

CW BEGINNER CLASS NOTES

INTRODUCTION

These notes were created to help me (Pat Brown) identify the topics that will be covered in each session of the CW Beginner Class along with details for each topic. They may also be useful to students as a review of the content they learned in class or for other instructors who are teaching the class.

However, they are not intended as a step-by-step guide to learning to kayak as a substitute for professional instruction, nor are they meant to be followed dogmatically. They are simply my current approach based on ACA standards that has been honed over the past 4 years of teaching this class. I expect that I will learn much more about teaching kayaking this year from my students and fellow instructors, and that the document will be updated to reflect my new knowledge. Simply put, take it for what it is: *my notes*.

Since these notes are partially geared for other instructors to read, *Instructor Notes* are included that explain the reasons why some topics are being taught in a specific order or if they are mandatory according to CW teaching standards.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Day 1 | 3 |
| Introductions..... | 3 |
| 5 Essentials of Kayaking..... | 3 |
| PFD | 3 |
| Helmet..... | 4 |
| Paddle..... | 4 |
| Spray skirt | 4 |
| Boat | 5 |
| Gear outfitting..... | 5 |
| Getting into the boat..... | 5 |
| Wet exits..... | 6 |
| Sharks and minnows | 7 |
| Body position fundamentals..... | 7 |
| Forward sweep stroke..... | 7 |
| Forward stroke..... | 8 |
| Review & questions..... | 8 |

CW Beginner Class Notes

Wet exits to get out of boats 8

Day 2 9

 Review names 9

 Hip snap land demo and practice 9

 Warm-ups in the pool..... 9

 Hip snap practice in the pool 9

 Review of previous day's lessons 9

 Reverse sweeps & pinwheels 9

 Reverse stroke..... 10

 Stern draw strokes 10

 Bow Rescues 10

 Hand of God 11

 Wet exits to get out of boats 11

Day 3 12

 Review names 12

 Clothing for kayaking demo 12

 Warm-ups in the pool..... 12

 Hip snap practice in the pool 12

 Bracing 12

 Side draws..... 13

 Rolling 13

 Boat tilt 14

 Turning a kayak 14

 FWMWW overview and closing questions..... 14

 Wet exits to get out of boats 14

CW Beginner Class Notes

DAY 1

Location: Pool

Duration: 2 hours

INTRODUCTIONS

- Welcome to CW instruction and beginner class
- Overview of the course including its approach and key dates (FMMWW, TC, etc.)
 - The CW class takes its time training you before you ever go on a river, so by the time you do, you will be well prepared in your skills, knowledge, and confidence
- Introduce names, where from, reason for wanting to kayak, and something fun
- Allergies, medical issues, special needs, etc.
 - Can always let instructor know in private
- Responsibilities
 - Kayaking doesn't have life guards (except at the pool)
 - You are ultimately responsible for yourself, so know your limits and when to say when
 - That being said, we all look out for each other all the time

5 ESSENTIALS OF KAYAKING

- All five must be used *every time* when whitewater kayaking
- Remember to count your 5 Essentials when packing your car to go kayaking
 - Write your name, phone number/email on your gear

PFD

- *Instructor Note: Go over PFDs and helmets first to emphasize safety and since they won't be used in the pool. Be sure to explain why they aren't used in the pool.*
- Personal Flotation Device, not "PDF" or "life jacket"
- Type-3 or Type-5 Coast Guard approved as indicated by label inside. Water skiing, recreational PFDs are not appropriate for whitewater kayaking
- Parts
 - Zippered or pull over
 - Foam flotation; degrades over time, exposure to UV so they need to be replaced every 5-7 years
 - Shoulder straps, lateral straps keep the FPD secure on you
 - Bottom buckle is most important since it keeps the FPD from riding up over your head
- Fitting
 - Should match torso size (S, M, L, XL)
 - Tighten all straps, buckle all buckles

CW Beginner Class Notes

- Should be able to have a friend lift up on the PFD by the shoulder straps without it coming off or moving

HELMET

- Whitewater kayaking helmets are not the same as other sport helmets (biking, skiing, climbing)
- Get a good helmet (not a cheap ProTec) that fits well.
- Parts
 - Shell is plastic, fiberglass, or carbon fiber; multi-impact vs. single impact bike helmets
 - Interior is foam
 - Chin straps
 - Ear and full face covers are optional
- Fitting
 - Shell should match head size (S, M, L, XL)
 - Helmet should sit low on your forehead to protect it. Should not be sitting high and exposing your forehead
 - Add padding for a snug (not tight) fit. Should be able to shake your head side-to-side, and up-and-down without the helmet moving on your head
 - Chin strap should be tight when dry, since it will loosen when wet. Be sure to check your chin strap and your friends' when on the water to make sure they aren't loose.

