroke just before hitting foam, (it may be helpful to think about finishing this stroke approximately a metre out from the foam) then sit back on your heels to raise the board's nose (lifting your knees will also help) (Picture A)
4. Take a stroke over the foam, while keeping low to the board. Keep the hands in the water until balanced then start paddling (Picture B and C)

Some common faults include stopping paddling well before the wave hits and not taking a stroke over the foam.



To sit over a broken wave

1. Just before a foam hits, go to sitting position just behind the back handles with the legs over the side and hold the handle(s)
2. Lean back and pull on the handle(s) to raise the nose of the board
3. Just before the foam hits, lean forward holding the board between your thighs with your left arm outstretched and grab the left handle pushing the front of the board down with your chest and left hand
4. Start a stroke with the right arm and hold on to the water so as not to get dragged backwards.
5. When balanced start paddling

Alternately, leave both hands on the back handles and use only your chest to push the front of the board down



To roll a broken wave



1. Move forward, grab handles while lying along the board, then roll over
2. While under water, keep the body parallel to the board and pull board forward and down as the foam hits (so that the board is moving and its nose is down) The front handles of the board must end up level with or forward of your head
3. After the wave has passed, slide one hand down the board along the rail then push the board over with this hand while throwing leg and body onto the board then quickly paddle off.

4. Getting out to the buoys

The two main elements a paddler has to contend with once out through the surf are the chop and the other competitors in the race. Paddling in chop uses a technique similar to that of kneeling over the waves but to a lesser extent. Negotiating other paddlers can actually allow those paddlers with more experience to paddle with less effort while still keeping with the main pack. This is called wash riding and it can reduce a paddler's effort by up to 20%, meaning that they can conserve energy. Wash riding is achieved by a competitor positioning their board alongside or behind another board using the small wave that is created to help them get along the water.

A competitor should always be alert and take the quickest way to the buoys avoiding broken waves and using rip wash riding etc.

Key Points:

- In chop, a paddler uses a similar technique to kneeling through the waves to paddle the board over the chop and prevent it from burying in and water coming over the front.
- The board should be kept in trim at all times. The paddler should use their legs and body weight to lift the board over the chop and keep the board running.
- To wash the ride behind a paddler, you must get the nose of your board as close to the back of the board in front as possible (while avoiding contact) and sit behind them in order to take full advantage of the wash of the lead board.
- To wash ride on the side, a paddler can position the nose of their board approximately level with lead paddlers front handles to take advantage of the bow wave of the lead board.
- The paddler should concentrate on the wash of the lead board while trying not to obstruct other paddlers.
- The paddler should avoid being sucked towards and hence obstructing the lead paddler by leaning on the side of the board closest to the lead paddler to steer the board away.

5. The turning buoys

At the turning buoys, the paddler can negotiate the turn on their knees or lying. If there is a large group of competitors or there is a large chop or tricky conditions, paddlers will often lay down around the turning buoys to make sure they do not fall off.



Key Points:

- The paddler should try to have the board horizontal (flat or tilted so that the inside rail is higher) to avoid pushing too much water.
- The turning strokes are away from the board in an arc with the right arm back and left arm forward (for both lying and kneeling)
- Two turning strokes are usually enough.
- If lying through the turn, drop inside foot into the water
- If kneeling then a low body position is necessary for stability.
- Most paddlers find it an advantage to move back on the board as they approach the turn

6. Coming In

In a board race, the most distance can be gained or lost on the way back to the wave area. A paddler who catches a wind chop may be able to speed away while the other paddler(s) are left in dead water and paddling at normal speed. Like other skills on the board, chasing chops or runners requires a great deal of practice and perseverance.

A competitor plans the course to be taken before the race and will start considering: the position and conditions of the finish line, the position of rips, reefs and sand banks, the prevailing wind, waves and chops.

