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Catching unbroken waves is the art of predicting where and when a wave will be catchable, positioning yourself accordingly and paddling into it with a proper technique and commitment.

This video will give you the basic knowledge you need in order to build confidence in the water and improve your wave catching skills.

There are five different sections.

The four stages of a wave, adapting to different surf conditions, positioning in the precise slope, using your head to catch waves and the final paddle strokes before taking off.

If you like this video then you'll love our online surf tutorial platform.

Our catching unbroken waves course is totally free so by signing up you'll get access to everything you learn here in addition to clear examples how to avoid nose dives, optimal equipment to catch waves and more.

Check out the link in the description to sign up.

The first step is recognizing the four stages of a wave.

If you've tried catching unbroken waves a few times before you've probably realised that no matter how hard you paddle you won't be successful if you don't time and paddle in the correct wave shape.

That's why you first need to recognise the stages of a wave.

To simplify things refer to four stages of a wave.

Stage A is a gentle slope that isn't steep enough to catch.

Stage B has a perfect slope with just the right amount of steepness for surfers to catch.

Stage C is already breaking and therefore is too late to catch and during stage D the wave is transformed into white water.

Although finding stage B the perfect slope for you to match the wave speed can sound simple in theory in reality it can sometimes be quite difficult.

It is a complex art that you will keep affecting for years to come.

Compared to catching white water waves on which surfers get pushed forward surfers can only rely on a proper paddling technique and gravity to match an unbroken wave speed.

Also you will rarely be sitting exactly at the perfect spot between stage A and stage B.

In most cases you'll need to paddle out, paddling, paddle to the side or diagonally position yourself into the wave.

You will need wave reading and agility skills which are also a subject of another course on our online coaching platform.

When you turn around for a wave it should be between stage A and stage B and transition into stage B as you get lifted into it.

This way you get the perfect slope to get into the wave easily.

What you need to do is to predict that the wave will have a stage B shape in a few seconds after you've given four to six quality paddle strokes.

You might be able to recognize stage B waves out in the water and think that's exactly the shape of wave that I need.

The fact is that's not enough.

At the moment you turn around and paddle into a wave the wave shape could look something like this.

If you're at a spot where the waves break quickly or like this if you're at a spot where the waves break slowly.

In both cases when you get picked up by the wave after four to six paddle strokes you end up in a slope at stage B.

This brings us to our second section adapting your approach accordingly to the sea floor and daily conditions.

Positioning yourself into stage B where the wave has a perfect slope for you to catch it can be challenging because depending on the surf spot and the daily conditions waves can transform from one stage to another at a very different speed.

Every surf spot has a different bottom contour.

Waves break faster when the sea floor slope is drastic and they will break more slowly when it's gentle.

When a wave goes from very deep to very shallow water in a short amount of time it creates powerful waves that quickly transition between stages.

On such waves surfers have much smaller error margin their positioning and timing need to be very precise that's why sometimes you can see experience surfers get thrown over the falls.

Catching waves at stage B is also tricky because surfing conditions consistently affect how quickly waves break.

If the wind is on shore it pushes the wave from behind making it break a bit faster than usual.

Therefore you'll need to position yourself a bit earlier on an onshore day at B-.

In the opposite situation the wave will often break a bit later than you expect when the wind is off shore.

Many surfers can get tricked thinking they've positioned themselves correctly but they end up missing the wave because it didn't get steep fast enough.

The tide will have a similar effect on waves.

On most spots high tide will create softer slower breaking waves so you should adapt your approach and try to catch them on stage B+.

When it is low tide normally waves hit the sea floor faster and therefore break more abruptly so you should aim for stage B-.

The biggest key is probably positioning yourself on a precise wave slope using gravity to get the acceleration you need to catch a wave.

There are often misconceptions about paddling speed in catching waves at the beginning into immediate level.

One is that for paddling for longer giving more paddle strokes will increase your speed and help you get into waves.

You get close to your maximum speed with only 5 or 6 paddle strokes.

After 6 quality paddle strokes you aren't gaining that much speed with additional strokes.

Therefore paddling for longer isn't the solution to catching more waves.