PADDLE

- Parts
 - Blades, shaft, throat, power face, back face, top, bottom
 - Straight vs. bent, inexpensive vs. expensive
 - Blade offset (0/15/30/45 degrees); started with Eskimos for wind shedding
- Fitting (how to hold the paddle)
 - Shoulder width apart, elbows at 90 degrees with paddle overhead.
 - Evenly spaced left-to-right
 - Top of paddle facing up, power face toward you
 - Right hand is control hand, left hand is loose grip
 - "Check your paddle" means that you aren't holding it correctly. It happens to all beginners.

SPRAY SKIRT

- Keeps boat from filling with water when waves hit it and when tipped upside down
- Parts
 - Spray deck, tunnel, grab-loop, rand (rubber vs. bungy)
 - **Grab loop (ejection handle) always goes on the outside. Check each other always!**
- Fitting
 - Tunnel fits your torso (S, M, L, XL)

CW Beginner Class Notes

- Deck fits your boat's cockpit (keyhole, L, XL, XXL)
- Step into spray skirt (men) or pull over shoulders (women)
- Avoid pulling on the seems to avoid ripping

Boat

- *Instructor Note: Go over last, since the next step will be to get the students outfitted in their boats.*
- Types
 - Whitewater vs. sea kayak vs. recreational/fishing
 - Modern vs. old-school
 - Big (river runner, creeker) vs. small (playboats)
 - **Big, modern boats are appropriate for learning to kayak; small boats are very difficult and not used in CW beginner instruction; old, slicey boats are also very difficult.**
- Parts
 - Cockpit (including combing), deck, hull (bottom), sides (edges/chines), bow, stern, grab loops, drain plug, seat, foot braces, knee/thigh braces, back-band
- Fitting
 - Find a boat with overall correct sizing for your weight and height
 - Seat adjusted to trim the boat front to back (actually have to be in the water to do this effectively)
 - Knee/thigh braces adjusted for support and comfort
 - Foot braces allow for feet at slight angle
 - Hip pads should be snug (can't get fingers between hips and pads)
 - Back band tightened so it just touches the back when sitting up straight

GEAR OUTFITTING

- Work with the students to get them into spray skirts, paddles, and boats
- Enlist help from other people at the pool (Patty, Bart, etc.)
- If things don't fit perfectly, it is okay since it is just pool practice and won't be doing anything that requires perfectly fitting gear. However, when practicing rolling or when paddling on the river, good fit will matter.

GETTING INTO THE BOAT

- Get boat near the water
- Wipe off feet to avoid getting dirt/sand into the boat
- Step in, sit on back deck, slide feet forward, then knees up, and butt onto the seat
- Adjust back band
- Start putting the skirt on behind you, move forward on both sides, finally flip the skirt up, grab it with both hands, and lean forward with straightened arms to get it completely onto the cockpit combing
 - Wet skirts goes on easier
 - May need assistance from a friend to get a skirt on that is tight

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- Check that your grab loop is on the outside (and check your friends' too)

WET EXITS

- *The one skill that you must be proficient at to continue whitewater kayaking*
 - Fortunately, it is not difficult to learn and everyone I've taught has learned it without difficulty.
 - Reason: You need to be able to get out of the boat safely and independently when tipped over.
- Dry land demonstration by the instructor
 - 4 steps to a wet exit
 - Tuck as soon as you tip. "Kiss the spray skirt to protect your face"
 - Relax :-)
 - Bang the sides of your boat loudly (above water) to let others know that you tipped over
 - Run your hands alongside your boat (in preparation for T/bow-rescues)
 - Tight fists a few inches away from your boat to avoid crushed fingers
 - Exit the boat
 - Grasp the grab loop with both hands while keeping your face to the spray skirt
 - Pull the loop backward toward your shoulder
 - Move your hands to the back of the cockpit opening
 - Push your body and butt out of the boat
 - Do a forward tumble while keeping your head near the surface (gravity helps)
- Dry land practice by students
 - Every student must show an instructor that they know and are comfortable performing all of the steps when upright and on shore
- Demonstration by the instructor in the water
- Getting into the water
 - Slide in like a seal
 - Should not get into the water on rivers before your instruction
 - After you know how to wet exit, you can safely paddle around the pool and lakes on your own
- Wet exits in the water
 - Start out with one student practicing at a time with an instructor watching them for safety and to provide feedback on technique and comfort level
 - Practice several times more to get more comfortable and get used to staying upside down under water longer
- Emptying your boat
 - Maneuver it perpendicular to the edge of the pool
 - Flip it upside down
 - Raise the closest end up onto the edge of the pool
 - Stand at the other end and use your legs to raise the boat to drain most of the water out through the cockpit

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- Pull it up onto the pool deck
- Practice whenever possible. Whenever you get out of your boat in the pool, do a wet exit.

