

Coaching Tip of the Month: sdrawkcaB gnlldaP

By Sean Morley

Seriously, why do I need to know how to paddle backwards? I've spent my whole life working on my forward stroke, and now you want me to paddle backwards? If I wanted to go backwards I'd be a rower! These thoughts went through my mind as I prepared for my instructor certification exam and it wasn't until I started teaching and guiding a bunch that I realized just what an important skill paddling backwards really is. And I've discovered it is important both as a functional skill, but also as a teaching and training tool. Please let me explain...

Paddling Backwards or the Reverse Stroke is useful for:

- Stopping quickly
- Backing away from a hazard
- Some rescue/tow situations
- Communicating with a group while still making progress
- Backing into a sea cave so that you can keep an eye on the swell
- Launching and landing through surf (yes - sometimes it's better to go backwards!)
- Working your muscles in a different way during a long day on the water
- Building confidence, blade awareness and edge control

There are (in my humble coach's opinion!) really two different techniques for paddling backwards. The first is for power - to kill any forward momentum (stopping) and get the boat moving backwards quickly. I then find it useful to blend into a second technique that gives me directional control - particularly useful if I have to paddle backwards over a long distance or within the confines of a sea cave!

Let's start with the power stroke to generate **momentum**. Here are some key points to the technique:

1. Torso Rotation - twist toward your stern (wind up) for catch position (don't lean back)
2. Catch position - blade close to boat, near stern, with back of the blade flat to water's surface, boat upright
3. Power Phase - keep paddle close to boat throughout stroke, maintain paddler's box
4. Release - with good follow-through

Now we have momentum we need **control**. Key points:

1. Torso Rotation - twist toward your stern (wind up) for catch position (don't lean back)
2. Catch position - place back face flat on water, edge towards the working blade

3. Power Phase - unwind torso while rotating wrist up & forward to keep back face loaded, blade just below surface
4. Release - to correct heading, hold your edge longer and finish the stroke further toward the bow

Paddling backwards in windy and wavy conditions, in current and around obstacles (buoys, rocks, other paddlers) are all difficult skills to master but well worth the time and frustration. Every time you have succeeded in paddling through a feature forwards, try it in reverse. There is something about the way that the brain is wired that makes it challenging to figure out which way to edge when we are going in reverse. But once we have figured it out, it has a significant positive effect on our ability to edge going forwards! That in turn boosts your confidence and allows you to really make your boat dance. Us coaches often talk about 'taking your paddling to the next level'. Well practicing paddling backwards can really do that for you. Oh, and sometimes the best views are behind you as well!

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