



## 17 WHITE WATER

*The job of a white water coach has many elements, all interrelated and complex. The best analogy I can find is that of a juggler.*

### INTRODUCTION

As with everything on white water it's a question of understanding the components and how they relate to each other. The two main components are:

- Safety - And how the coach manages it.
- Fundamentals - Body, Boat, Blade, Background and Brain.

### ► SAFETY

One of the more frequent comments about coaching goes something like this...

'Steve Redgrave's coach can't row faster than Steve Redgrave'.

It is offered to justify why a coach need not be able to paddle. Well the statement is essentially correct, however Steve Redgrave's coach doesn't need to travel on white water to do his job. As a recreational white water coach you do!

To fulfil your role as a coach you must ensure the session is safe. That means being able to paddle if you are to supervise your students.

Safety, when you're a recreational white water coach is about:

- Your own skill.
- Your ability to make judgement calls about locations, activities and realistic goals for your paddlers.

The reality is that coaching is both a physical and mental activity for the white water coach. We know as coaches that if we are having to focus our efforts on performing physical skills it is very difficult to think about other things. You should not need to focus your attention on yourself when coaching. Your attention should only be on your students and coaching them.

*This all means that you must be able to paddle!*



KEY POINT

- Demonstration as a teaching tool and/or a method of feedback is a valuable tool. You have to be able to paddle to use this tool!

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

White water, especially for novices, can be a very scary place. The need to feel and be safe is one of the basic instincts (it's the foundation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs).

Not a lot of people know this but Maslow was a white water coach! He developed a theory identifying that fundamental elements of security, respect and self-worth need to be addressed if our students are to develop. Although primarily a motivational theory it is very applicable to white water coaching, especially when it comes to safety, security and learning.

If we interpret Maslow for the coach, he suggests that for people to be motivated (learn), they have

to be physically secure (warm), fed and watered and their basic needs addressed. Once these are covered, the immediate physical safety needs to be addressed (the student should feel at no physical risk). He then states that psychological security needs to be covered (a positive, respectful learning environment without fear of ridicule). For learning to be possible Maslow also suggests that the learning environment needs to be one that recognises achievement and responds to it in an individualised way.

► Qualities Of The White Water Coach

In a nutshell the white water coach has to be friendly, caring and compassionate.

Empathise with your students, try learning something new yourself just to make sure you know how it feels.

You must be safe. You will need to be considerate, modest, patient, understanding, honest and able to do this in your boat from an eddy or from the bank if the conditions permit.

