



# Sea kayak secrets

KEY TECHNIQUES TO TAKE YOU FROM  
BEGINNER TO EXPERT IN RECORD TIME

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## Introduction

If I was starting over with zero kayak skills, which techniques would I focus on?

When I got started with kayaking most paddlers I knew with 10 plus years of experience didn't have the rock solid low brace for confidence in rough water. A few had this explosive power roll which is not likely to work in real conditions. I wanted the skills needed to have peace of mind in any conditions so that I would have the freedom to explore anywhere I wanted, without putting my life at risk.

I discovered little known simple to learn techniques that took me from clumsy, to having massive confidence at sea. It only took months. I'm not saying that to brag, I'm not more gifted than average. It's the techniques that made it quick and easy for me and so many others.

I want to share these 10 breakthrough skills with you because I haven't seen them taught anywhere else. That's why I call them secrets.

I think these techniques will help you gain more competence than you ever imagined possible.

I know I wouldn't have the competence I have without them.

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# CHAPTER 1

## **How To Use Your Paddle Like A Lever. And Look Like You Are Hardly Working While You Go Past Even Your Fastest Friends.**

**I**'m in the waves on a windy day with a student. He struggles to keep up with the rest of the group. He seems to be working harder than the more experienced paddlers. Seems like he is taking two hard paddling strokes for one of theirs. And I wonder why.

It's hard not to notice the difference, isn't it? Some people are plowing their way with a hard, steady paddle stroke while others give the paddle a little nudge here and there to move faster than everyone else. It looks like they are not even trying. So I want to help my student paddle with more ease, but I don't know what's going on. I start paying more attention.

Most of us think we need more practice, more hours on the water, before we are efficient. Or we need to take a few more lessons. Paddling into a head wind feels like we are not only

fighting against the wind, but also against the waves; yet some paddlers glide through the waves with little effort.

I discovered a way to use the energy of the wave to help you. I don't mean surfing the wave. My approach works going into the waves, moving broadside to the waves, or with the waves behind you. It works even on little ripples to help you get more distance with every stroke. Even on a nearly calm day. Why do some paddlers have access to this power while others do not? The problem starts with the focus on moving the paddle back.

Have you ever seen penguins swim? They move their fins the way a bird moves their wings while flying. There is very little backward movement. They move their fins up and down, on each side, propelling themselves forward at incredible speed. It's striking how agile they are in the water. So why are they not using their wings to push water back the way ducks kick with their feet? Have they discovered a more efficient way?

Here's what I discovered: When I feel like I'm borrowing energy from the wave, I use my paddle like a penguin uses his wings. Except I'm lifting the wing instead of moving it down. I may pause and hold the paddle to let a wave create the lifting motion. Or I add my own lift by pushing down with my upper hand. The force on the water is mostly lifting, not moving back.

I will talk more about using the energy of the wave in chapter 6. Before you can absorb the energy of the wave, to use it for going forward, your body needs to be in a strong position. That's what I want to teach you with this exercise. I want you to forget about paddling for a moment. Imagine you are

holding a shovel full of heavy dirt. Hold a stick or a shovel in your hands.

Don't worry. I'm not going to tell you to move water when paddling. I want to give you the feeling of positioning your body in a powerful way. It will make paddling feel easy.

Notice how you keep your lower hand close to your side when lifting a heavy shovel. This makes it easier to lift the weight. If you move your hand further from your core, it feels hard, doesn't it?

Now notice what you do when you want to move the heavy dirt a little distance. Are you not using your core muscles? You rotate your body. Move your hips. Keep your abs tight. Notice how much power you have when you hold your body in that position, with your lower hand close to your side.

Now replace the shovel with a paddle. Use this strong body position to pry with your paddle. It doesn't need to move much. Notice how much power you can apply to the paddle using your core muscles. Keep in mind: We are not going for a big movement here—a very short pry with a lot of power.

