

Water Changes

Written by: Lori (Stewart) Velisek and Jackie Webber

False Creek Racing Canoe Club

There is a lot going on when a water change is occurring and everything happens so fast that there is no time to think about what is going on. The secret to doing successful water changes is:

1. To develop an **"AUTO PILOT"** – This is done by practicing changes slowly from start to finish in stages.
2. Practice your changes using mental visualization. Mastering changes is hard work, BUT changes don't have to be hard or painful.

Changes can be challenging and fun rather than intimidating and scary

In the Water

Once you have left the comfort of the escort boat, you need to do a few things:

1. Line up in order with the appropriate amount of space between you and the next paddler.
2. Raise a hand in the air so your steersman can line up with you. As the canoe gets close, have your left hand up so you can make contact with the canoe and protect your head from the iakos.
3. When in line, let the canoe come to you – **STAY IN A STRAIGHT LINE DO NOT SWIM TOWARDS THE CANOE.**
4. Call out your seat as the canoe approaches you.
5. As the canoe approaches you, you should be focused on the canoe and know exactly where you will grab the canoe.

In the Canoe

A change is coming up and the whole boat needs to be ready for it ...

1. The caller makes the appropriate changes to get paddlers on their correct side coming into the change (the people getting out are on ama side.) This way the people getting into the canoe won't have their blades in their face before they grab the canoe, which combined with dodging iakos can be distracting and ruin your approach. Also, the paddlers staying in, can paddle hard without having to avoid heads and other body parts. This approach works the best with 1 and 2 person changes. If you are doing a 3 person change, you can choose to have one of the paddlers staying in, paddling ama side once the bodies have gone past them. (This is a fine tune point which should be worked out as a group.)
2. If you are the caller and you are getting out, it is your responsibility to pass the "calling duty" off to a fellow paddler who is staying in the boat, **well before the change occurs.**
3. Once the signal for a change has been given from the coach boat, a designated paddler (the caller or steersperson usually) should clearly announce the upcoming change (ie. Seat 2 and 4). It is then sometimes a good idea for everyone to echo the instigated "change call", to ensure that everyone is aware of the upcoming change and who will be exiting the boat.
4. **If the canoe is skirted:** at a reasonable time before the change, the steersperson will call for paddlers to "UNZIP". Unzipping always occurs from BACK to FRONT. The logic here is that the bow seats take on more water than stern seats; thus, the fronts should unzip last. Once the paddler has unzipped they call out "4 seat unzipped" nice and loud. And up the boat it goes, one at a time, with the next paddler unzipping.

The Change

APPROACHING THE CANOE:

1. Left hand in the air should make light contact with the side of the canoe. This is for proprioception, meaning that your body knows where the canoe is by touch and vision.
2. Your body should be no more than arms length away from the canoe and no less than one foot. (this will allow you to establish proper "ATTACK DISTANCE", which is a must.)
3. Try to keep your legs as close to the surface of the water as much as possible in your approach, it would be useful to use more of a breast stroke approach. Prior to grabbing the canoe, your feet are on the surface of the water pointing away from the oncoming boat. This prevents paddlers from grabbing the canoe with their legs directly under them, which will cause a drag on the boat.

THE GRAB:

1. Look for your spot to grab (which is usually marked with tape on the side of the canoe at the front of each seat). At this point, the paddlers full concentration should be on **WHERE** and **WHEN** to grab the canoe.

The rest should be AUTO PILOT!!:

2. Extend your arms and reach towards the “grab spot” with both arms. Legs are behind you close to the surface.
3. As soon as you touch the canoe you kick with your legs (scissors or dolphin kick). The most common error is grabbing late. If you grab late, the canoe starts to pass you, your legs sink deeper into the water and you end up clinging to the canoe with your legs flailing behind you. If this occurs, you’ll have to use a great deal more energy and muscle to get in. If you time it right, you won’t have to be killer strong! (Technique and Timing is key)

“SO GRAB EARLY AND GRAB WITH EXTENSION!”

