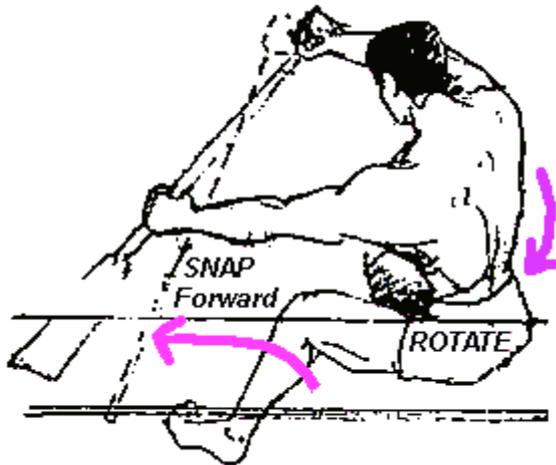


Paddle Technique - Phase One

The Catch



Few sounds on the water generate as much satisfaction as 20 paddles plunging into the water in time and without splash; except maybe that sound a high platform diver makes when they cut the water surface with nothing more than a ruffle of bubbles. Burying the blade in the water is called the 'CATCH' and it should be well in front of your body critical to initiate a powerful stroke. This is where most novice paddlers are the weakest and it is the point at which even veteran paddlers fail when they start losing power due to lack of conditioning. The most common problem is to lose length by catching the water too far back by not reaching far enough forward in the RECOVERY or start smacking the water with a misguided sense of aggression.

A good CATCH requires a deliberate and powerful drive downward by your top arm, which is made more effective when the wrist and elbow of your upper arm are above the inside shoulder making your forearm parallel to the water surface. Some teams utilize very high upper hands to emphasize a forceful drive into the water, though good control as the blade enters the water is important to avoid splash.

Good paddle entry is executed in either a vertical 'spearing' of the water or can be combined with a slightly diagonal 'slice' as the blade carves into the water. The slice is found to be very effective by locking the blade in fast and deep with less of a vertical lunge, though requires a greater participation from the bottom hand in combination with the upper arm drive. Your bottom arm must be fully extended forward, but not locked at the elbow to help ANCHOR the paddle in the water quickly and cleanly to its full depth and correct location relative to the side of the boat, without any splash or horizontal movement.

A common problem is that 'work' is often applied too late after the CATCH as a paddler may be well into the first part of the STROKE phase before full power is exerted (wasted potential is a paddling sin). A good CATCH technique must transmit power into the STROKE phase within a fraction of a second. This is also important to unify CATCH in the boat in order to maximize POWER with each paddler transmitting power into the STROKE at the same time,

which is not always apparent. Getting into the water at the same time is one thing; beginning to pull together is another and is vital to a fast boat.

Excess splash or cavitation in the water (trapped air and disturbed water) is an indication that you are applying power with the momentum of the vertical drive, before the paddle is fully buried (lost energy is another paddling sin). The paddle blade at entry should be moving forward at the same speed as the boat in order to avoid such splashing. Smacking the water too aggressively can result in broken paddles and can lead to tension when your teammate behind you receives an unwanted face full of water. This type of problem is often created by a misapplication of aggression and is usually an indication that a paddler is getting tired or is unable to keep up with the pace. The CATCH is not a power phase, it's how you get into the water. Keep it fast and keep it clean.

Another common mistake is to lunge too far forward with your upper body or to bend excessively at the waist which starts the boat bobbing up and down.

"You want to run a quiet boat. You want a smooth running boat. Every time the boat wiggles left or right or bobs up and down, you lose a little. This can play havoc with your speed and efficiency — be fast." — Peter Heed

Remember that the length of 'the forward stroke' is controlled by a fully extended bottom arm and a rotated torso. You only need to bend far enough forward to bury the blade to its full depth at the CATCH.

Remember also, a powerful CATCH comes from a strong upper arm drive into the water at a forward position which is sharp, clean and instantly transmits power into the STROKE. Once the stroke rating increases to 90 plus, emphasis on the CATCH becomes more important in order to deliver power quickly.