When you practice this in your kayak, remember how it feels. As you move your whole body, you will feel a pushing pressure with your top hand. You will feel pulling with your lower hand, as if you have weight on your shovel. You will be using your core to apply that pressure. No arms. If you didn't sign up for the free video that goes with this lesson, you can do so [here](#):

## Sea Kayak Secrets

<https://www.dancingwiththesea.com/product/sea-kayak-secrets-mastery/>

**You will learn about an exercise to practice this motion on the water.**

## CHAPTER 2

# **How To Use The Power Of A Breaking Wave To Make Paddling Broadside To The Wave Feel More Secure Than Paddling On Flat Water.**

**I**'m paddling with a friend who is fairly new to kayaking. It's a bit windy but not very choppy. As we round an island, we are exposed to the full fetch of the wind. The waves are bigger than anything he has experienced. They are coming from the side, with the bigger ones breaking right over his kayak. Waves are pushing him out of balance, as if trying to capsize him. He nervously reacts by smacking his paddle in the water on the other side.

He avoids another capsize. Each time he is getting more terrified. He knows he's going for a bad swim if he is not quick enough.

This is something I see often. Those without much experience in the waves are nervous. You can see it in their eyes. In how stiff they look. They can't wait to get to the calm water.

You can tell the more experienced paddler by the confidence they have in using their paddle to stop a capsize. They have a brace which can keep them upright most of the time.

Then, you have those who are completely at home in rough water. They understand how the force of the wave moves the kayak. They know exactly how to place the paddle and their body to use the force of the wave. They look like they are playing with the wave, not fighting it. They are not in a hurry to get out of rough water, but instead they enjoy the moment. There is no fear of capsizing. There is no having to be hyper alert. Calm and collected works fine.

Seeing my friend with that stiff nervous look, I decide to raft up with him. I show him how to place the paddle on the other side for bracing. On the side the wave is coming from. I tell him to stop waiting for the wave to knock him over. Instead, leave the paddle in the water to let the incoming wave bury it. I show him how to time his forward stroke to place the paddle in the right place; how to pause to let the wave wash over. I tell him to relax his hips to let his body rotate towards the wave. Be ready for a quick sweep for support, if needed.

It all took less than a minute. He is calm during the rest of the paddle home. Completely relaxed. I think I even saw him smile as a big wave washed over his kayak at one point. He is a different paddler.

Here's an exercise for developing a strong position for bracing in the waves:

1. Sit on the floor with your paddle pinned under something heavy. In the water the wave will hold your paddle in place.
2. Sit facing forward and hold on to the paddle.
3. Have someone push you over.
4. Notice how much force it takes to push you down.

**Now try this:**

1. Sit with your hip back and body rotated towards the brace side.
2. Have someone push you over.

**See figure 1.**



**Figure 1**

Notice if it's easier to stay in balance.

I think you will find that it feels a lot more secure when you are rotated towards the paddle.

Here's an exercise to practice on the water for developing the blade angle to give you tons of support:

1. Start with the same position you were in for the previous exercise. Your paddle side hip is pulled back. Your body is rotated toward the paddle. Your paddle is near the surface of the water, 45 degrees to the back of the kayak.
2. Practice sweeping it forward and then back again.

3. Use your hips. Your whole upper body should rotate as you move your hips.
4. Find the blade angle that gives you support without moving water.

It will be quiet. It will feel like the blade slices cleanly through the water. It will feel like you can put your whole weight on the paddle and still get support. Notice how much support it gives you.

If you learned to use your hips when paddling, it will feel natural to rotate towards the wave.

Here's an exercise I like to show new paddlers:

1. Practice turning your forward stroke into a brace without taking the paddle out of the water. A brace does not have to be something you do to regain your balance. It's not a reaction. It is about paying attention to the waves. It's about placing your paddle and body in a strong position to stay stable.
2. Practice this by paddling forward normally. After you have a bit of speed, imagine that a wave is coming from the side.
3. Change the angle of the blade to make it rise to the surface on the side of the incoming wave.
4. Place your body in position. Your same side hip is pulled back. You are rotated towards the incoming

wave. You place your paddle at about a 45 degree angle from the back of the kayak.