SHARKS AND MINNOWS

- New rule: you have to say the person's name when you tag them, or it doesn't count!
- Play for 10-15 minutes
- Gets everyone warmed up and gives them a feel for their boat and paddle
- "You already intuitively know how to paddle". This class is going to help make sense of what you already intuitively know how to do, and it will also introduce safe paddling concepts that will greatly improve your skills and confidence.

BODY POSITION FUNDAMENTALS

- Keys to successful kayaking at all levels (Class 1-5)
- Goal is to achieve *balance*
- Upright torso/keep your weight centered over the boat
 - Leaning forward is aggressive
 - Leaning back is fearful
 - Slight lean from the waste; pull the belly button toward the bow of the boat
 - Do not lean side to side (we will use boat tilt to put the boat on edge)
- Head looks at target (Pat's Golden Rule of Kayaking)
 - Your boat goes where your eyes go (paraphrased from The Art of Racing in the Rain)
- Torso rotation enables all turns, maneuvers, rolling, etc.
 - Rotation not twist
 - Will feel your butt, knees, and feet engage as you wind up
 - Practice holding paddle to chest with arms crossed
- Shoulder safety
 - Keep hands low and in front of your torso
 - Paddler's box analogy
 - Use torso rotation when you need to place the paddle blade in the water. If your torso won't rotate that far, it is far enough.

FORWARD SWEEP STROKE

- Used to spin the boat to face a different direction. Can maneuver anywhere on the water by changing angle (heading), then paddling forward, and repeating as necessary
- Hold the paddle horizontal (parallel to the water) and just above your spray deck
- Steps:
 - Put one paddle blade in the water near your toes while keeping the paddle close to horizontal

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- Torso should rotate to move the blade forward to the toes. "Wind up the torso"
- Blade should go vertically into the water to catch the most water
- Unwind the torso which will pull the blade backward while keeping the boat flat (no tilt)
 - To get the feeling of this, the eyes can follow the paddle blade
- Remove the blade when it reaches the hips. "In at the toes, out at the hips."
- If one stroke isn't enough to face your intended direction, do multiple strokes back-to-back
- Students should demonstrate turning in both directions. It doesn't need to be perfect initially.

FORWARD STROKE

- Used to paddle in a straight line in the forward direction
- Very similar to the sweep stroke, but the paddle is nearly vertical to the water rather than horizontal.
- Still goes in at the toes and out at the hips and uses torso rotation for power
- Students should demonstrate paddling relatively straight across the pool. It doesn't need to be perfect initially.

REVIEW & QUESTIONS

- Suggest that students show up early next week, get their boats outfitted, practice wet exits, paddle around to get warmed up

WET EXITS TO GET OUT OF BOATS

CW Beginner Class Notes

DAY 2

Location: Pool

Duration: 2 hours

Instructor Note: Will try to alternate recovery and stroke skills to avoid getting bogged down with too many hip snaps all at once.

REVIEW NAMES

HIP SNAP LAND DEMO AND PRACTICE

- Show how to make your body into the shape of a "C" tightening all the muscles on one side of your body
- Practice on dry land by having everyone line up and demonstrate that they can make a "C" to the side while standing. Gravity will help. Then repeat while sitting on the pool deck.

WARM-UPS IN THE POOL

- Benefit of warming up is tremendous. Important to warm up before stretching.
- Start out just paddling around and doing lots of sweeps. As you learn more skills, they can be incorporated too.
- Demonstrate a few stretches in boat (leaning forward, backward, twisting side to side with/without paddle)

HIP SNAP PRACTICE IN THE POOL

- Practice off edge of pool
- Practice off of other people's boats
- Focus on great technique and slow things down to get great technique. If this skill is learned incorrectly, it simply won't be possible to roll a kayak.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS DAY'S LESSONS

- Body positioning/posture, forward sweep, forward stroke

REVERSE SWEEPS & PINWHEELS

- Reverse sweeps are simply the reverse of forward sweeps
- Depending on available space (not much room in an eddy or the pool) and water currents, this might be more effective than doing a forward sweep
- Paddle remains horizontal, but it goes into the water near the stern and comes out at the hips
- Pinwheels
 - Forward sweep on the right followed by a reverse sweep on the left followed by a forward sweep on the right, etc.

