

Prepare Yourself and Know Your Individual Responsibilities

1. Wear a lifejacket.
2. Be comfortable in the water, out of your boat.
3. Obtain the knowledge, skills and ability necessary for coastal kayaking.
4. Always boat with a group. Three boats is a recommended minimum.
5. Know how to self-rescue. Practice! Practice! Practice!
6. File a float plan, with friends, family, or the authorities.
7. Bring appropriate safety, rescue, and navigational aids, and more than adequate food, water, and extra protective clothing. Do not wear cotton!
8. Pick an activity level that matches your ability, and progress to more demanding challenges.
9. Monitor your physical and emotional condition, and watch the other members or your group for fatigue, illness, and changes in behavior.
10. Know and follow all local, state and federal laws.
11. Be visible - wear bright colors so others can see you between waves or in the fog. Carry a bright light, flares, and whistle to signal your position.



Understand the Hazards

1. Tides and tidal currents – What you don't know about these can leave you high and dry, or carried out to the open ocean.
2. Wind, Waves, and Weather – Understanding these three forces is vital for a safe sea-kayaking trip.
3. Surf Zone – Know where and how to safely beach your Kayak.
4. Cold Water – Can Kill! Use wetsuits, drysuits, and other protective clothing.
5. Fog – Can disorient you, obstruct visual navigation, and prevent larger, faster boats from spotting you.
6. Other boats and rules of the road – Learn and follow all the navigation rules!
7. **Take a class!** - the best way to ensure your safety is to be a well-educated paddler. The ACA offers courses and certifications for all disciplines in all levels.



Prepare Your Boat and Equipment for the Activity

1. Make sure your lifejacket fits, is adjusted properly, and Wear It!
2. Your boat must float too. It should have bulkheads that form watertight chambers, air bags, or foam securely attached so that the boat will float even when swamped.
3. Inspect the whole boat for damage, make sure the foot rests, back brace, rudder or skeg (if used), watertight hatches if present, all function properly.
4. Consider perimeter lines and/or grab handles so that the boat is easy to hold onto when you are in the water.
5. Inspect your paddles, spray skirt if used, and other safety gear such as paddlefloats, pumps, navigational aids, marine band radio, etc., before each trip.
6. Carry a more than adequate supply of food, drinking water, and protective clothing in waterproof containers.
7. Bring a First Aid kit and know how to use it.



ACA Guidelines for Safe Coastal Kayaking

Additional Resources

ACA - www.americancanoe.org
 U.S. Coast Guard - www.uscgboating.org
 National Safe Boating Council - www.safeboatingcouncil.org
[Essentials of Kayak Touring](#) by the ACA



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Know How to Rescue Yourself and Others

Learn and practice appropriate **self-rescue** skills. These may include:

- A controlled wet exit and deep water re-entry.
- Solo re-entry techniques such as using a paddle float, inflatable sponsons and straddling the stern (scramble).
- Kayak rolling skills.
- Swimming to shore with your equipment when practical.

Learn and practice appropriate **group-rescue** skills. These may include:

- Assisted re-entry, such as a sling entry, or the "scoop" technique.
- Towing or pushing a swimmer and/or boat to safety.



Be Able to Communicate with Others

Universal Signals

Stop - Hold paddle horizontally overhead.

Help/Emergency - Wave the paddle in a circular motion and/or give three long blasts on a whistle.

All Clear - Hold the paddle vertical and stationary.

Go This Way - Use the paddle to point toward direction of travel.

Are You Okay? - Tap the top of your head three times and point to the person whom you are questioning. If they tap their head three times, they are okay. Otherwise, assistance is needed.

Prepare as a Group and Know the Group's Responsibilities.

1. Research the trip. Know distance, likely conditions, potential hazards, and bail-out points should conditions worsen.
2. Know each participant's abilities, and goals.
3. The least experienced, skilled, and able participant must be able to safely complete the trip.
4. Each participant should accept responsibility for his or her own safety, and be ready, willing, and able to assist others in the group.
5. Elect a leader, or a trip coordinator, to arrange meeting locations, shuttles, equipment needs, and to file a float plan for the group.
6. The group must have the knowledge, skills and equipment to deal with potential hazards.
7. Do a group briefing, including an equipment check at the put-in.
8. Start as a cohesive group, stay together while underway, and takeout as a group. Individual safety is ensured by the group's mutual protection.
9. See and be seen. Keep a safe distance from other boats. Maintain a route that avoids other boats. Avoid hazards.