5. Pause for about 1 second; then keep paddling. Keep practicing this on both sides until you feel confident putting a lot of pressure on the paddle.
6. Pay attention to the angle. Most people will use too much of a climbing angle. You can hear the water moving. You can see how it moves water. It doesn't give much support.

Play with the angle until it slices cleanly up through the water with all your weight on it.

**See figure 2.**



**Figure 2**

## CHAPTER 3

# **How To Use The Wind Like Power Steering To Turn Your Kayak With Ease.**

**I** still see even experienced paddlers completely ignoring the wind when turning.

Have you ever had this experience? You're paddling on a windy day, your kayak is constantly turning upwind. So you do a sweep stroke to push the bow back downwind. It feels hard. The more you force the bow to move downwind, the more the stern gets pushed downwind as well. In the end you are still pointing upwind. It feels like you are playing tug of war with the wind, doesn't it?

I remember meeting a kayaker one time as I was paddling with my 19 1/2-foot-long kayak. He said to me it must be so hard to control in the wind, and I thought about it for a while. It made sense.

But here's the thing. There is as much extra length in the front as there is in the back, so actually it makes no difference. Not if you understand how the wind affects your kayak.

I remember a time when it was hard to control in the wind. I used to get pushed all over the place. I had to use all my power to keep the kayak pointing the right way. And the next day I had shoulder pain. Then I realized that the kayak is like a weather vane. You can fight against the wind, or you can make the wind work for you. When the kayak is not moving, you are sitting in the middle, so the tendency is to move sideways in the wind. The kayak doesn't have a tendency to point into the wind or downwind.

When you are moving forward, more resistance is added in the bow. It is like moving the pin of the weather vane closer to the front. Now the back gets pushed downwind more. This results in the kayak pointing towards the wind. The faster you go, the more resistance in the front. It's like moving the pin closer to the front of the kayak. So the kayak wants to go into the wind more.

If you lean forward it's like moving the pin even closer to the front.

Here's an exercise: Think of where to put the pin to get the kayak to do the desired turn. If you want to turn upwind, you can paddle faster to create more resistance on the bow. Let the wind push the stern downwind. You can lean forward to release the stern to make it turn quicker, or place the paddle near the bow to pin it in place.

If you want to turn downwind, you can slow down; lean back, and place the paddle near the stern to pin the stern and let the wind blow the bow downwind.

Think about this before you get in your kayak to paddle on a windy day.

When you find yourself in the wind, pay attention to where it's coming from. Ask yourself: "Am I trying to point upwind more or downwind?" You will find that it soon becomes easy to maneuver in the wind. Most of the time I just shift my body forward or back. You can let the wind do the work, but it starts with paying attention to which way the wind is blowing.

## CHAPTER 4

# **Learn The Secret That Allows You To Paddle Smoothly Past Your Friends Without A Sound.**

**W**e all know how to kayak right? Simple enough: Place the paddle near the front, move it back. The kayak moves forward. We take kayak lessons to learn everything else about paddling. We learn what muscles to use, and how to use the foot pegs to help us. We learn how to plant the paddle to make it more quiet; how to move our torso in a way that allows us to keep our arms straight.

I say by far the most overlooked part of kayaking--the part even neglected by experienced paddlers--is moving the paddle back. Tweaking this will bring you the biggest energy saving.

One day I'm on a multi-day trip when, after hours of paddling, I notice that my blade makes a splashing sound with every stroke. Even though I try to make it quiet, it keeps splashing. After several hours it becomes a disturbance not only for everything around me but also a major distraction for me. I find myself getting annoyed by my own paddling noise.