CW Beginner Class Notes

- These are a great addition to your warm-up strokes

REVERSE STROKE

- Reverse strokes are simply the reverse of forward strokes
- Useful whenever you are trying to back away from something (another paddler in an eddy, the edge of a waterfall, etc.)
- Paddle is vertical and goes in at the hips and comes out the toes with torso rotation providing the power
- Look straight ahead at a fixed target to maintain your heading and occasionally look over your shoulder to see where you are going

STERN DRAW STROKES

- *Instructor Note: Demonstrate spin momentum by paddling forward, stopping paddling, and letting the boat spin out.*
 - The boat does not want to go straight, so in addition to good forward strokes, we need correction strokes.
- Stern draw is a correction stroke that is very effective when the boat has speed relative to the water (paddling across the pool, ferrying, etc.)
- Steps:
 - Start out by opening your torso to the side of the stroke to protect the shoulder
 - With the paddle shaft at about a 45 degree angle to the water, stab the water 1 to 2 feet away from the stern of your boat
 - The back arm should be straight and the forward elbow should be tucked tight to your belly
 - Pull your back hand to your rib cage which will pull the stern of the boat and the paddle blade together
- Practice paddling across the pool and using stern draws to correct boat angle when skidding out

BOW RESCUES

- A technique that allows an upside down paddler to roll their boat upright with the aid of the bow of another kayak
 - Also known as T-rescues
 - Very useful when you don't know how to roll and you flip over in the pool or an eddy. It is much, much easier than wet exiting, getting your boat to shore, draining your boat, and getting back into your boat.
- Takes advantage of the second and third steps (bang boat, swipe fists alongside) that were taught during the wet exit
- Steps:
 - After you flip, perform steps 1 through 3 of the wet exit (tuck for protection, bang boat to alert other paddlers, swipe fists alongside), but you aren't going to wet exit!
 - While you are patiently waiting in your tucked position and swiping your fists alongside your boat, another kayaker will paddle up to your boat and tap the bow of their boat near the cockpit of your boat.

CW Beginner Class Notes

- Your hand closest to their boat will locate the bow of their boat and you will grab on to it.
- Get your second hand onto the bow of their boat in “cobra” pose
- Hip snap to roll your boat upright
- Rest your head on the bow of their boat, take a few deep breathes, and finally sit upright!
- *Instructor Note: It is most effective to teach the bow rescue by starting with hip snaps off of a boat and having the student go deeper and deeper into the water and letting go with one hand at first and then both hands.*
- It is very important that the rescuing kayaker be actively involved to keep positive pressure of their bow on the other boat, otherwise you will have a swimmer on your hands!

HAND OF GOD

- A technique that allows a trained kayaker to flip and upside down kayaker upright while still being in their boat
- Can be useful in lieu of a bow rescue due to various circumstances
- *Instructor Note: Although this is a useful technique, only use it if you feel comfortable with it.*

WET EXITS TO GET OUT OF BOATS

CW Beginner Class Notes

DAY 3

Location: Pool

Duration: 2 hours

Instructor Note: Will try to alternate recovery and stroke skills to avoid getting bogged down with too many hip snaps all at once.

REVIEW NAMES

CLOTHING FOR KAYAKING DEMO

- *Instructor Note: Need to go over this gear in preparation for FWMWW*
- Dry tops, underlayers, neoprene pants, booties
- Dry bag with extra layer, food, snacks, etc.

WARM-UPS IN THE POOL

- Forward/backward strokes, forward/backward sweep strokes

HIP SNAP PRACTICE IN THE POOL

- Practice off edge of pool
- Practice off of other people's boats

BRACING

- Braces are a recovery technique that keep you from flipping over after you've already started to tip over
- Two types of braces: High braces and Low braces
- Low braces
 - Elbows are pointed to the sky with the paddle horizontal near your lap
 - This position is very safe for your shoulders
 - As you begin to tip over, slap the water with the back face of your paddle blade, throw your head toward the water (counterintuitive, right?), and lift the knee on that side (hip snap actually)
 - This brace is effective when the boat has just begun to tip over, but not when the boat is mostly tipped over
- High braces
 - Elbows are pointed to the water with the paddle horizontal near your shoulders
 - This position is less safe for your shoulders, but if you avoid overextending them, it can also be safe
 - Almost the same technique applies from the low brace: As you begin to tip over, slap the water with the *power face* of your paddle blade, throw your head toward the water (counterintuitive, right?), and lift the knee on that side (hip snap actually)

CW Beginner Class Notes

- This brace is effective at all boat angles and is actually part of the continuum of the kayak roll
- Braces are difficult to practice when you don't know how to roll, but they are an incredible effective technique on the river that should be embraced
 - You can practice aggressive bracing in the pool and if you tip over, you will just get some bow rescue or wet exit practice!

