

Tampa Bay Sea Kayakers Paddling Guide

Revised March 17, 2017

Mission Statement

Tampa Bay Sea Kayakers (TBSK) is a social paddling club which promotes safe paddling with our friends on the water.

We recognize that:

- This guide is a compilation of lessons learned by our club's Trip Leaders. It contains practical tips and guidelines to lead a safe trip.
- This guide is not intended to be a thorough, all inclusive manual on training and safety. Therefore, it may not include some important safety issues nor has it been reviewed by American Canoe Assn (ACA), British Canoeing (BC) or any other recognized paddling authority.
- Trip Leaders are volunteers who are not required to have any certification from the ACA, BC or any other recognized paddling authority nor do they receive first aid instruction.
- Trip Leaders do receive on-the-water orientation.

We encourage members of the paddling community to pass on their suggestions for improvement and changes to the information presented in this guide to any TBSK Board Member.

John Marek
TBSK President 2017

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Section I - Trip Participant Guidelines

A. Safety Defines a TBSK Trip

1. All TBSK trips are led by a TBSK Trip Leader(s) who has taken the Trip Leader orientation course.
2. Without exception, all paddlers are required to wear a USCG approved Personal Floatation Device.
3. If paddling when it is very cold or very hot, Trip Leaders must take precautions to paddle safely (See Appendix E for details).
4. No alcohol or mind altering drugs may be used prior to or during any TBSK trip.
5. All paddlers on a TBSK trip must sign a liability waiver form before each trip.
6. All TBSK trips (commonly called "official" TBSK trips), will either be:
 - a. Scheduled a month in advance and described in the monthly Newsletter, or
 - b. Organized on shorter notice, as an "impromptu" trip by a TBSK Trip Leader. Members are informed of all impromptu trips through an email generated through the TBSK website from our Trip Coordinator.

B. Trip Participant Guidelines

1. Remember that each participant is ultimately responsible for his/ her own safety.
2. Make sure you have the skills, physical stamina and the equipment for the paddle. There is a **SKILLS SELF ASSESSMENT CHART in Appendix A below.**
3. RSVP to the trip leader ahead of time. Ask, if you have questions about the necessary stamina, skills or equipment (Distance of trip, how fast will you be paddling, type of boat needed?). Mention any special needs you may have. Ask your questions before you drive to the launch site.
4. Leave a "Float Plan" - Write a note or email to concerned local relatives or friends about where you are going and when you expect to be back, with launch and take out points and Trip Leader contact information.
5. Equipment Check List:
 - For all trips:

PFD	Paddle
Sunscreen	Hat
Water	Energy Snack
Whistle	Sun Glasses
 - For open water trips (additional equipment):
 - Kayak with proper floatation (Trip Leader may determine boat floatation is not adequate for the planned trip)
 - Spray Skirt/ Deck

- For paddling when it is dark (additional equipment): White light and flares
6. Before the paddle begins, please advise trip leaders (privately) of potential medical issues such as use of nitroglycerine, epipens, insulin, bronchial inhalers or other medical needs. Trip leaders will need to know where supporting medication is stored. During the paddle, also advise a trip leader if you are having problems while paddling.
 7. Please understand that Trip Leaders may deny trip participation to people that they believe do not have the correct equipment, skills or conditioning to make a safe trip.
 8. Sign the liability waiver form at the launch site.
 9. Stay with the group. Notify the Trip Leader if you need to leave the group for any reason.
 10. Follow your Trip Leaders instructions while on the paddle. Let her/him know of any problems you are having while paddling – blisters, speed of paddle, tiredness, etc. Paddlers who do not follow the Trip Leader's instructions may be asked to leave the "official TBSK paddle", which means they would no longer have the Trip Leader as their guide.
 11. TBSK Service Dog Policy

Normally, TBSK does not allow animals on TBSK paddles. However, service dogs may be allowed on Level 0 trip, with the agreement of the trip leader. To ensure that the trip is appropriate for a member with a service dog, the TBSK member must:

 - Realize that only Level 0 trips would be appropriate for service dogs.
 - Notify the trip leader that you are bringing a service dog.
 - Ensure that the dog wears an appropriate PFD.
 - The dog must be well trained (e.g. for dogs that would mean no barking at animals or other kayakers and be able to be on the boat several hours without taking a pee break).