I like to move without disturbing the wildlife. I want to see the seals as they go about their regular day. I don't want to see them freaking out because they perceive me as a threat. I want to experience myself as an invisible visitor.

A few weeks later I'm paddling by myself one sunny day, still trying to avoid the splash, when an older couple glide past me without a sound. The way they paddled looked so smooth, effortless, quiet-like in a dream. This was my first time seeing the Greenland paddle.

I had to stop them to ask about the paddle they were using. After downloading a plan, I'm back on a nearby beach to look for a log which would provide the wood for my first Greenland paddle.

I still remember the first time I used it. It had no power. It fluttered. I kept using it, not because it worked, but because I had just spent 12 hours carving it. It was a nice paddle. I was proud of my work. I was proud that it started out as a beach log. I wasn't ready to throw it in the fireplace. Not yet.

I kept paddling with it until suddenly something shifted. I went from feeling like I had no purchase on the water, to feeling like it was rock solid. The fluttering was gone. I started moving. I mean moving fast.

Did I learn how to use it, or did it teach me how to paddle more efficiently? If you took kayak lessons, someone probably told you to move the kayak past the paddle, not move the paddle back. I realize the paddle was teaching me how to use it. When you move the Greenland paddle back through the

water, it flutters. When you move yourself past it, the flutter stops, and you start to move fast. It feels smooth. Easy. It's quiet.

I remember years ago. I'm drifting down the Yukon River in a canoe when a curious moose decides to swim towards me. Apparently to get a closer look. It swims right around me and back to shore. I was amazed at how good a swimmer it was. How can moose swim so fast with only skinny legs to paddle with?

The thing about water is it gives little resistance when you move something through it slowly. But try to move something fast and the water stops it like a solid rock.

I realized that when using the Greenland paddle, it is more efficient to let the paddle hit the water--like it's a rock--than it is to move it back. You don't want to waste your energy moving water.

This exercise will help you develop this approach.

1. Start with the kayak at rest. I want you to start paddling forward, but focus on avoiding moving the paddle back. It will look like placing the paddle on one side, and hitting it the way you hit a tennis ball. You are placing your body in the position you learned in chapter 1 when you were pretending to be holding a shovel.
2. Place your paddle in the water while placing your body in a powerful position so you can punch it. You

will feel a push on the top hand, but you are using your core for power.

3. Use your upper arm, at least at first, to get a feel for it. Later on you can get the same result with your core muscles alone.

The important thing is to not move the paddle back. Just quickly release the energy before changing sides. Don't worry about moving the kayak yet. At the beginning it will look like you are not doing anything. As you start to move, your paddle will look like it's moving back.

If you hear water moving, be more explosive when applying the power. Change sides more often. Most kayakers move a lot of water when they accelerate from a dead stop. The tendency is to keep this same energy sucking technique even after getting up to speed.

It's just not as noticeable when you are moving fast. You may not realize how much energy you are wasting. As you gain speed your paddle will end up further back. That's perfect. The kayak is moving past the paddle.

Another exercise:

1. Tie yourself down, or get someone to hold on to your kayak.
2. Focus on paddling without making a sound. If you are not moving forward, your paddle should not be

moving back much. Or as little as possible like a moose kicking its legs; it's a quick push, not a long slow water moving process.

As you pay attention to how it feels to accelerate efficiently, you will develop that same feeling as you paddle. You will notice that you can go much further with less effort. It is quieter.

## CHAPTER 5

# **How A Smaller, Older Man Can Out Paddle A Young And Stronger Man All Day Long.**

Here's a story from one of my students. He's on a multi-day trip with friends. On a longer than usual day of paddling along a rugged shoreline with nowhere to stop for a rest, one of the young men experiences tiredness in his arms. Maybe it has happened to you at some point. It happened to me one time where I had to pause every 10 seconds or so to let my arms rest before paddling on. Once the arms get tired, it's pretty much game over. Arm muscles are designed for quick strength, but not for endurance.

