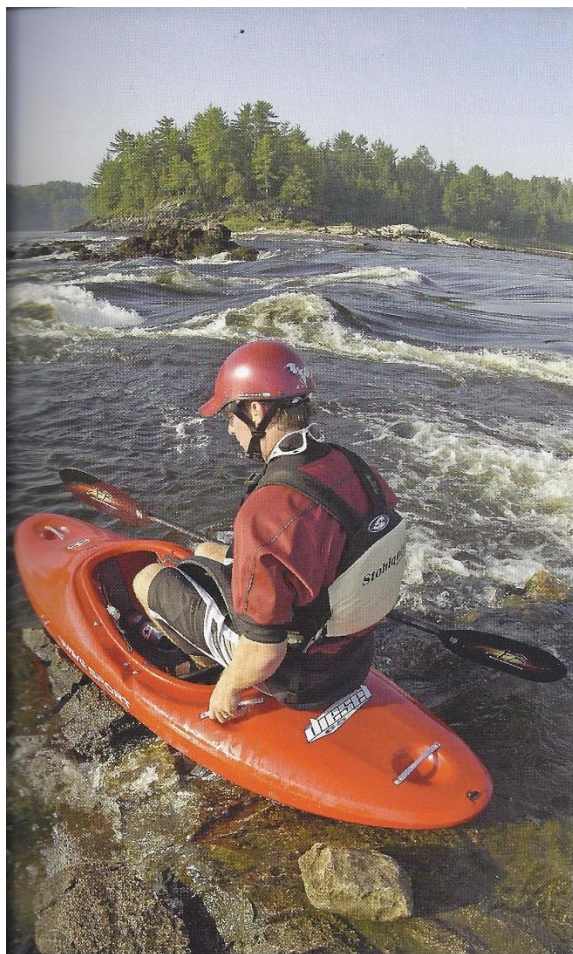


GETTING IN AND OUT

Even though whitewater kayaks have large cockpits, getting in and out of them can be tricky because of the outfitting. The trick to getting in is to keep your legs straight for as long as possible as you are sliding in and then twisting



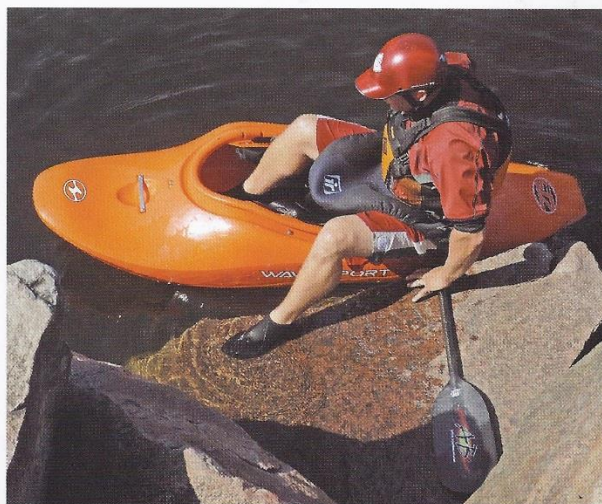
your whole lower body to get a leg at a time under its respective thigh hook. If you are still having trouble, try loosening the back band. You can retighten it once you're in. Getting out is actually much easier. With your hands on the sides of the cockpit at about your hips, push down and back. Keeping your legs straight, you should be able to slide them right out of the boat. Of course, if you can't

get out of your boat relatively easily on dry land, it's probably not the best boat for you. Some kayaks offer less aggressive thigh hooks, which might solve the problem. Otherwise, you'll want to find a different boat to paddle.

The river environment will frequently throw a twist into things; realistically it won't be often that you are getting in and out on a nice sandy beach! You'll learn a few of your own tricks as you gain experience, but here are some general tips that may help you.

When getting in or out while the boat is in the water, don't sit too far back on the boat—it will inevitably sink the stern and flood your boat. In some situations, you can use the paddle as a brace by placing it perpendicular to the boat with one blade on shore and the shaft resting behind the cockpit. This works well when the water is not fluctuating much, but can be frustrating if it is! A common choice on the river is to find a friendly looking rock as close as possible to the water to launch from, or to pull up on or brace against in order to get out.

On a steep rocky shoreline, use your paddle as a brace to get in or out of your kayak.



THE WET EXIT

A wet exit refers to the act of getting out of your kayak when it's upside-down, and it's one of the first skills that any paddler should learn.

To smoothly exit an overturned kayak, the first thing you'll do is lean forward and find your skirt's rip cord with one hand, while the other hand firmly hangs on to your paddle. Now yank the ripcord forward and up to pop your skirt. Next, slide your hands back to your hips (still holding the paddle), and while staying leaning forward, push yourself out. You'll end up doing a bit of a forward somersault out of the boat.

