

Common Kayaking Mistakes and How to Avoid Them



2020 and 2021 were boom years for paddlesports and it led to [kayak and canoe shortages](#) across the US and Canada. A large portion of the boom was due to the covid-19 pandemic. Kayaking, it turns out, is the perfect socially distanced sport. You can get out of nature without having to be close to people—other than your immediate family—if you don't want to be. You also get some Vitamin D to help out your immune system at a crucial time!

Whether you're dipping your toe in the sport for the first time or are a seasoned kayaker, it always pays to brush up on your water safety skills and paddling techniques. Common kayaking mistakes can trip up anyone if the weather turns nasty, the currents get away on you, or you forget a key piece of your gear such as a personal flotation device.

Read on for our guide to the errors kayakers make most often—on or off the water.

1. Not Keeping an Eye on the Weather

It's shocking how fast weather conditions can switch when you're out on the water.

You look outside in the morning and think, “Best kayaking weather ever!” By the time you get to the lake, river, or beach, things have taken a turn for the worst.

And it’s not just annoying. Kayaking in poor weather conditions can be dangerous, too. If the wind is high, you tire and get cold more easily. Rough waters put you in danger of capsizing.

Thankfully, there are a few easy ways to ensure you don’t get caught out.

First, learn how to read both short and long-range forecasts. Pay attention to temperature, wind strength, direction, and storm warnings.

This is easy nowadays with apps like Windy or websites like NOAA. They do all the thinking for you, and you can even set up alerts. Don’t forget to familiarise yourself with the current and tide patterns in the area you plan to paddle in, too.

Trust your instincts when out on the water. If things aren’t feeling right, it’s probably time to turn around and head home.

2. Not Wearing Appropriate Gear

Those heading out on solo and tandem kayaks need to make sure they’re dressed for the weather and the possibility of submersion. Getting the balance right can be challenging, especially if you’re new to kayaking.

You might be out for an hour or you may be gone an entire day. Either way, if you end up capsizing or the weather changes from sunny and hot to cool and rainy, you’re setting yourself up for failure and possible illness.

Aim for quick-drying fabrics like nylon or polyester and avoid natural textiles like cotton—except for lightweight wool, which can be insulating. Always pack a dry bag with spare clothing, too.

Dress in layers so that you can add on or take off as the temperature and conditions change. A nice windbreaker or a waterproof raincoat can really come in handy in a time of need. A waterproof hat is a bonus tip that I always try to remember. Stay protected from the sun and the rain!

3. Not Thinking About Your Technique

If you’re a beginner, you probably haven’t thought much about *how* you paddle or sit in your kayak. And that can be a big mistake that leads to problems. Improper posture or technique can lead to cramping, stamina loss, and exhaustion.

One issue many new paddlers run into is hugging the paddle too close to your body. This results in you bending your elbow too much, putting unnecessary pressure on your muscles. The proper

kayaking technique starts with holding the paddle a reasonable distance from your chest. Keep your upper and lower body movements working together and use your hips and body for direction, stability, and maneuvering.

Newbies also tend to turn their entire body into a rod when they hop into their kayak. You might think this makes you more stable when in fact, it does the exact opposite. Keep your body light and loose and use the power of your core for stabilization.

If you're planning on committing to the sport of kayaking, it's worth investing in [a quality seat](#). They're a cheap way to assist you with the correct paddling posture, making for a much more enjoyable day on the water.

4. You Never Learned to Self-Rescue

One of the most potentially dangerous situations a kayaker can find themselves in is when they're turned upside down and immersed in water. This can happen when riding large waves or traveling down whitewater rivers.

Whether you're kayaking in groups or solo, you need to know how to roll upright if you capsize. This is a skill you can practice. Until you master this tricky technique, you can learn to self-rescue by flipping yourself back over with a paddle float.

5. Not Using Kayak Safety Gear

If you're heading out on the water without a personal flotation device (PFD), you're taking your life into your hands. According to water safety studies, life jackets have the potential to [prevent half of all drowning deaths](#).

But that's only if you actually wear one! And just feeling uncomfortable isn't a good enough excuse. For ultimate wearability, invest in a PFD vest that's designed for kayaking. They're lightweight, more compact, and allow freedom of movement.

Outside of a good quality PFD, there are a few other items any clever kayaker has on hand. These include:

- A paddle float
- A bilge pump
- Marine flares
- A portable radio
- A Personal Locator Beacon (PLB)
- Cell Phone

- Waterproof device bag

An [outboard kit](#) is helpful for overnight trips or when kayaking in unpredictable locations. If you run into trouble, you won't have to rely on your human power to get you back to shore.

6. Drinking and Paddling

We hope this goes without saying, but no one should be on the water if they've been drinking alcohol. Even a little bit is too much. In 2020, alcohol consumption was responsible for [almost 20 percent](#) of American boating fatalities.

Alcohol also increases your chance of suffering from hypothermia, decreases your response times and coordination, and impairs your ability to think straight. If you get into an emergency while on the water, you want a clear head and quick reactions.

7. Using Damaged or Poor Quality Kayaks

Whether you are using a traditional kayak or one of the increasingly popular [inflatable kayaks](#), you must make sure it is seaworthy and ready to perform. Getting on the water with a kayak that is damaged or of poor quality can be disastrous in the wrong conditions.

When purchasing a kayak just remember that you get what you pay for. If a deal on a kayak looks too good to be true... it most likely is. You don't have to spend an arm and a leg to get a reliable kayak, but evaluate what type of conditions you will be using your kayak in. If you are going to be in the ocean or a large lake, a high quality kayak will really help you out.

How to Avoid Common Kayaking Mistakes

Regularly reviewing lists of common kayaking mistakes is a great idea for a newbie paddler or a seasoned kayaker. If you're just starting out, you need to know what to do and not do for success on the water. As a more experienced paddling pro, you can get complacent and think you know everything already. A good brush up on common errors will keep you sharp.

Also, as technologies change, it never hurts to freshen up on your knowledge of gadgets and equipment designed to make your time on the water more enjoyable.

If you're not sure which kayaks or kayak accessories to buy, [contact our awesome staff](#). The team at Splashy McFun has years of experience in watersports and is passionate about ensuring our customers get exactly the products they need.