4. Your kick coincides with your arm pull. It is one explosive, committed, and “whole body” effort that takes you to a “front support position” (both your hands and hip line on the gunwale – with your weight on your hands.)
5. From the “Front Support Position”, lean forward slightly to get your legs out of the water and simultaneously reach for the far gunwale with your **right hand**. If you keep your left arm straight and strong, your bum should be almost be inside the near gunwale. Twist your torso to the left so your bum finds the seat, then swing your legs in and pick up your paddles and GO!

***note**

The important part of the change is getting to the front support position and then reaching for the gunwale with the right hand. It is important to find the far gunwale because your body then knows where it needs to go: between your hands! If you can get to this position you can step into the boat, fall in, “bum in”, crawl in, etc. The key is you are not slowing the boat down by dragging your legs in the water.

Get Out!

The change is close, you’re unzipped, you’re paddling on the correct side and you’re ready to get out ...

1. Timing :

When your replacement paddler is about a “2 to 3 seat distance away”, you should be stowing your paddle. When they are a “1 to 2 seat distance away” you should be getting out.

***note:** Try not to get out too late because you will interfere with your replacement paddler...

Also, if you stop paddling and stow your paddle too soon, and time passes before you get out of the canoe, the rest of the paddlers will be pulling dead weight!

2. Stowing Your Paddle:

If your canoe has paddle clips, simply ensure your blade is down and touching the bottom of the canoe and clip the shaft of the paddle into place (vertically).

If there are no clips, you need to stow your paddle on the far right hand side of the canoe, blade is down in the canoe and the paddle handle rests on the right hand side of your seat. This allows for as little disruption to the paddler trying to enter the boat.

“TAKE THE TIME TO STOW YOUR PADDLE PROPERLY!”

A Note About Sprayskirts

1. Misconceptions:

Some people seem to be a little more reluctant about doing changes with skirted boats for the following reasons:

“the spot I have to get into is smaller”

“I can’t see the seat”

“The skirt is slippery”

To clear up this issue...the sprayskirt is your friend. If it is fully unzipped, there is lots of room. If the front of the seat is marked by tape on the side of the canoe, below the skirt, you shouldn’t have any problems. The hoops will also alert you that your seat is coming up. Actually, you’ll find that the skirts give better traction than any unwaxed gunwale, so go for it, use it to your advantage!

2. Zipping

Once the change is complete in a skirted boat, the call to zip up can occur (generally initiated from the caller or steersperson). Zipping occurs from the FRONT to the BACK. The call would then come from the front most paddler ie "1 seat zipping" ... "1 seat zipped". Then down the boat, with the next paddler calling out that they are zipping and then have successfully zipped. Only one paddler zips at a time.

3. Bailing

If a change has occurred and it's not too rough, sometimes 4 or 5 seat (bailing seats) can leave their skirt unzipped to bail after the boat gets up and running again. If 4 or 5 seat decides to bail they should indicate this to their teammates by calling "4/5 seat bailing"

Mental Visualization

Mental Visualization is a process that is encouraged to help you with your changes. You need to be able to "see" yourself doing changes correctly, competently and with precision. To do this, find a time when you are relaxed!!! (maybe a quiet time at home, just before falling asleep, just as you wake up, sitting in your parked car or maybe at work?!?!)

Picture your water change with the "picture" that you are physically in the water and the canoe is approaching ...(Visualize your exact position as the boat approaches) ...What are you doing? Is your left hand up? ... Make contact with the canoe ...look for your grab spot ...focus on it ...legs are close to the surface ... reaching for it ... GRAB /KICK ... front support ... reach for the far gunwale ... get my legs/bum in ... there's the paddle ... look up ... Which side do I start on? ... OK ...**GO!**

Now, picture the same successful change from an outside perspective, as if you are watching a video tape. Go through the same change. See you change in slow motion with all the stages – and then see it at full speed, being precise and powerful with no wasted strokes. Try to stay focused (you should not be distracted in the middle of any mental training.) Always visualize the perfect change with no errors. Never see yourself fall, stumble or cling – it's not an option!

If you visualize often and practice often you will have great changes!

GOOD LUCK!!