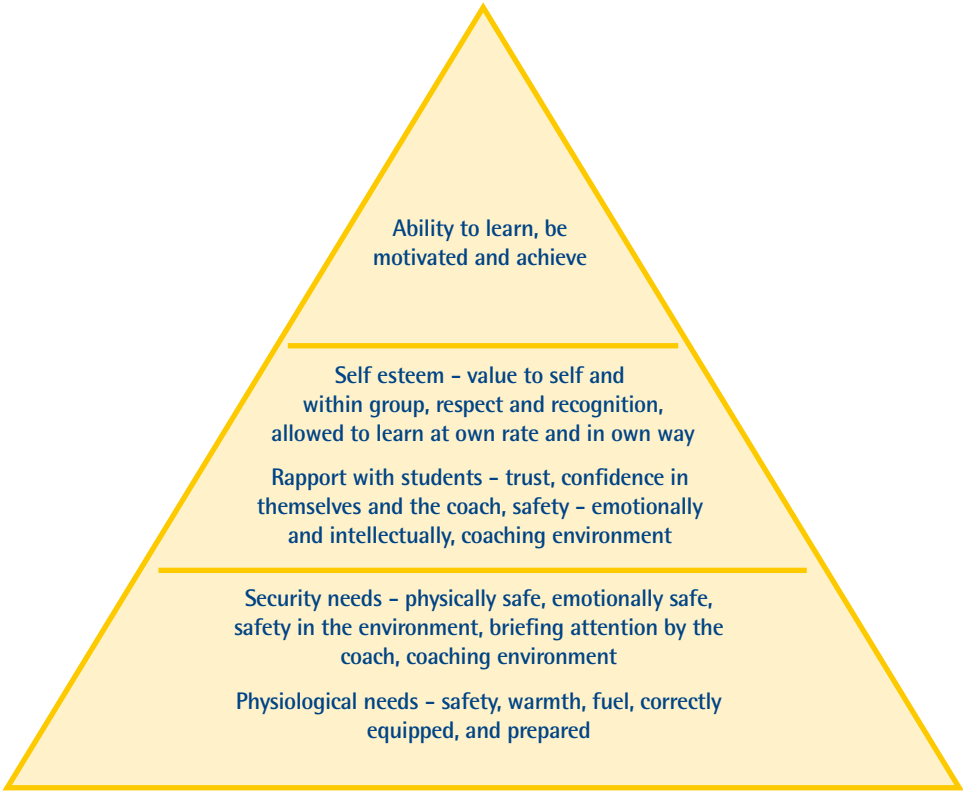


Fig. 1 Maslow, the White Water Coach!

Qualities of the white water coach:

- ✓ Friendly
- ✓ Caring
- ✓ Compassionate
- ✓ Considerate
- ✓ Modest
- ✓ Patient
- ✓ Understanding
- ✓ Honest

You need to enjoy your boating, you don't have to be a zealot but you do need to be able to paddle and enjoy it! The passion and enthusiasm you have will inspire people to take part. You need to be, and appear to be confident.

The safety of your clients is about your judgement. The responsibility lies with you to ensure the immediate safety (what you do on the water), the long term safety (injury prevention, appropriate skill development for the future) and the overall well-being of your student (the rate of development and the nature of the coaching environment).



Photo 1 An enjoyable experience

The safety of your clients is paramount. However maintaining your student safety is not simply a case of supervising them so closely that an accident can't happen.

## ▶ THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF SUPERVISION

Your supervision skills should be a natural process. (You should be able to paddle to ensure the CLAP principles are maintained on the grade of water you are coaching on. You will not be a bank-based coach).