On this trip an older man, who isn't very strong, is using his core muscles to power the stroke. He is very efficient. His hips are moving, his stomach muscles are engaged. He applies the power when his body is in the strongest possible position. With his core muscle. Core muscles are designed to give steady movement all day long. They are built for endurance.

Even a strong man who uses his arms will get tired before the end of the day. How can you avoid tired arms?

1. You keep your arms in a strong position while you apply the power. The power comes from the hips and core, while the arms stay just slightly bent, in a strong position.
2. Make sure you can power your forward stroke with hips and torso rotation alone.

What happened to the young man using too much arm? He needed to be towed back to camp by the older man. He wasn't happy about it. If you want to avoid getting tired when you paddle, you need to use your body in a natural way. Use the right muscles. When you walk, notice how you use your hips. Your core is engaged. When you paddle try moving the hips. If you need to be jammed in the kayak to feel secure, you may need to adjust the fit. Here is a free course to show you how:

<https://www.dancingwiththesea.com/product/outfitting-your-kayak-for-performance/>

When you move your hips freely, it's very natural to also move your torso. Notice how your core is engaged. Now focus on making sure your arms stay in a strong position until you are done applying the power. You may need to look at your arms to make sure you are not bending them. You don't need to lock your arms straight. A slightly bent position is powerful. Look at your top or pushing arm. Make sure it doesn't bend. Look at your lower arm. Does it have a tendency to bend before

you are done applying the power? If so you will tire out much more quickly.

As you use your body in a powerful way, you will become more efficient. Paddling will feel easier. More pleasant. You will arrive to camp with more energy left for setting up your tent and making dinner. Your outdoors experience will be overall more enjoyable.

## CHAPTER 6

# **Why Some Kayakers Are Diminished By A Wave, While Others Can Tap Into The Energy To Get A Boost Of Power.**

**H**ave you ever struggled to keep moving forward when kayaking into a head wind? Not only is the wind pushing you back, but you actually have to work extra hard to get up and over the waves.

I recently started mountain biking and there is something called pumping. It took me a while to figure out what was meant by pumping, but now I can actually keep going around and around the track without ever pedaling. I can create forward momentum using the bumps on the track. It requires some effort because the bumps are not moving. You have to create the energy. On the water the waves have plenty of energy to give. When you learn to tap into it, you can paddle into a head wind with ease; by using the power of the waves.

You may have noticed that when paddling with a group some people seem to go a little further with less paddling. Maybe you had the experience of having your paddle in just the right place to get a little extra help.

This lesson will be short. Using the waves to give you power will come with practice on the water, not from reading. As I mentioned in the first lesson, using the paddle as a lever is a critical aspect. If you have not mastered this approach, please go back to practice this in calm water.

You can create forward thrust by moving the canted blade up through the water. The Hobie kayak uses that principle to propel their kayaks forward, instead of using a propeller.

One way to make the blade go up is to hold it with your lower hand, while you push down with your top hand. If you want to make it stronger, you can apply the force with your core muscles. Use your whole body.

Now imagine applying the force to make the blade go up as your kayak goes down a wave. As the bow drops down the wave, the stern floats up and puts more force on the blade. When your paddle is in just the right place, with your body applying the lifting power on the blade, the motion of the stern going up creates extra lift. It feels like you are getting help from the wave.

When you pay attention to this approach, you will notice that paddling in the waves gets easier. You will notice that you are using less energy while still keeping up with the faster paddlers. You will see others working hard to power their way

through the waves while you can relax. You are focusing on the timing of your forward stroke to get the most energy from the wave. It feels like a dance. You are responding to the movement of the water, working in synch with it.

It's not man versus wild; it's more like man figures out how to play with nature. You become part of the force.