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Another major misconception is to think that you've missed the wave because you didn't paddle hard enough.

Surfers with a good paddle technique move at a speed of about 6 km per hour.

On smaller days, need to waste high waves move at about 10-12 km per hour.

On bigger head-high and above days, waves move around 15-20 km per hour.

Even if someone exercises loads and corrects their paddle technique, they may only gain 1 km per hour at top speed.

This extra speed would undoubtedly help them catch more and broken waves, but the reality is that they will need to double their paddling speed on small days and triple it on bigger days if they want to match the wave speed.

Proper paddling is crucial, especially for energy conservation reducing injuries and paddling a bit faster.

To learn more about the proper paddling technique, maximising your speed while minimising your efforts and reducing the risk of injuries, check out our paddle technique course on tutorials.bearfit.surf.

We also have a video tutorial on sprinting and kicking, which can be very helpful to catch more waves.

Advanced surfers catch more waves even though they potentially paddle slower on a shortboard because they can consistently position themselves to use the waves' slope and get the correct acceleration due to gravity.

Think about a skateboard ramp.

The steeper it is, the more acceleration you get.

The bigger the ramp, the more speed it provides.

Waves work similarly.

The bigger the steeper they are, the more forward momentum they can provide you, which is good because bigger waves move faster in the ocean.

This is extremely important to understand and visualize.

You want the wave to pick you up at the precise moment when it has the right shape.

It's not about paddling harder, it's not about paddling for longer.

It is about using the wave, tapping into acceleration provided by gravity.

Think of it as trying to harvest sufficient speed provided by the wave's shape to match its speed.

If you're paddling at 6 km per hour and trying to catch the wave moving at 15 km per hour, you will need an extra 9 km per hour.

This acceleration will mainly be provided to you by the wave's slope.

With time, you may be able to recognise that waves won't have the proper shape and avoid wasting energy paddling into the waves that you just cannot catch.

Next time that you come really close to catching a wave, but you just didn't make it, you'll know that most probably you need a slightly steeper slope to catch it.

The single biggest mistake a beginner intermediate can make whilst learning to catch and broken waves is not looking back at the wave.

This creates two big problems.

One, you don't know if you need to pad a more or less or completely stop for a moment to position yourself in the precise slope of the wave that you need.

Two, you're not building the internal database, you'll need to catch and broken waves with consistency.

In other words, you're not learning from your mistakes.

If you keep catching waves when the shape looks too weak or too steep, without actually looking back over your shoulder, you are training your mind to be able to recognise quickly what a proper wave slope looks like and what it doesn't.

If you get into the habit of taking glances, then with time, you'll be a lot more proactive and efficient in your positioning, making a massive difference in your wave count.

You want to keep taking a few glances over your shoulder until the very last moment.

At the moment that you're getting into the wave, don't look back.

You want to keep your head still and often you need to keep it low near the surfboard.

The way you use your head to get into waves is essential.

When paddling into an unbroken wave, surfers get lifted upwards towards the top of the wave.

The surfboard's nose needs to stay lower than the tail to catch it.

When the nose starts to rise higher than the tail, it indicates that the surfer won't be able to stick onto the wave.

The first step to keeping the nose lower than the tail is to have the correct body position over the surfboard.

Laying on your surfboard in the correct position will increase your chances of catching waves without them sliding under your board.

You are in the sweet spot if your surfboard is laying so flat that by putting your chin down, the nose would go under water and by leaning very far back in the co-propose, your nose would pop out of the water by more than 5 centimetres.

We often compare wave slopes to skateboard ramps.

When you want to go down a skateboard ramp, you bring your weight down and forward to get going.

When catching waves, instead of going from the top to the bottom, you start from the bottom and go towards the top.

This being said, the same concept applies.

If you're trying to gain momentum down and forward, you'll want to apply extra weight in that direction.

The best way to do this is to bring your head low with your chin almost touching the nose.

Take a look at how the surfers head placement is here.

At the critical moment when the surfer gets lifted up onto the wave, he keeps his head low, putting extra weight over the surfboard's nose.

This helps him to stick onto the unbroken wave.

Imagine the difference it can make when you bring your head lower and closer to the surfboard as you get lifted up on a wave.