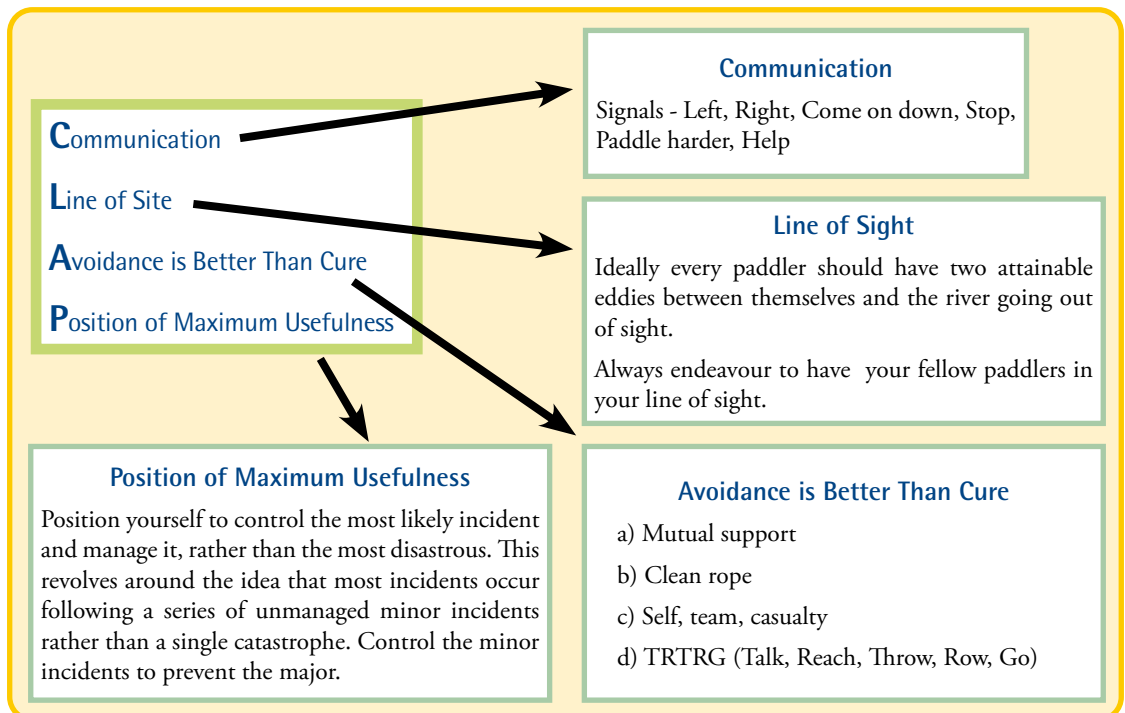


Fig. 2 CLAP - the principles of white water safety

## MAINTAINING A SAFE COACHING ENVIRONMENT

In particular your skills should extend to applying the 'A' (Avoidance is better than cure) very well because both safety and coaching will hinge on your judgement to maintain a safe coaching environment. Often the recreational coach manages risk rather than removes it. A great deal of this is about selecting a venue that the student finds challenging enough to develop, but not so intimidating as to prevent learning (it's an arousal level and a Maslow thing). Your students will not learn if they are too preoccupied with their own safety and security, but do need to be challenged in order to gauge their achievements. This is a hard level to find. The physical demands of white water may suggest quite a high level of arousal yet the cognitive processes of learning to paddle on white water may suggest a lower arousal level.



Photo 2 A safe coaching environment

### ► Striking A Balance

A balance has to be struck that creates a safe environment in which to work but is not so secure that it fails to challenge the paddlers. This can only be based on experience and is definitely not an excuse to compromise safety.

Consider safety when coaching as a balance: students' ability versus risk posed by the environment. The balance will change as your students improve, as the skills being coached develop, as the session progresses and the students become increasingly tired. There is a point at the start of a session when student ability and environment will be furthest apart and the coach will be more directly involved with practical safety issues. As the ability of the paddler develops the

gap closes, the coach has to ensure a gap remains suitable between ability and goal to ensure progress can be gauged by both parties. This can be achieved in one of three ways: changing the technique, changing the environment, changing both, all of which are appropriate and effective.

Broadly speaking:

- ✓ Changing the technique creates a range of options that the paddler may select from when paddling.



Photo 3a Low brace turn breakout



Photo 3b Bow rudder turn breakout

- ✓ Changing the environment can be used to create a robust individual technique, i.e one may be used in a greater range of situations or with greater reliability in the continually changing environment of white water.

- ✓ Changing both allows you to explore the application of different techniques in different applications.

The skill of the white water coach lies in maintaining the arousal level at the appropriate point for each student in relation to the type of activity. If you want to develop physical components of white water skill you may want a higher arousal level. When refining





4a



4b

Photo 4a Spangle (Speed and Angle) breakout

Photo 4b Spangle breakout in different eddy



5a



5b

Photo 5a Bow rudder breakout into tight eddy

Photo 5b Spangle breakout into deep eddy

skills and when you want a variety in performance you will be working with a lower level, and when developing judgement/cognitive skills you will be even lower. As you move within this 'coaching zone' (an imaginary box defined by an upper limit 'scared' and a lower limit 'bored'), your practical supervision will change and a new balance has to be considered, that of observation versus supervision.

### ► Observation VS Supervision

When environment and performance are close, you need to consider the point at which the paddler or the group can take greater responsibility for their own safety.



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Photo 6 Coaching from the bank, boat and equipment to hand.

The coach in the first photograph has elected to coach from the bank. His student's ability is high and he can handle the difficulty of the water easily, he has a reliable roll and the site has a large slow moving pool at the bottom. The rest of the group are of similar standard and can help in the unlikely event of a swim. The coach can watch the complex actions of the move, use a video and focus on the coaching rather than safety, the student is comparing, contrasting and thinking.



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Photo 7 Coach in boat

The same coach and student are at a different venue. This time the site does not have a safe run-out and is busy. The coach has elected to coach from the boat and will move around to get the best possible supervision and observation. He will physically move around the eddy to ensure both roles are maintained, to physically time his feedback, maintain line of sight for supervision and observation.

## ► CHOICE OF VENUE

The choice of venue can lie with the coach or the student if they have sufficient experience. The environment for effective learning will be different for each individual and the student's perception of the security of the coaching venue will have a dramatic effect on the effectiveness of your coaching. The venue should challenge the paddler but not intimidate them. It should have scope for moves to be practised on both sides, have an area that allows for feedback to be provided and allow you to observe the paddler effectively.

Same coach, same student, different skill, different venue... different approach.