## CHAPTER 7

# Why Having The Good Knee Contact That Most Of Us Learn, Actually Prevents Good Kayak Control When On Edge.

**W**e all know how powerful our hips are. Can you imagine having to walk without moving your hips? How much harder it would be? Do you think your legs would get tired more quickly?

When I started kayaking I was taught to tighten my foot pegs to push my legs bent, until my knees were braced against both sides of the kayak. The idea is to have a solid connection, so that moving your hips results in the kayak responding instantly. That worked for me. Usually, I was able to get quite a bit of strength rotating my upper body. Then, something changed. After seeing what the Inuit of Greenland could do in their kayaks, I went on a journey of discovery to figure out how to develop this much agility. The first thing I started practicing was a balance brace. **See Figure 4.**



**Figure 4.** Resting at Sea

The Inuit, according to the stories, did not allow the young paddlers to join the hunters until they could perform this feat. In Greenland you can't just go to shore anytime you like. The shoreline is rugged, with few places suitable to land, making it critical for the hunter be able to rest while at sea. The hunter must be self-sufficient. The balance brace allows a paddler to take a break and get a good stretch. He can even take a short nap, if necessary.

This idea of floating on your back on the water while in your kayak is not something which is commonly taught. The modern kayak industry is mostly about getting back in the kayak after a capsized. Rolling is not even considered useful for most paddlers because it is taught in a way which is hard to learn. Not so in Greenland. The kayak was designed to be easy

to roll back up because going for a swim in the freezing cold arctic water is not an option. So I went to a nearby lake and started practicing the balance brace. I put my float at the end of my paddle. I dropped myself on the water. The kayak pushed me and my paddle underwater, forcing me to do a wet exit. I would get back in the kayak to try again many times before realizing I was missing the most critical piece.

After a lot of frustrating practice, I realized I needed a better fit with my kayak. I needed the freedom to rotate my hips to get more flexibility. I needed a looser fit. A loose fit that still gives me enough control for edging the kayak while staying securely seated without feeling like I could fall out.

After transforming my kayak with new thigh braces, and a lot of foam, I was able to rotate my hips to get my back flat on the water. Doing a balance brace is now easy. It's not a matter of practicing a new skill.

Moving my hips was the key to competence. Not only for the balance brace. It's also what makes rolling easy. I have since taught the layback roll to many people. But it's not just about rolling. Moving the hips gave me a low brace that is solid. It allows me to use the power of my hips for paddling forward, the way kayak racers do.

But here's the challenge. I'm paddling along with a lot of power and agility. Ready to brace with the hips, if needed. But as you know agility in the kayak depends upon using the natural shape of the hull to help you maneuver. You need to put the kayak on edge to make turning easier.



**Figure 5.** Edging kayak for a turn

You can put your kayak on edge when paddling in the wind to help you keep going straight. But here's the thing. When you have to lock your hips in place to edge, your turning stroke becomes gutless. Unless . . . There is a way to outfit your kayak while still using all the hip power, even when edging. It's really quite simple. You just need to make sure your knees are free to move.

If your knee is making contact with the kayak, rotating your hips feels very uncomfortable. But if you pad your kayak in such a way so it makes contact with your thighs instead of your knees, you can move your thighs freely. Now you can use your hip power for forward paddling, even when your kayak is on edge. You can also use that same hip power to make your

turning feel easier. You will be bracing quicker with a more natural body movement.

As you get comfortable with moving your hips while edging, you will notice kayaking just got a whole lot easier. The kayak feels more like something you are wearing. Your movements are more natural. You move the same way you would if you didn't have the constraint of the kayak. You may even realize that the kayak is an extension to allow you more agility on the water. It was never meant to be a constraint.