C. Skills Self Assessment - Chart Recently Updated – Appendix A

Section II - Guidelines for Trip Leaders

The heart of our club is our Trip Leaders. They share their favorite paddling places with others in the club while providing leadership for a paddle.

1. Planning for the Trip

- Decide on the location, route and the distance to be paddled.
- Review directions to the launch site.
- Check the weather, tides and currents several days before the trip and also the morning of the trip.

- If this is new site for you, check for unusual conditions with someone knowledgeable about them.
- Determine the paddle difficulty of the trip using the TBSK trip rating scale.
- Determine if any special equipment/ requirements are needed (e.g. light for a night paddle, two sealed hatches for open water paddle).
- Notify the TBSK Trip Coordinator by the 15th of the month prior to the month of the trip so that it will appear in the TBSK newsletter.
- For an “impromptu” trip, contact the Trip Coordinator so that he/ she can email all members through the TBSK web site.
- For a river trip, check water levels and plan for necessary shuttles.
- When the group size exceeds 10, recruit another Trip Leader to go with you on your trip.
- Make sure that you have your Trip Leader equipment ready to go.
- If the trip involves being out after dusk, remind all to bring a white flash light.
- Trip Leaders wishing to specify safety equipment for their trip (e.g. type of PFD, boat with floatation) must give this information to the Trip Coordinator so it can be included in the trip description.
- **Service Dog Policy - Trip Leader Responsibilities**
 - When notified that a service dog will be on the trip, determine if the trip is appropriate for a member with a service dog. For example, you would probably want to avoid an area which has a large alligator population.
 - If not appropriate, the trip leader can either contact the member and explain why the trip would not be appropriate (e.g. large number of alligators) or change the location of the paddle.
 - Have the person with the Service Dog sign the **Guest Waiver- Service Dog Release of Liability**
 - Contact the TBSK President if the trip leader asks the member with a service dog not participate in a TBSK paddle.

Planning Tips

- To avoid burn out, plan your trip to a place that you want to paddle and then invite others.
- Have a safer/ alternative trip in mind if the weather does not allow you to launch where you had originally planned (e.g. a river which is close by).
- These trips are not about YOU. They are about the paddlers in your care looking for you to provide safety, fun and a positive on-the-water experience.
- Keep in mind the possibilities of hypothermia or heat stress (See Appendix C).

- During hot summer months, consider launching early and being off the water by noon, unless the trip is held on a spring-fed stream.

2. Informing the Trip Coordinator About Your Trip

Provide the following information to the Trip Coordinator:

- **Contact:** Trip leader name, phone number, and email address.
- **Description:** Launch place and time along with a brief description of the paddle.
- **Paddle Difficulty:** Level of paddle difficulty - paddle skills required, estimated distance, type of water, and expected conditions.
- Special Requirements such as: Minimum boat length, type of boat, spray skirt, or waterproof bulkhead required, or other special equipment required.

3. Suggestions for your Response to RSVPs

- Keep track of the names of the people who want to come on your trip in the event that you may need to contact them if the trip is cancelled at the last minute. They will receive an email from the Trip Coordinator about any cancellation, but this will take some time to happen.
- Provide all persons who respond with specific directions to the launch site, if the site is not commonly known.
- If you do not know the person who responds, contact the person to make sure they have the proper boat, equipment, and skill for the trip.
- Ask about unusual medical conditions. It can be very important to counsel a person that the trip may not be for them.

4. File Your Float Plan

Write a note or email to concerned local relatives or friends about where you are going and when you expect to be back, with launch and take out points.

5. Cancelling a Trip

As soon as you decide to cancel the trip, or that you cannot make a trip to which you previously agreed to lead, notify the Trip Coordinator who will put out an email message, through the TBSK website, informing all TBSK members.

