

The Basic Technique in Sprint Kayaking

Basic technique is the technique we teach to beginners during their early stages of a paddling career. It is a simplified version of paddling that enables the beginners to move on the water safely and quite effectively. It is however not enough for top performance as it is a very simplified version of what we see champions use.

It is crucial the basic technique is taught well so as to offer a good base for the paddlers to build on in the next phases of their careers. The most talented athletes will build on basic technique alone and achieve a technique level high enough for high performance intuitively. Less skilled athletes will need a coach to teach them the meta-technique and the micro-technique to achieve top performance.

The basic technique therefor is not just a stage. All the elements of basic technique are essential cornerstones for further development of the athlete. So insisting on a perfect execution of all elements of basic technique is crucial if we want to prepare a beginner paddler for a later success in mastering an advanced paddling technique and achieving top performance.

Within the basic technique we teach:

The four stroke phases

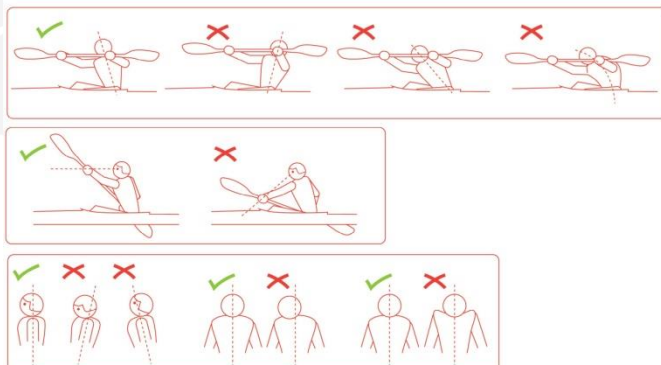
To simplify the teaching process of the basic technique, we divide the stroke cycle into four phases. These are the set-up, the catch, the pull and the exit.



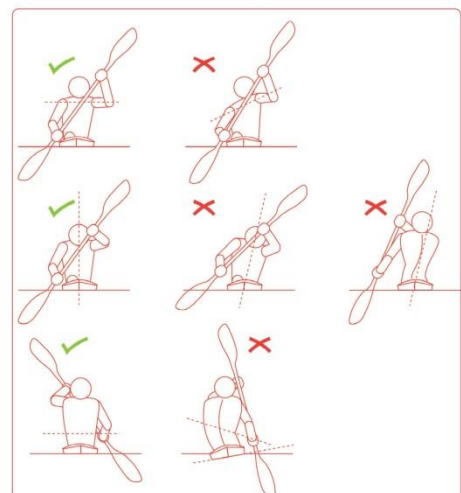
Posture in the boat and alignment

Posture in the boat is upright and slightly forward. Shoulders are relaxed and neck is in a neutral position. Shoulder blades remain together and packed in all the phases of the stroke cycle.

Posture



Frontal plane alignment



The workspace

The stroke is happening in front of the paddler.

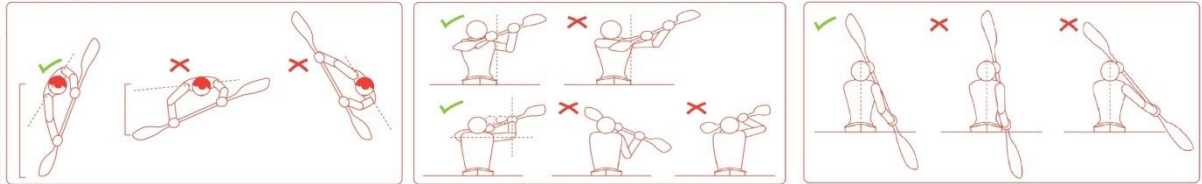
The body rotation is forward and it stops in a neutral position – meaning no rotation backward (pulling shoulder never moving backward).

The top hand may be at the height of the head but not higher in the setup phase.

The pulling hand travels wide, but doesn't make the top hand cross the boat on the other side.

Shortly put, the work space of the paddler is in his eye vision field.

Work space



Balance

Balance in the boat is crucial. When you lose your balance you lose your power. And one of the technical goals in the boat is to be able to use dry land abilities in the boat effectively. The more stable the athletes feel the more power they can apply to the blade and the energy they can transfer from the paddle to the boat is also more.

Balance is very trainable so developing it in training is a big opportunity to lay the ground for more effective movements in the boat. Balance is connected with proprioception, joint and core stability, strength etc.

Basic legwork and Basic rotation

We teach the use of leg in helping the rotation of the trunk:

- Pressing and not kicking
- The pressing leg is working to help rotate the trunk and pelvis forward and not to send its own hip backwards.
- Leg-hip-pelvis-trunk-shoulders are one block (we might teach the various degrees of elasticity in the chain and the different timings of the leg press within the advanced technique)
- The leg opposite to the pulling side is pulling on the pull bar/stripe and its knee is moving up during the pull phase.
- The degree of rotation is always proportional to the leg work.
- The speed of trunk rotation is always proportionate to the speed of leg work.