## CHAPTER 8

# **Why Neglecting This Muscle Makes You Afraid In The Waves. And A Simple Exercise You Can Do To Become Fearless In Rough Water.**

**T**his is something I see all the time. People practicing a kayak skill in the hope that the repetition will help them gain mastery. As an example, many kayakers would like to learn to roll. Which means that if you capsize, you can right yourself without getting out of the kayak, by using your paddle and your body. If you can manage to get the movement just right you should be able to roll your kayak with success every time right? Not always . . . One day I'm teaching a one-on-one rolling lesson. Trying everything I know to get my student to do a roll. He has the flexibility to rotate. His body movement is good. His paddle has a good climbing angle to provide support. But he can't come up.

After a bit of practice on the water, we are back on the beach where I show him an exercise. What we discover is he has no power in his hip rotation. This hip power is critical for kayak control. It's an important part of making a roll feel easy. If you want to edge your kayak at will to make paddling more fun, to feel agile, hip strength is crucial.

But here's the thing. You may be fit for walking or running, but have no strength for the hip rotation which is required for controlling the kayak. Without that critical strength, you will not have much competence.

If you have practiced rolling you may have had the experience of doing a few good rolls; then the rest of the practice is sloppy. You may feel frustrated with yourself because instead of making progress, you feel like you are going backwards. I now make it a priority to make sure the student has power in their hip rotation.

You can have everything else right and without the hip strength, your roll won't work. Your edging will not be nice and steady. On the other hand, if you have a powerful hip rotation, you can roll up quite easily even if your technique is sloppy, or the conditions rough.

Here is an exercise I like to do every day to keep my hips strong. Ready for a high brace or roll. **See Figure 6.**



**Figure 6.** Keep the Hips Strong

1. Lie on the ground on your back. Place your legs at a 90 degree angle to your torso. One leg is on top of the other. Place a towel around the lower foot and pull to create a bit of a stretch.
2. Next, wrap your upper foot around and below the lower foot to hold the legs together, and rotate your hips against the resistance of the towel.
3. And hold. Do the other side.

For most people it will feel easy. If you do it regularly, you will develop the extra endurance which will give you the ability to keep rolling without getting sloppy. As you do this exercise regularly you will notice the position is similar to when you are

doing a side scull (see **figure 7**) with your kayak. It's also the same position you want to get into for doing a high brace. Or a roll.

Keep doing this simple exercise to gain a lot of agility with your kayak.



**Figure 7.** Side scull

## CHAPTER 9

# **Practice The Same Physics Used By The Space Shuttle To Create The Zero Gravity That Makes Your Low Brace Bulletproof.**

**T**he first thing I did when I succeeded with my layback roll is I started learning the forward finishing roll. It's much harder to learn for two reasons.

1. The front deck on most kayaks is higher than the rear deck.
2. Most of us don't have as much flexibility for bending forward as we do for lying back, so we have to lift our body weight against the force of gravity.

This is very counter intuitive. You need to start with your head close to the surface by arching your back. As you rotate your hips to right the kayak, you need to drive your head down, towards the bottom of the ocean when all you really want to do is bring your head up, out of the water for a breath of air.

What does a forward roll have to do with bracing, you might ask? Nothing unless you want to make your low brace really super powerful. A low brace is when you place your paddle on the water for support after losing your balance (figure 8).

### Figure 8

Do you want a low brace which works in any conditions?



Who needs a low brace which is useless in rough water? What's the point? The forward finishing roll is the key to this powerful low brace.

Essentially, you are using the water to support your weight while you rotate the kayak with your hips. By doing so you are removing the effect of gravity. You can use that exact movement to eliminate gravity when performing a low brace even without using the support of the water. Instead of having

your paddle sink as you put your body weight on it, you can free fall your body weight and recover close to the front deck.

You will notice much less weight pushing down on the paddle, which allows the blade to stay close to the surface where it can keep giving support. You are always ready for another brace. You will notice that bracing feels more like a smooth, easy, natural body movement. There is no force required, no strain on the shoulders.

## CHAPTER 10

# **The Quickest Way To Go From Paddling A Boat To Wearing Your Kayak And Start To Move With Ease.**

**T**he Inuit of Greenland see it as a critical skill to learn early on. Modern kayak instructors don't teach this at all or at least not until a paddler is closer to the expert level.