6. Equipment Trip Leaders Must Carry on a Trip

In addition to equipment required for all participants, the Trip Leader must also carry:

- Basic first aid kit
- Communication device – cell phone or VHF radio. If paddling in open water a VHF radio is highly encouraged because of spotty cell phone reception.

- Trip Leader Checklist & Emergency Procedures (Described in Appendix B) .
- Spare paddle
- Tow belts - a waist-mounted or combing-mounted long-tow belt and a contact tow.
- Rescue stirrup
- On unfamiliar waters, a navigational device – compass and local chart or GPS.
- Extra water and sun block

7. Information to Share or Gather at the Launch Site

Gather the group together before starting:

- Have all participants read and sign the Waiver and Release of Liability Form, reminding them that it is a liability release form and not just a participation roster. (Keep the signed Liability Release form dry by storing it in a plastic bag or dry bag or leaving it in your vehicle). Both these release forms can be printed out from the TBSK web site under "Trip Planning".
 - Roster format for members
 - Annual release format for guests & minors
- Explain the equipment and skills needed for the trip. Refer to the “Self Assessment Guide” which can be found in Appendix A of this guide.
- Discuss the trip length, difficulty, water and weather conditions, known obstacles then ask if everyone feels comfortable with the trip.
- Review the Trip Leader Checklist & Emergency Plan (See Appendix B)
- Stay close together when paddling.
- Tell participants to get permission before leaving the group. Explain that participants who need to return early to the launch site should inform the trip leader so that another, experienced, paddler can accompany them. No one should paddle alone.
- Review Paddle Signals (Appendix F)
- Request that participants use their cell phones for personal calls only when they are off the water.
- Explain that kayak sails are not permitted on TBSK trips because it makes it difficult to keep the group together.

Launch Site Tips

- **Deciding whether to launch is the most important decision of the entire trip. If in doubt, don't launch.**
- The wind and waves are always worse out on the water than how they look from the shore.
- When the wind is blowing against the tide, expect choppy water and breaking waves.
- A great Trip Leader rarely has to rescue people because of the planning and decisions made before launching.
- Don't be afraid to tell someone that you do not feel comfortable with them going on this trip either because of skill level or equipment. Steer them to the monthly TBSK Paddle Picnic, which is meant for EVERY LEVEL OF PADDLER.
- A Trip Leader is in charge of the trip. Be diplomatic when possible. Be dogmatic when necessary.
- When paddling in hot weather, remember the 103 Rule of Thumb (Appendix C). Talk about heat stress and ask paddlers to let you know if they feel light headed, have cramps, head aches or loss of coordination.
- When paddling in cold weather, remember the 120 Rule of Thumb (Appendix C).

8. After Deciding that the Trip is Not Appropriate for a Participant

If you are uncertain about a participant's skill level, you should call the person before the paddle to confirm that they have the proper skills and boat for the trip.

- If you decide that the trip is not appropriate for a participant, then ask that participant not to go or change the trip so that all may participate. (Hopefully you can determine this when responding to their RSVP for the trip.)
- If the participant refuses to comply, then ask two group members to confirm that you asked the person not to participate - giving your reasons.
- The Release Form must be annotated with a note that the person has been denied participation in the TBSK event.

9. During the Trip

- Watch how ALL of your paddlers are doing and occasionally ask people how they are doing during the trip.
- Make sure the paddler you have selected to "lead" does not set too fast a pace.
- Make sure your "sweep" maintains position.
- Take water/ rest breaks frequently.

- Ideally, all paddlers should be in sight of either the Trip Leader or Co-Trip Leader and within a distance which makes it easy to notice a paddler has capsized and to execute a rescue.
- If a paddler wants to leave the trip, they should notify the trip leader who must:
 - Understand the problem. If the paddler is leaving the trip, in the presence of another TBSK paddler, make sure the paddler knows they are no longer on the official trip.
 - Make sure that the paddlers can return to the put-in safely.
- If a paddler refuses to follow Trip Leader's directions, then with another TBSK member as witness, the paddler can be told that they are no longer on the "official TBSK trip" and that the Trip Leader is not responsible for guiding this paddler. Every effort, within reason, should be made to help the paddler return to the launch site safely. A report of such action should be made after the trip to both the TBSK president and Training & Safety Coordinator.