Coordination of movements in the boat

Besides teaching the correct movements and positions such as:

- Introducing the concept of the 'catch frame' (as introduced by NZL coach Fred Loyer)
- Introducing the 'block position' (as introduced by CAN coach Scott Oldershaw)
- Rotation from the hips
- Top hand pivoting
- The path of the bottom hand respecting the wing blade function

The above movements must be coordinated:

- Pull starts when catch is finished and the paddle is anchored
- Set up must be completed before we go into the next catch
- Leg pull and leg press must be coordinated
- Leg pull, leg press and the hands movements must be coordinated (through the trunk) and in sync
- Leg work and trunk rotation must be proportionate

The feel for boat glide

Boat glide is an amazing feeling to experience in a sprint boat and one of the cornerstones on which champions base their performance. The feel for the boat glide is both inborn and developed with training. What we want is a constant and smooth boat surge in a correct sync with the stroke phases.

The paddle grip in the water

Also, the ability to correctly find the right amount of water resistance on the blade is both inborn and developed with training. From the very start of kayak training we have to avoid:

- incorrect ways of finding pressure on the blade (eg. hitting the water instead of inserting the blade to create an own anchoring point)
- water slip (meaning the blade is not exiting the water in the same point it entered it, but is instead moving backwards during the pull)

Finding the grip in the water along with achieving the correct boat glide is the essence of moving well in the water medium.

Breathing

Correct breathing is not only important for gas exchange in the lungs, but also for:

- staying relaxed during high intensity activities and when tiredness appears
- bracing the core correctly
- adjusting the body to the stroke and boat glide rhythms

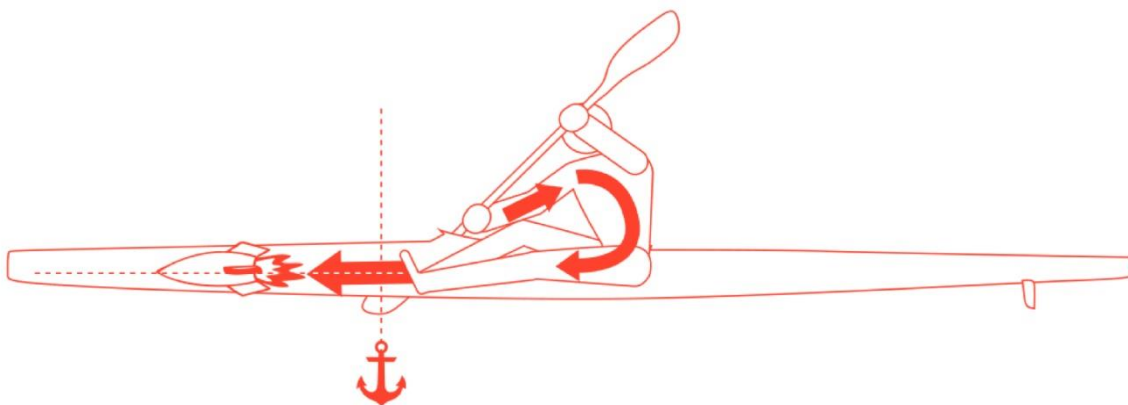
It is very important to teach correct breathing patterns to beginners also for dryland training as they are crucial in strength, mobility and relaxation practices.

Rhythm

Rhythm is something deeper than the mere tempo of paddling. It should not change with a higher or lower tempo. It is very personal. The internal rhythm is like the athlete's signature. Rhythm in paddling also means the ability to differentiate between the tempo and the ratios of water and air phases in a stroke cycle.

When the rhythm is right, the paddlers seem relaxed in their effort, effortless while paddling hard. Rhythmic movements become fluid, sharp and light at the same time. When athletes get the rhythm right the movements become clean and symmetric. There is an absence of important technical errors. These are the reasons why rhythm is crucial for achieving both high speed of movement and efficiency.

The ability to set or predict (crew boats) a rhythm is genetically predetermined, but training can improve this ability a lot. As in music also in sports we can impose rhythm and tempo to the athlete by using a metronome. If a beginner or intermediate level paddler is following a metronome in the boat for a few minutes, the technique will suddenly clean up...symmetry, balance and fluidity will appear along with a smile on the paddlers face. In paddling just as in dancing once you find the rhythm simplicity appears!



Helping the beginner master these elements will set a great base for later development. Polishing and revising these elements with the advanced paddlers will help them keep the basics of their technique intact and avoid basic mistakes to undermine an advanced execution. Every time an athlete will loose the good feelings in the boat, it is time to make a step back and work on these basics again.

It works every time!

Author: Jernej Župančič Regent
 Graphic representation: Rok Bezeljak, <http://www.gaflab.si/>

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