

How to Gauge Your Paddling Skills - Our Club Guide.

Please try to estimate your paddling level based on the following guidelines. It's not a science, just a rough guide to where you think you are on the scale.

Paddle grades are defined below as a guide for estimating your trip comfort level:

Awards levels are there as a guide, not to suggest an expectation that you should have any awards.

- **New start** – looking forward to developing basic sea kayaking skills
- **Beginner** (*equivalent to Start / Discover level*) - Basic skills, few sea trips as yet, prepared to join Progression Paddles
- **Novice** (*equivalent to Explore Award/2 star*) - Some training and practice, a few sea trips done, comfortable up to grade A paddles
- **Intermediate** (*equivalent to Sea Kayak Award /3 star/PSL*) - Ongoing training / practice, many sea trips done, comfortable up to grade B paddles
- **Experienced** (*equivalent to Coastal Sea Kayak Award / Sea Kayak Leader / 4 star*) - Trips / training / practice in range of conditions over a few years or more, comfortable up to grade B-C paddles
- **Advanced** (*equivalent to Advanced Sea Kayak Award / Advanced Sea Kayak Leader / 5 star*) - Well experienced, competent in big conditions, comfortable up to grade C paddles

Paddle grades defined:

The Club uses some of the same type of grading of paddles as is seen in the Pesda Press kayak guidebooks and elsewhere.

Progression Paddles These will be short and in relatively sheltered water. These paddles are aimed at relative beginners. There will be small groups of paddlers with one or more leader or coach, possibly with assistants on the water as well.

Grade A Paddles: Up to 20 km. Relatively easy landings with escape routes easily available. Trips offer relative shelter from extreme conditions and ocean swell. Some tidal movement may be found, but easy to predict with no major tidal races or overfalls.

Competency requirement – novice and above.

- Have been on at least 3 Tuesday evening paddles, progressions paddles or equivalent in the past year.
- Able to paddle at least 20k, and for up to 6 hours.
- Can handle slight swell and winds up to F3
- Proficient in deep water rescue techniques, both as rescuer and casualty, and have practiced these within the last 6 months.
- Several in the group should be able to tow a casualty

Grade B Paddles: Up to 30 km. Some awkward landings, and sections of coastline with no escape routes, should be expected. Tidal movement, tidal races, overfalls, crossings, ocean swell and surf may be found on these trips. They will also be exposed to the weather and associated conditions.

Competency requirement – intermediate and above.

- Have been on at least 3 grade A or above paddles in the past year.
- Be paddle fit from recent paddling and able to paddle at least 30km, and for 6 or more hours.
- Know that they are able to paddle against winds of up to Beaufort force 4 (18 mph) over a distance.
- Can handle moderate swell and tidal flows and launch and land in small surf.
- Have practiced deep water rescues within the last 3 months, and competent to assist with rescues in the expected conditions.
- Carry a towline and be competent to assist with towing and other incident management.

Grade C Paddles: These trips may have difficult landings and may have no escape routes for long sections of the trip. Fast tidal movement, tidal races, overfalls, extended crossings, ocean swell and surf may be found on these trips. They will be very exposed to the weather and sea state, therefore require detailed planning and paddlers competent in rough water conditions. The journey may require good conditions for the trip to be viable.

Competency requirements – Experienced

- Relatively experienced and capable paddlers, who have the expertise to deal with the conditions under the guidance of the leader. Someone who would currently be able to pass the Coastal Sea Kayak Award may be appropriate for some Grade C paddles. A higher level of competence than that may be needed for more challenging Grade C paddles.
- Have been on at least 3 grade B trips within the past year.
- Be paddle fit from recent paddling, able to paddle 30km or more in the expected conditions, and able to paddle against a F5 for a sustained period.
- Be comfortable in swell, tidal streams and overfalls and capable of landing in moderate surf.
- Be competent to conduct rescues in the expected conditions, and have practiced them within the last 3 months.
- Be competent at towing and capable of being involved in a tow for several kilometres.

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