Handling Emergencies & Other On-The-Water Tips

- Once on the water, situations can change rapidly. Always assess the environment, the group, and your plan. Do not be afraid to 'call an audible' and change your plan if the situation dictates. A shortened trip or an easier route is a great decision if it means everyone returns to the landing site happy and under their own power.
- A group of paddlers is most likely to "fall apart" when under stress, such as when difficult weather arises, a medical emergency occurs, or rescue is necessary. This is the time to give orders, not requests.
- If someone capsizes the Trip Leader must consider the entire group. The Trip Leader should:
 - If possible, ask the Assistant Trip Leader or other capable person to effect the rescue.
 - Give directions to the rest of the group to stay close.
 - Assign a designated person to hold the rest of the group together.
 - If necessary, ask someone in your group to call "911" and ask for on the water rescue. Realize you are on the water and it will take some time for rescue help to organize itself and find your location.
- If a paddler strays from the group, either exploring by themselves or paddling too far ahead, talk to them and ask them to stay with the group. Give them specific tasks to do, such as assisting less able paddlers.
- Except for narrow, winding rivers, all members of the group should be visible to you or your Co-Trip Leader at all times. On narrow, winding rivers, the Trip Leader should have the lead paddler stop periodically to gather all paddlers.
- A good trip leader will have their "head on a swivel" keeping alert to possible danger and also sights for the group to enjoy. Think of yourself as a roving problem solver.
- Keep the trip lighthearted and fun.
- Encourage paddlers with local knowledge of the area to share.
- If one person says they are tired or having trouble with the conditions, there are most likely others who feel the same way.

- VHF Radio: If using a VHF Radio monitor channel 16 and communicate on one of these channels - 68, 69, 71, 72 or 78.
- On hot days, besides drinking extra water, remind people to soak their hats or a bandana in water and place it on their head/ neck.

10. After the Trip

- Report emergencies or paddling problems to the club President and to the Training & Safety Coordinator. Examples are: a paddler had to be rescued, or a failed rescue, or an injury, a paddler who could not keep up with the group, a paddler who failed to comply with direction.
- If an emergency occurred on the trip, use your discretion as to whether you should contact the person designated by the paddler on the liability release form.
- If there is more than one trip leader on the trip, the trip leaders should review the trip and discuss what went well and what could be improved. We learn from one another.
- Mail or email the Waiver and Release from Liability Release Form to the TBSK Trip Coordinator within a reasonable amount of time after the trip (not more than 4 weeks).
- The signed release forms are used to:
 - Confirm that the trip took place (was not cancelled for weather or other reason).
 - Recognize Trip Leaders at the end of the year and the basis on which we determine if a Trip Leader is eligible for a free TBSK membership (4 completed trips, with co-leaders getting credit for a full trip).

Section III - Appendices

Appendix A - Skills Self Assessment Chart

The Skill Self Assessment Chart (below) is meant to be used by a paddler to let them know the skills they should expect to perform and conditions they should expect to handle when going on a TBSK paddle. A paddler who wants to go on a paddle where they might not have all the skills listed (e.g. a roll for a Level III paddle) should contact the trip leader, because they may have excellent bracing skills to be able to make the trip. As always, the trip leader has the final decision on whether a paddler has the proper skills and boat to go on a paddle.

