

Equipment.

Paddle

Choosing a Paddle

Kayak paddles generally have their blades offset. This means you have to swivel the shaft in your hand on each stroke cycle. This is done by gripping with one hand and 'slipping' with the other. Whichever hand you choose to grip with will determine the 'handedness' of the paddle. Right-handed people usually prefer right-handed paddles and vice versa (although many left-handed people paddle with right-handed paddles). For a beginner, a general-purpose cheap and durable paddle might have a plastic or alloy shaft paddle with molded plastic blades. If you become more specialized you may prefer a lighter-weight paddle. Different disciplines have different shaped blades and use different length shafts.

Paddle Length

Paddle lengths vary. A short paddle can accelerate your boat quickly (useful for freestyle and river running). A long paddle will be slow to accelerate but will make long distance paddling more comfortable (a good idea for sea-kayakers and marathon paddlers). Paddles for use purely on white water might be 190-200 cm while those used for flat water racing or touring might be 210-225 cm.

The Paddle Grip

Hold the kayak paddle with its mid point on top of your head. Position your hands so that a right angle forms at each elbow. This is the correct grip. The same applies with the canoe paddle - start with one hand on the T-grip.

Spray Deck

The spray deck is an elasticated 'skirt' that prevents water from entering the kayak through the cockpit area. In rough water it is an essential item and in cold weather it helps keep you warm. The quick release strap must be accessible, in case of a capsize. Spray decks can be made of tough fabric (cheap but not 100% waterproof) or neoprene (expensive but more watertight. Also harder to release)

Helmet

Helmets are necessary for white water, shallow rivers, polo, slalom, river racing or surfing. Choose one which can be adjusted to fit your head so that it doesn't slip back or forward, covers your forehead and has a strong chin strap. It should be made of a durable material and float. Helmets should be CE approved - CE1385.