Key Points:

- Paddlers can have a quick look for chops during the recovery part of the stroke or wait until they feel the back of the board lift.
- The board should be square to the line of the wind chop (i.e. perpendicular) and be paddled at top speed to catch it
- Once on the chop and the board speed has increased try to straighten and angle back towards the finish area
- The paddler may have to adjust their position on the board to keep their weight forward in order to keep it running on the chop
- Good paddlers plan their course prior to the race and are aware of useful landmarks

7. Catching a wave

There will not always be times in a race situation where a paddler will be able to get onto a wave from right out the back and negotiate it without any trouble. An instance such as missing the first wave and having to do a late take-off on the next wave are a common occurrence. This is why a paddler should never sit out the back and wait for waves in training. This will enable them to become familiar with waves hitting them from behind or having to take-off on a wave that is steep and late. All of these skills can be considered drills that should be regularly practiced at training in order to become an entrenched skill that the paddler can call on if needed.

Key Points:

- The paddler should ensure they are in a good position to catch the wave and once properly on the wave, grab hold of the back handles then slide body back so as to lie with the stomach on the back of the board.
- The paddler's legs are kept apart for balance and steering while the arms are in front slightly bent with hands holding the back handles, ready to lift nose of board if necessary.
- The paddler slides forward if wave starts to die out
- If kneeling on a wave, keep hands in the water, palms forward, for balance.
- If the board is not perpendicular to the wave, then keep the outer (or shore side) rail higher.



8. The Finish

All the good work a paddler has done throughout a race can be in vain if they do not finish correctly. Often, there will be multiple paddlers on the one wave and the final positions will be determined solely by the paddler's ability to jump off the board cleanly and run to the line. It is for this reason that the paddler should simulate a race finish every time they return to the beach during every training session.



Key Points (to get off the left hand side of the board):

- The paddler who is normally in the kneeling position should start to sprint to the line before they attempt to jump off in order to remain slightly ahead of the wave and prevent the board from being washed around
- The paddler should not attempt to jump off the board until they can see the actual water depth or have some other indication of water depth (i.e. a handler standing there)
- To jump off the board the paddler should kneel as far forward as is practical, place the hands on rails so that the right hand is behind knees and the left hand in front.
- To leave the board the paddler should push off the right hand (getting off on the left side of board), jumping forward off the board with the left leg landing in front of the right in a running position. The eyes should now focus on the front left handle and while using the left hand to lift the left side of the board up, slide right hand across board and grab the left handle.
- The paddler should run past the finish line so they are not hit by those running up and finishing behind them

Competition Checklist	Yes	No
Paddler checks the course conditions such as the water depth and sand bank in front of start and finishing position		
Jumps on board while looking at the pads in one smooth action		
Takes a stroke over and into the foam when kneeling over waves		
Moves forward before the foam hits when sitting over a wave		
Can position themselves next to or behind paddlers to wash ride if needed		
Can negotiate the turn without losing position in group		
Can chase wind chops adequately		
Places board square (perpendicular) to the chop when catching wind chops		
Can perform a late take-off if needed		
Sprints to line before jumps off at finish		
Is aware of the rules of racing as per the SLSA handbook		

Equipment

- Racing boards must comply with the specific weight, length and safety specifications set down by Surf Life Saving Australia
- Do not leave board in the sun for extended periods and keep the waxed deck out of the sun
- Do not drop or throw the board at any stage or for any reason
- Do not drag the board except for in a race situation or if absolutely necessary
- Wash board down with fresh water after each use
- Always transport the board in its cover
- Repair any dings immediately, before further use
- Do not store board in cover and in direct sunlight for extended periods
- Do not wrap in bubble wrap and leave in direct sunlight for extended periods
- Never use polyester surfboard resin on polystyrene (koolite) racing boards
- Do not sit on boards which are on the beach

Equipment Checklist	Yes	No
Board complies to SLSA's weight, length and safety specifications		
Board is washed and stored properly in cover or on padded rack after each use		
Not stored in cover or in bubble wrap and in direct sunlight		
The board does not have any sharp or rough edges from previous repairs		