Skills Self Assessment Chart			Paddle Levels			
			Level 0	Level I	Level II	Level III
Essential Requirements						
Be Able To Swim			•	•	•	•
Physically fit to paddle			•	•	•	•
Entry/ Exit Boat						
Without Assistance From Shore			•	•	•	•
From Low Dock					•	•
Surf Launches & Landings < 2 ft					•	•
Surf Launches & Landings > 2 ft						•
Paddling Skills						
Forward Stroke			•	•	•	•
Sweep Strokes For Turning				•	•	•
Reverse Stroke				•	•	•
Edging & Low Brace Turns					•	•
Sculling Draw Strokes					•	•
Bow Rudder & Bow Draw						•
Brace Strokes In Rough Water						•
Rolling						•
Cruising Speed						
Distance Up To						
3 Miles	1- 2 mph		•	•	•	•
5 Miles	2 - 3 mph			•	•	•
10 Miles	3 - 4 mph				•	•
18 Miles	> 4 mph					•
Wave Current Wind						
Wave	Current	Wind				
Calm	< 1 mph	< 4 mph	•	•	•	•
< 1 foot	< 1 mph	< 6 mph		•	•	•
< 2 feet	< 2 mph	< 12 mph			•	•
< 3 feet	< 4 mph	< 15 mph				•
Rescues						
Wet Exit			•	•	•	•
Assisted Rescue				•	•	•
Self Rescue After Wet Exit					•	•
Towing					•	•
Wet Re-entry in Rough Water Assisted by Partner						•
Roll						•

Appendix B - Trip Leader Checklist & Emergency Procedures

This laminated checklist is meant to be a quick mental reminder for the Trip Leader. It will have the following information:

Boats:

- Appropriate for the trip?
- Hatches, deck lines, repairs needed?

People:

- Liability Release Form signed
- Ask questions of paddlers:
 - Can they swim?
 - Do they have special medical conditions that need to be considered?
 - Can they perform a wet exit?
 - Do they have plenty of drinking water and a snack in their boat?
 - Do they have time constraints - a time by which they need to be back?
- Everyone have sun block & hats
- Lead/ Sweep assignments

Trip Details

- Trip Description: Distance, things to see
- Restrooms at start and end of trip
- Paddle Conditions: Weather, tides, other
- Hazards: Hypothermia, heat stroke and response

Emergency Communications Numbers

- VHF Radio - Channel 16
- Cell Phone – Call 911 and tell them it is an “On The Water Emergency” and describe the emergency

Appendix C - Liability Insurance Coverage & Policy

- The club will make every effort to maintain liability protection each year from a reputable source that will provide reasonable protection for the club members and officers.
- The club will not provide any transportation to or from it's on-the-water activities.
- Contact the TBSK Safety and Training Coordinator for help in getting details of the insurance coverage.

Appendix D - Trip Leader Orientation Session

Details of the Trip Leader orientation can be found on the TBSK web site under "Trip Planning". Trip Leaders must attend continuing trip leader orientation every two years.

Appendix E - Hypothermia and Heat Stress & Ways to Prevent Them

- 1. Cold Weather - The 120 Rule of Thumb:** When the sum of the water and air temperatures is **less** than 120, the participants must be dressed for immersion with wetsuits, dry suits, or "warm when wet" clothing such as fleece or wool.
- 2. Hot Weather - The 103 Rule of Thumb:** When the heat index is **more** than 103, you are in danger of heat stress (see heat index chart below). Because high humidity magnifies the effect of high temperature on us, weathermen often call this a "feels like" temperature. The heat index values are developed for shady, light wind conditions. Exposure to full sunshine can increase the Heat Index dramatically. The National Weather Service recommends "extreme caution" when the Heat Index range of 91 to 103 and to be aware of heat stress "danger" in the range of 103-124.

If you would like to determine the heat index for a planned paddle you can find the information at:

- Daily heat index information at WeatherForYou.com (scroll down to forecast details)
<http://www.weatherforyou.com/reports/index.php?forecast=zandh&pands=pinellas+county,florida>
- The National Weather Service issues a weekly prediction of the heat index here:
http://www.hpc.ncep.noaa.gov/heat_index.shtml

Overheating can quickly progress to heat exhaustion and/or heat stroke which can cause serious injury or death. Contrary to popular belief simply maintaining adequate hydration and electrolytes **will not** preclude a heat illness accident. Experience has shown that if all four of the following conditions are present, a high potential for onset of heat illness exists.