Consideration must be given to:

- Feature - Does the venue have the kind of water/bank you need to teach the skills you have identified. Is it appropriate? An easier venue could be better than a hard venue. Is it consistent? How long will you work here? Will it be tiring for the students?
- River downstream - What is downstream? Is it safe? Do you need to brief your students about it? What will you do if you need to deal with a swim, can you see or will you need to move?

○ Other river users - How busy is it? Tours and events tend to be very busy and are not the best place to coach or be coached.

○ Other paddlers and etiquette - The attitude of some paddlers would lead you to believe they must have learnt to paddle by the laying on of hands method. Unfortunately the 'wannabes' may not be patient or considerate to your students. A quiet word to explain or physically helping your student by appropriate boat positioning can help.

○ Other coaches - Talk to the other coaches using the site. This will make sure you don't get in each other's way. Don't move slalom gates if they're in use. Likewise don't encourage your group to queue jump. Keep an eye out upstream for downriver traffic. Perhaps you could use a different venue?

## VENUE AND PRACTICE

We aspire to create a performance that is skilful, robust enough to be performed in a variety of places and that has solid foundations. To achieve this a white water coach should endeavour to use a variety of different venues and should be wary of overusing a single site as this leads to the development of 'narrow based' skill. Initially, as the foundation moves are learnt, it may be necessary to work a single site to generate a solid foundation of technique BUT at the earliest opportunity the venue should be changed to generate a robust basic model for the students' performance.

*"Variety is the spice of practice"*

The skill for the coach is in judging the impact of the venue on your student. This enables you to ensure the environment/task is pitched at the optimum level for the student and skills you are coaching. The impact of the environment cannot be overstressed because its effect can be catastrophic. I would consider the venue in terms of four elements:

**P**ositive - The consequences of mistakes are not significant and the results achievable. The objective is to achieve, not avoid!

**U**nderstandable - The venue is clearly defined with the kind of features needed being easily recognisable by the students.

**R**ealistic - At a level of activity that has a relation to the ability of the student.

**E**njoyable - Not physically exhausting or boring.

## PURE

Whether you're getting it right or wrong there are indicators the coach can pick up on:

✓ Listen to your group - There should be conversation within your group. If you can't hear it they could be intimidated by the site. If the conversation is about what you've asked them to do it should be positive, you will need to keep a careful eye on performance. Try to encourage conversation by asking people to consider setting their own goals or using a reciprocal approach that has people working in pairs or threes, so they can watch and coach each other under your guidance.

✓ Watch for changes in performance - If the performance level drops the site could be too difficult (expect it to fall initially as they get used to the site). If there is no improvement the site could be too much. You may not need to change the venue, you may get away with de-tuning the exercise initially. The intensity of the environment has the potential to occupy many aspects of the students' learning capacity; reducing the complexity of the exercise can sometimes help. A rule of thumb: capsize and roll or swim more than once and the exercise could be too hard, consider changing.

✓ Watch for changes in behaviour - If the person who has been 'go for it' now becomes quiet and waits till last, the exercise or environment could be too hard. The quiet person now starts to ask loads of questions when they haven't in the past, consider changing the exercise for them. Are they asking if you think they'll be OK? This is because they have doubts!

✓ Look at your students - Have they physically drawn back from you, are they pale, do they look scared or concerned. Possibly this is because they are, so don't ignore it.

## ▶ OBSERVATION STRATEGIES FOR THE WW COACH

Observation is the key skill for the coach. It doesn't matter how well timed, structured or delivered your feedback is if it's wrong! The quality of your observation and your understanding of what you are looking at is a foundation skill.

### *'Look and Listen'*

The practicalities of observation must be considered. Often the best place to observe a performance is not the best place to ensure your student's safety. For the environment to be suitable for learning to take place there should not be a real risk to your students, so if you are working in an appropriate environment the bias can be towards the observation. Nevertheless, you should never neglect the safety issues of your role.

The act of observation will change a student's performance; formal observation will have the greatest impact, informal will have least. As a coach you will need to consider: what you actually see, what you don't see, and what you can't see.

○ What you actually see - With what you do see, look for several repetitions of similar actions, look for a root cause to a common problem before dealing with individual specific problems, i.e. look for common causes.

○ What you don't see - This is particularly important with informal observation strategies. It is easy for the paddler to do only what they feel comfortable doing, not what they don't feel good at doing (and it could be this that you want to coach). Sometimes the venue may not allow you to see some things. You may need to ask to see what you've missed, change a venue or move your observational position.