Six of us are out paddling on a day with maybe a 15-knot wind. Nothing big but some waves are forming. I think to myself if I can get on top of a wave, I can get a little ride. Everyone knows I'm a rookie with only months of experience. I'll show them I have more skills than they think. I get on top of the wave to get a ride. I'm riding it. Excited at how cool I probably look. Before I can do anything about it, I realize I'm out of balance, on my way into the cold water. Next thing I know I'm in the water, out of my kayak. Swimming. Feeling refreshed by the cold water but not looking as cool as I hoped.

There is one skill in particular I like to help people master. It is the fastest way to go from someone who could easily end up swimming, to someone who will almost never swim. It's a key technique which is easy to learn if you know what to do. At least if your kayak is well fitted for you. A lot of people will get it the first time they try. When you get this, you instantly go from the most likely to swim to the least likely to swim.

It's the skill which takes your rolling from something needing coordination with a good strong paddle, to something requiring no effort at all. And you are confident it will work every time.

In fact when you have this you have all the most important parts of doing a powerful layback roll, one that works not only in the swimming pool but also in rough conditions. It works with a fully loaded expedition kayak. It gives you a powerful high brace.

It's not a skill that is taught to beginners or even intermediate paddlers. Unless you live in Greenland. The Inuit learn it before they venture out to sea because it's a skill which teaches you how to move with your kayak. This skill keeps you feeling confident in the waves and makes you look like a pro; it also helps you develop a paddling style which makes use of your whole body. You learn to move with your kayak like you are wearing it. The main thing is the body position. You need to place your back on the water.

To get that much rotation you need freedom of movement in the hips.

You need to arch your back to bring your head down like you are placing your head under water; very counterintuitive when every cell in your body wants you to raise your head out of the water to get a breath. When you give in to this urge to lift your head, you notice that the kayak pushes you under water.

The trick is to keep the kayak in a position where it is comfortable on its side. If you let it fall or rotate too far, it will have a tendency to go upside down. It will seem like the kayak is trying to push your head under water. All you can do to stop it is use your paddle to force it off of you. In the end if you don't have the right body position, the kayak will likely win. Or at least it will make you work hard to keep breathing.

Here's what to do instead of fighting with your kayak. Put a float at the end of your paddle to start with, to get a feel for the body position. If you are doing the exercise in Chapter 8, you will have the strength to rotate your hips. If you followed the recommendations from this free course on outfitting your kayak, you have a good fit.

**You can take the eCourse here:**

<https://www.dancingwiththesea.com/product/outfitting-your-kayak-for-performance/>

When you have the right fit with your kayak it is easy to rotate your hips and apply pressure on the thigh brace on the same side you are lying on. Now do that same exercise in your kayak, on the water. **See Figure 9.**



**Figure 9.** Practicing the balance brace with a paddle float

It helps to have someone support you until you are confident with your ability to keep your head out of the water. As you are rotated, place some pressure on the thigh brace.

This is when it gets counterintuitive. As much as you want your head to come out of the water, you have to arch your back and put your head deeper in the water, as deep as you can. And as you do, you will notice that you don't need to use the paddle as much. You may even float there without any need for the paddle. When you can do this without needing any support it's called a balance brace. **See figure 10.**



**Figure 10**

But don't stop there. Some people will do a successful balance brace, but when you put a paddle in their hands so they can scull for extra support, they start to sink deeper and deeper. The paddle is pulling them under instead of helping them.

You want to practice this sculling motion until you are confident you can find the perfect angle to give you support. After you are comfortable with the body position, this is what you want to practice.

The balance brace is a great skill. Don't worry if you can't quite get it. The sculling is what will make you rock solid in the waves. It's all about getting the right blade angle to scull in a way that gives you support.

**Thank you for reading!**

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