The trickiest part of this manoeuvre is fighting the instinct to lean back as you slide out of your kayak. The problem with leaning back is that it raises your butt off the seat and presses your thighs against the thigh hooks, which will actually make it harder to slide out, and slow down your wet exit.

The entire process of wet exiting will only take a few seconds, and the more relaxed you are, the more smoothly it'll all go. The first few times it may feel as if you'll soon be short of air, but in reality you have lots of time, so relax and practise sitting there for a few moments before popping out of the boat.



The trick to a smooth wet exit is tucking forward and pushing yourself out of the kayak with your hands at your hips.

THE HIP SNAP

The hip snap (or hip flick) refers to the action of rotating your hips to right your kayak. The hip snap is without a doubt the single most important technique to master in order to have success with your braces and your roll.

The idea behind the hip snap is simple. By staying loose at your waist (applying the first Golden Rule by separating your upper and lower body movements), you can use your knee to roll your hips and your kayak upright while your body remains in the water. In order to do this effectively, you'll need some form of support for your upper body. For most rolls, your paddle provides this support. For a



HIP SNAP PRACTICE

This drill involves practising the hip snap technique while holding onto something for support. It can be done alone or with the help of a friend. Alone, you can use the side of a pool or dock. With a friend, you can use an end of his or her kayak. The idea is to hold on to whatever aid you have available, and then to lean right over on your side and lay your cheek on your hands. Relax your hips as much as possible and pull your top knee over so that the kayak collapses on top of you. You'll know that your hips are loose enough and that your kayak has flipped over all the way when you feel its cockpit rim come into contact with your side.

Now it's time to right the boat again. Keeping your

Lay your head on the bow of a friend's kayak and use your knees to pull the kayak completely upside-down. Keeping your head down, roll your boat upright using the lower knee while pushing as little as possible on your friend's kayak.

cheek on your hands, pull the trailing knee (the one that's underwater) up toward your body and roll your hips and kayak to an almost upright position while minimizing the amount you push with your hands. For this drill, you're going to maintain your grip and repeat these steps, so once you feel the lower cockpit rim come into contact with your side, that's as far as you're going to right the boat, and it's time to start over. Ideally this drill is done off the bow of a friend's kayak, as the bow will sink if you push off too heavily with your arms. You should be able to do this drill while keeping the deck of your friend's kayak dry.

When you get comfortable with your hip snap on one side, practise it on the other. Having an effective hip snap on both sides will come in handy for kayak rescues, and it will provide you with an even better understanding of the technique.



Raising your head will cause you to push down on the bow of your friend's kayak and makes rolling the kayak upright much more difficult. You should be able to keep their bow dry.

Separate Your Body Movements

The best kayakers have mastered the art of letting their upper and lower bodies work independently, yet cooperatively with each other. This means there needs to be a distinct separation of movements at the hips. Early on you will become comfortable with this separation as it applies to leaning forward and backward. As you progress, it will become a key ingredient of balancing your boat on edge and staying ahead of your boat as it spins.



By letting his upper and lower bodies work independently but cooperatively with each other, Ken tilts his boat aggressively during an eddy turn.

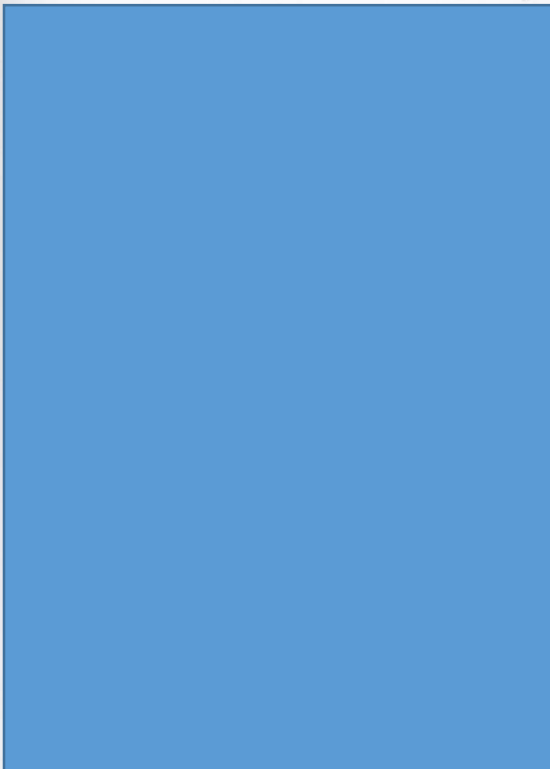


Staying loose at the hips is the key to edging. This lets you keep your head and weight over the kayak, even when your kayak is being aggressively edged.

EDGING

Much of your time kayaking will be spent on one edge or the other, depending on what you're doing. Peeling out into the whitewater, ferrying across the current, side-surfing in a hole, or paddling through a wave train all require you to keep balanced while the boat is tilted on edge. To tilt a boat on edge, shift your weight slightly over to one butt cheek and lift the opposite knee. Moving your weight over to one side and staying balanced will involve keeping your torso vertical while shifting your whole rib cage over to one side. You'll find that your stomach and side muscles have to work to hold this position, while your leg muscles hold the boat in its tilted position.