- a. High Air Temperature (88 degrees and above)
- b. High Humidity (80% and above - it feels "muggy")
- c. Low Wind (5 knots or less)
- d. High Water Temperature (86 degrees and above)

If all four of the above conditions are present, or anticipated during a kayak trip, trip leaders should consider cancelling the trip or taking the following precautions:

- Plan trips earlier in the day.
- Stop frequently for water breaks and check that all have and use adequate hydration and electrolytes.
- Reduce trip distance and paddle speed.
- Avoid getting caught in open water, remote locations, or other situations where rescue would be difficult.
- Avoid long downwind legs on a hot day.

- Avoid the “doldrums” typically found adjacent to building storms and/ or in the transition period between the morning breeze and the afternoon sea breeze.

Symptoms of heat stress include; profuse sweating, headache, pale or red skin, nausea, muscle cramps, weakness, dizziness, lose of coordination, and many others. Once a participant starts to succumb to heat illness, it will be very difficult to cool the victim down and reverse the process. Towing a victim will hazard the rescuers to overheating.

If you, or anyone else in your group, have symptoms of heat stress, it's essential to immediately get out of the heat and rest. If you can't get inside:

- Find the nearest cool and shady place and have the victim lie down
- Remove any tight or unnecessary clothing
- Have the victim drink plenty of fluid (avoid caffeine and alcohol)
- Pour water over him/her to aid in the cooling process
- Seek medical help

NOAA's National Weather Service

Heat Index

Temperature (°F)

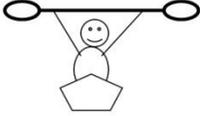
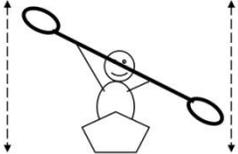
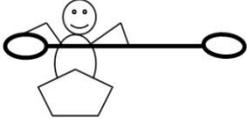
	80	82	84	86	88	90	92	94	96	98	100	102	104	106	108	110
40	80	81	83	85	88	91	94	97	101	105	109	114	119	124	130	136
45	80	82	84	87	89	93	96	100	104	109	114	119	124	130	137	
50	81	83	85	88	91	95	99	103	108	113	118	124	131	137		
55	81	84	86	89	93	97	101	106	112	117	124	130	137			
60	82	84	88	91	95	100	105	110	116	123	129	137				
65	82	85	89	93	98	103	108	114	121	128	136					
70	83	86	90	95	100	105	112	119	126	134						
75	84	88	92	97	103	109	116	124	132							
80	84	89	94	100	106	113	121	129								
85	85	90	96	102	110	117	126	135								
90	86	91	98	105	113	122	131									
95	86	93	100	108	117	127										
100	87	95	103	112	121	132										

Likelihood of Heat Disorders with Prolonged Exposure or Strenuous Activity

- Caution
 Extreme Caution
 Danger
 Extreme Danger

Appendix F - Paddle Signals To Use on Trips

Oftentimes on trips, paddlers cannot hear directions from the Trip Leader. Therefore, it is helpful to have paddle signals which communicate to the participants on the trip.

Command From Trip Leader	Paddle Signal	Graphic of Paddle Signal
<p>Stop (Stop momentum)</p>	<p>Paddle held horizontally</p>	
<p>Go (Go forward to designated location)</p>	<p>Paddle held vertically</p>	
<p>Back Paddle/ Slow Down (Slow down if used while touring, paddle backwards when in surf zone)</p>	<p>Paddle held horizontal with ends moving up & down alternately</p>	
<p>Paddle to right or left (Go in direction leader's paddle is pointing)</p>	<p>Paddle pointing upward to the right or left</p>	
<p>Emergency/Gather-up (The speed of the wave changes from emergency (fast wave) to gather-up (slow wave)).</p>	<p>Paddle pointing upward and moving from side to side</p>	