



Paddling Technique

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Paddling a dragonboat is very different to paddling a canoe, kayak or surfski.

- As paddlers sit in pairs, it is one-sided paddling
- All the power of the stroke is in front of you. The stroke finishes at your body and should not extend behind you.
- The power of the stroke comes from uncoiling your torso and sitting up straight and square i.e. it comes from your back far more than your arms.
- It is the ultimate team sport: the more alike everyone's style and the more in time you all are, the more efficiently you are paddling.



The stroke can be divided into 4 parts

1. Reach / punch-forward - blue team
2. Catch / drive
3. Pull-through - red team
4. Exit

1. Reach



Put your back into it

With this part of the stroke you do just that, **reach as far forward as you can**, beyond the person in front. Don't worry about hitting them, they should be doing the same, so should not be in your way.

The bottom (outboard) arm punches forward, straight and low along the gunwale (boat edge), the top arm is high and strong, elbow above your head and top hand over the side of the boat ready for the catch.



... and the really important bit!

your back must be leaning forward from the hips and rotated so your chest is facing inwards to your partner with your top hand over the water. Coiled like a puffadder, ready to strike with full power by uncoiling and sitting up strong and straight. No matter how strong your arms may be, your back is much stronger.

As if all this isn't enough to remember, **your eyes must be on the stroke pair**, do not watch your paddle. A bit of a chameleon act, but you must **take your timing from the stroke**, not the person in front of you (whose timing may be a bit out).



If you are sitting on the right (starboard) you will watch the stroke on front left. If paddling on the left side (port) you should keep your eyes on the stroke's partner, front right. Do not watch your paddle!

2. Catch / drive

The top hand **hammers the blade deep into the water, before you start the pull-through.**

The deeper your blade, the more water you have to pull against, the more powerful and effective your stroke.

The blade should be as close to the side of the boat as possible and should be buried fully to create as little cavitation as possible in the pull-through.

In the picture on the right, paddler number 6 right has their paddle entering at a slight angle: this paddler was not rotating fully and with the paddle at an angle to the side of the boat they would be pulling slightly out to the side of the boat thus reducing the power.



If your blade is not fully buried before you pull-through, you'll cause a cavity to form in front of your blade and a small wave will be created behind it.

When the person behind you punches their paddle forward in the recovery/reach, they will punch into this wave which will slow the boat ... and drench you!

First-time paddlers, digging holes!

3. Pull-through - the propulsion part!

Use your back. With your blade fully planted in the water, pull yourself towards your blade by un-rotating and sitting up straight, head up, shoulders squarely forwards, top hand powering the blade forward.

Don't think of pulling the blade back past you, think of pulling yourself and the boat up towards your blade.

Do not watch your paddle, keep your eyes on the stroke pair.

Use your feet to get yourself as firmly wedged in the boat as you can and push with your legs as you pull with your body and your arms. If you are paddling properly, your legs should also feel well exercised as the end of a race or practice session.



4. Exit

The stroke ends half way along your thigh and the paddle should exit no further back than your hips,

your back should be straight, head up, shoulders square, top arm strong (sit up aggressively)

If you pull too far back, behind your body you will raise water behind you and so cause the boat to slow when the paddler behind you has to punch through this, you will take longer to do a stroke and so get less strokes/minute and the timing of the whole boat will get thrown.

The power of the stroke comes from uncoiling from a forward inwards rotation, not from a backwards outwards rotation.



In summary [click here for an excellent video](#)

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