SIDE DRAWS

- A paddle stroke that allow you to move your boat sideways without spinning or moving forward or backward
- Very useful in tight spaces (eddies, pool, etc.)
- Steps to pull yourself to your right (swap to go to the left):
 - Face your torso completely to your right
 - With both arms nearly straight and the paddle nearly vertical, place the paddle blade into the water 1 to 2 feet away from your right hip
 - Pull the paddle to your hip while keeping the paddle shaft vertical

ROLLING

- Allows you to get your boat and yourself upright after you have tipped over
- A key skill to enjoyable, safe whitewater kayaking on intermediate and advanced rivers
 - But...it is not necessary for enjoyable, safe kayaking on easy whitewater rivers
 - *Instructor Note: The challenge of learning to roll a kayak often results in frustrated students who believe that they are not ready to begin to enjoy whitewater kayaking. Nothing could be further from the truth. After they have had fun on the rivers in the summer, they will be itching to explore more runs and will be highly motivated to learn to roll. The Beginner Rolling class provides an introduction to the roll, but it does not have any expectation that it is necessary to spend too much time or focus on it.*
- Rolls will be taught in the beginner class as time permits and will include instructor demos followed by one-on-one instruction with the students in their kayaks and the instructors standing in the pool
- Several rolling techniques are commonly taught: the C-to-C roll, sweep roll, and the EJ roll
 - They all rely on a few basic techniques that must be adhered to in order to roll a kayak, and their differences mainly apply to subtle aspects of timing and body position. There is no need to get caught up believing that one roll is much better than another.
 - The sweep roll is the standard roll taught to Colorado Whitewater beginners (except Kids learn the EJ roll), but instructors may change the technique on a student-by-student basis
 - If you want to familiarize yourself with the roll in more detail, a few great DVDs exist for the purpose:
 - Kent Ford's Kayak Roll DVD: http://www.performancevideo.com/the_kayak_roll
 - EJ's Kayak Roll DVD: <http://store.jacksonkayak.com/ejs-rolling-and-bracing-2014>
- The steps involved with a kayak roll are simple on one hand, but also very detailed and subtle on the other, so I am not going to attempt to summarize them in these notes.

CW Beginner Class Notes

BOAT TILT

- *Instructor Note: This topic could be introduced along with the other Body Position Fundamentals or saved until this point since it is directly applicable to paddling on edge.*
- Boats can put on their edge for effective turning as well as balancing in whitewater
- Key concept: *the boat tilts while the body remains vertical with weight over the boat*
 - In other words, the body does *not lean* to get the boat on edge. That is a highly unbalanced position that will result in tipping over.
- Three levels of boat tilt:
 - Level 1: Slight weight on a butt cheek
 - Level 2: Weight on butt cheek and beginning to engage the opposite knee and crunch ribs laterally to lift the boat
 - Level 3: Fully engaging the knee and ribs just to the point of almost tipping over

TURNING A KAYAK

- The maneuvering strokes that have been taught thus far (forward/backward, sweeps, stern draw, side draw) will allow you to move your boat around, but they will not allow you to make *arcing turns*
- Arcing turns form the basis for much of river running include catching eddies and peeling out
 - Paddling in a circle is an example of a 360 degree arcing turn
- Key aspects of arcing turns:
 - Look with your head and eyes toward the center of the arc
 - Open your torso and face it toward the center of your arc
 - Tilt boat toward the center of your arc
- Practice paddling in circles in both directions
- *Instructor Note: This topic will be in much greater detail and with more time to focus on it during the lake session of FWMWW. It will then lead into practice for catching eddies and peeling out.*

FWMWW OVERVIEW AND CLOSING QUESTIONS

- Renting gear including cold weather clothing
- Location, dates, times, camping
- Congratulations on completing the pool session!
- Keep coming to the pool to practice and ask instructors if you have questions

WET EXITS TO GET OUT OF BOATS