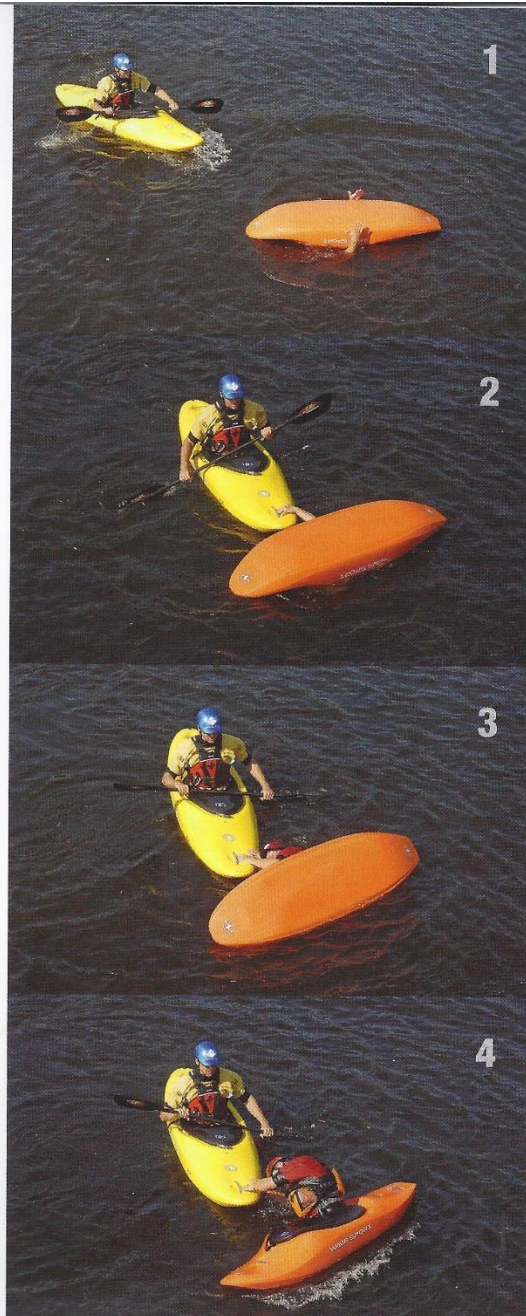
As you progress, it becomes more and more important to be able to tilt and hold the boat on edge quickly, and then transfer from one edge to another. You can practise this on the water by paddling in a straight line with your boat held on a steady edge. After five to ten strokes, switch to your other edge without losing your paddling rhythm. This is a great drill for improving your balance and edge control while strengthening your stomach muscles.



The T-rescue

The T-rescue involves a rescuer offering one end of his kayak to an upside-down paddler to use for support as she hip-snaps her boat upright. The T-rescue is the most basic form of kayak rescue and will only really come into play when there is a special teacher/student relationship between the two paddlers. Otherwise, it's unreasonable

The T-rescue is only a real option when there is a special teacher/student relationship.



for any kayaker to expect to receive a T-rescue when out on the river. It's also crucial that the one getting rescued has practised and become comfortable with the skill of hip snapping, which we've looked at in depth in the "Rolling" segment of this book.

The T-rescue starts with the "victim" upside down and the rescuer close by. Because the victim knows the rescuer is there to provide a T-rescue, the victim calmly tucks his body forward while upside down to protect his face and body. He then reaches up to the surface with both hands, one on each side of his kayak. The first thing he should do is slap the bottom of his boat three times to let the rescuer know he needs help.

He will then proceed to run his arms alongside the kayak to create as large a target area as possible for the rescuer. The rescuer will then approach the victim at ninety degrees and offer her bow for support. This usually means running lightly into the side of the upside-down kayak in the area that the arms are sweeping. The victim's arm will soon bump into the rescuer's kayak and then he grabs that end with both hands. On occasion, the rescuer is dead on target and the victim gets a little jolt of pain from the impact on his hand, but in the big picture, we can't worry too much about this!

The success of the T-rescue now revolves around the victim's ability to hip snap the kayak upright. Hip snapping refers to the action of rotating the hips to right the kayak. Without a good hip-snap the victim will naturally try to push his head and body back over his kayak, which won't do anything but sink the rescuer's bow and maybe even scare the rescuer off! Once upright, the rescuer can help recover the lost paddle, and then both can continue to head downstream.

On top of being a rescue reserved for situations where there is a special student/instructor relationship and the clear understanding that the rescuer will be looking to provide a T-rescue, it is of course very important that the T-rescue be practised and used in deep, safe whitewater in which a paddler isn't subjecting himself to further danger by hanging out upside down. If in doubt, get out!