This is what really helps you catch, stick and follow the speed of the water hill that's moving forward.

So much of catching unbroken waves is about timing.

Not just timing yourself into the proper wave stage, but also timing your head's weight distribution over the surfboard.

[11:27]

Do not make the mistake of associating a low head with nose dives.

Keeping a low head at the right moment is not the cause of nose dives.

You can nose dive if you apply weight over your nose too soon.

If you put your head low before building forward momentum, the nose might sink under water and you could nose dive when the wave gets to you.

You can also nose dive if you keep paddling with your head low for too long after you've matched the speed of the wave.

In short, you can nose dive if you apply weight over your board's nose at the wrong time, either too soon or too late, but you won't nose dive if you apply the weight at the correct time.

For the purpose of this tutorial, we will discuss the timing of a very common approach.

Keep in mind that each wave is different and the amount of weight you apply with your head, as well as the amount of time you keep your head low, will always vary according to every specific situation.

When they get into position and start paddling for a wave, often surfers will start with their head in a neutral position, not too high, not too low, just as if there was a small sockable under their chin.

For more information on how speed is key to helping you avoid nose dives, check out the tutorial on avoiding nose dives, which is a part of our free course on catching unbroken waves.

Another thing to consider is that at this point, surfers are not on the flat water anymore.

They are trying to keep their nose lower than their tail.

Therefore the extra weight over the nose will not make them nose dive, it will help them prevent the gap between their nose and the water surface from increasing.

As they give a few paddle strokes and start getting lifted onto the wave, they bring their head low with their chin very close to the surfboard to nose.

At this precise moment, here when they start accelerating and going up onto the wave, it is practically impossible for them to nose dive because they are going too fast.

Once they've given 4-6 quality paddle strokes and they feel like they're gliding with the wave on the top third, they keep their head low and give 2 extra paddle strokes.

Only after they are certain that they fully caught the wave, surfers put their hands beneath their pectorials and get into the co-proposed position to prepare for the takeoff and prevent dropping down the wave on their belly.

As we've mentioned, every situation is different.

Sometimes a surfer won't need to bring the head low.

This is usually when a surfer is positioned for a wave that has enough slope to provide plenty of acceleration on its own.

In this case, you can keep paddling with your head up, get ready to get into the co-proposed and take off.

This happens more frequently for surfers riding long boards because their paddling speed is higher, therefore it's easier for them to catch the wave speed without shifting weight down by bringing their head low.

One thing that you'll always want to do is to keep your head still, whether you bring it low or not.

Moving your head up and down will make your board flap up and down, disrupting the water flow underneath it.

This will result in more drag and less speed, making it harder to catch waves.

Finally, the last paddle strokes before taking off.

Even when surfers have the proper positioning in a wave at stage B, a fast paddling speed and the use of their head's weight to get into a broken wave, things can still go wrong.

At the moment when surfers match the wave speed and start to glide with it, they could forget to give an extra 2 or 3 paddle strokes and lose the wave as they try to do their takeoff.

Or in the opposite situation, surfers might keep paddling for too long and end up dropping down the wave to the bottom.

Both situations are very common with novices because the timing is quite precise.

You need to quickly feel that you've properly started to glide with the wave.

Your ability to recognise when you've paddled enough will greatly improve with practice.

You should aim to do your takeoff on the top two thirds of the wave.

After you feel your tail lifting and you feel like you're gliding with the wave, it's often a good idea to give 2 or 3 last paddle strokes just to make sure that you've caught the wave properly.

After you're certain that you've caught the wave, arching your back will help you slow your speed so that you don't go all the way down the face on your belly.

Arching your back is also a good habit for angling your takeoffs.

Instead of dropping down to the bottom, you will go diagonally with the wave.

This way you can actually surf the wave on your belly, trimming down the line even before you get to your feet.

This is a great way to start riding the open face of the wave.

Check out the angling the takeoff course for more information.

If you want to learn more about learning to surf more efficiently, make sure you subscribe to our channel and consider joining our mailing list for exclusive information from us.

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And we help surfers kickstart their surf progression journey through our online coaching platform and community.

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