

## How to Gauge Your Paddling Skills

### Our Club Guide

This guide is intended to help you estimate your current paddling level as honestly as possible. It is not an exact science and should be treated as a broad guide only. The aim is to help you choose paddles that you will be comfortable on, enjoy, and benefit from safely.

**The Paddling levels (see below) and trip grades are linked, but they are not rigid rules.** Everyone progresses at a different pace, and conditions vary from trip to trip. Please use your judgement and, if in doubt, talk to a trip leader or coach.

Award levels are included purely as reference points. There is no expectation that you hold any formal awards.

---

### Paddling Levels

#### New Start

You are new to sea kayaking and keen to develop basic skills. You may have limited or no experience on the sea and are beginning your paddling journey.

#### **Beginner** (*equivalent to Start / Discover Award level*)

You have some basic paddling skills and may have completed a few sea trips. You are keen to gain experience and are ready to join Progression Paddles.

#### **Novice** (*equivalent to Explore Award / 2 Star*)

You have undertaken some training and practice and completed several sea trips. You are comfortable paddling on Grade A trips and continuing to build confidence and skills.

#### **Intermediate** (*equivalent to Sea Kayak Award / 3 Star / Paddlesports leader*)

You paddle regularly and have ongoing training and practice. You have completed many sea trips in a variety of conditions and are comfortable on Grade B paddles.

#### **Experienced** (*equivalent to Coastal Sea Kayak Award / Sea Kayak Leader / 4 Star*)

You have several years of experience, with trips, training and practice across a wide range of conditions. You are comfortable on Grade B and some Grade C paddles.

#### **Advanced** (*equivalent to Advanced Sea Kayak Award / Advanced Sea Kayak Leader / 5 Star*)

You are highly experienced and competent in challenging and exposed conditions. You are comfortable paddling on Grade C trips and contributing actively to group leadership and safety.

---

### Paddle Grades Explained

The club uses a grading system similar to that found in Pesda Press kayak guidebooks and other commonly used references. These grades describe the overall difficulty, exposure and commitment of a paddle.

#### Progression Paddles

Progression Paddles are short trips in relatively sheltered waters. They are aimed at newer paddlers developing skills and confidence.

- Small groups with one or more leaders or coaches

- May include assistance from club 'buddies' on the water
  - Focus on skills development, confidence and enjoyment
- 

## **Grade A Paddles**

### **Typical characteristics:**

- Up to 20 km
- Generally straightforward landings
- Escape routes readily available
- Some shelter from swell and extreme conditions
- Light tidal movement that is easy to predict
- No major tidal races or overfalls

### **Competency requirement:** *Novice and above*

#### Participants should:

- Have completed at least three Tuesday evening paddles, Progression Paddles, or equivalent within the past year
  - Be able to paddle up to 20 km over a period of up to 6 hours
  - Be comfortable in light swell and winds up to Beaufort Force 3 (18mph)
  - Be proficient in deep-water rescues as both rescuer and casualty, practised within the last 6 months
  - Include several paddlers in the group who are competent to tow a casualty
- 

## **Grade B Paddles**

### **Typical characteristics:**

- Up to 30 km
- Some awkward or exposed landings
- Sections of coastline with limited or no escape routes
- Tidal movement, tidal races, overfalls, crossings, swell and surf likely
- Trips are exposed to weather and sea conditions

### **Competency requirement:** *Intermediate and above*

#### Participants should:

- Have completed at least three Grade A (or above) paddles within the past year
- Be paddle-fit through recent paddling and able to paddle at least 30 km over 6 or more hours
- Be confident paddling into winds up to Beaufort Force 4 over a sustained distance

- Be comfortable in moderate swell and tidal flows, and able to launch and land in small surf
  - Have practised deep-water rescues within the last 3 months and be competent to assist in rescues in the expected conditions
  - Carry a towline and be competent in towing and general incident management
- 

## **Grade C Paddles**

### **Typical characteristics:**

- Difficult or committing landings
- Long sections with no escape routes
- Fast tidal streams, tidal races, overfalls and extended crossings
- Significant swell and surf
- Very exposed to weather and sea state
- Require detailed planning and favourable conditions to be viable

### **Competency requirement:** *Experienced*

#### Participants should:

- Be experienced and capable paddlers with the skills and judgement to manage challenging conditions under the guidance of the leader
- Typically be operating at, or above, Coastal Sea Kayak Award level (with higher competence required for more demanding Grade C trips)
- Have completed at least three Grade B paddles within the past year
- Be paddle-fit and capable of paddling 30 km or more in the expected conditions, including sustained paddling into Beaufort Force 5 winds
- Be comfortable in swell, strong tidal streams and overfalls, and able to land in moderate surf
- Be fully competent in rescues in the expected conditions, with practice within the last 3 months
- Be confident towing and capable of participating in a tow over several kilometres