○ What you can't see - You will not be able to see the work going on with the legs within the boat or the amount of work the paddler feels they're actually doing. The only way to address this is to create a way in which the paddler can provide you with quantifiable answers to your questions.

Observation is like any skill... with practice its use will become refined and improve. The more we observe the more experiences we can draw on when we observe in the future.

We can classify our observation approaches into three broad categories: Analytical, Deductive and Holistic. A



white water coach will use all three methods of observation, often at the same time (see Chapter 1).

### ► FOUNDATION SKILLS

Getting to grips with white water assumes a level of competency in foundation boat handling skills by the student. Without solid foundations none of the fancy stuff works. Flat water foundation skills are the basis for white water skills and white water foundation skills are the basis for freestyle skills. If you can't ferry glide you can't get to the wave to pull the moves, and if you can't ferry or break out you can't get back into the eddy. Not fashionable or 'new school' but true!

You could easily argue that the job of a white water coach starts on flat water. Some of the things we learn on the pond in preparation for white water aren't actually what we do on white water.

It is the weaknesses of the component parts that lead to the rapid onset of exhaustion in the novice paddler. The emphasis on foundation skills should be equal to the importance of understanding the impact of environment on their performance.

It's a Gestalt thing.

*'The whole is greater than the value of the component parts.'*

### REVISITING FLAT WATER SKILLS

Accordingly the good white water coach should not be afraid to revisit some skills on flat water. It is primarily a presentation problem for the coach because many people want to be on 'the white stuff'. Hence the use of the term 'foundation' rather than 'basic'. More importantly, the coach will need to approach these skills with the same enthusiasm and in the same, student-centred manner. For these sessions to work the coach will need to consider the context of the skills being taught and placing them in context for the paddlers.

At a foundation skill level the coach will want to focus on balance, speed and direction. This will require the coach to consider an active posture for the paddler, i.e. one that has stability at a core level (strength from physical position) allowing muscles to remain relaxed and flexible, giving greater boat/blade control and better intrinsic feedback.

In a preparation for a white water pond-based session the coach will want to consider:

- How to balance the boat, being able to control the amount of edge a boat has, both when stationary and when moving. (These aren't support strokes... that's about being off balance!)
- To do the 'when moving' of the above, the coach will need to make sure the paddlers can propel the boat forwards and backwards, accelerate and maintain speed... all with the boat on edge.
- Finally, once proficient with the above foundation skills, the student will need to be able to steer the boat with the boat on edge and moving forwards.

*Foundation skills first, specifics later.*

### ► Consider The Context Of The Final Skill

This means the coach can often avoid strokes which are best taught wholly in context, i.e. bow rudder, because when breaking in and out the blade angle is set relative to the current, and the low brace turn where the angle of boat sets the angle of the blade to the water when breaking in (not by feathering the blade as we do on flat water).



Photo 8 The bow rudder in context.

The sweep, knee, brace combination is only suited to flat water and has subtle differences that do not work well when breaking in or out. Flat water is a good place to develop the skills to achieve balance, by edging through dynamic balance to leaning and to develop confidence in the legwork, bottom position and body movements to





## EXERCISES – FLAT WATER PREPARATION FOR WHITE WATER

### • *Paddling the Plughole:*

- Aims:**
- Increase boat awareness.
  - Increase boat control.
  - Linking, modifying and blending strokes.

Place a buoy in a clear area of water. Paddle the boat in ever-decreasing circles in towards the buoy. Once at the buoy paddle out in ever-increasing circles without losing speed or control.

Set the boat into a skid, control the skid with a long power stroke. Gradually shorten the power stroke from the stern and allow the circles to tighten. When the skid is at its tightest start linking a bow draw to the front. For even tighter turns add a stern push away, creating a 'C' stroke. At its tightest keep the blade in the water in a continual movement.

Keep the boat moving.

To move out, add a little more emphasis to the forward power part of the stroke until the slice can be removed. Then lessen the correction at the stern; the radius of the turn will increase. To increase the radius further, lessen the bow draw until only the bow sweep remains. Gradually lengthen the sweep and bring it closer to the boat until it is a full-length power stroke and bring the boat onto a straight course with an effective stern sweep.

### • *'Syncro' paddling:*

- Aims:**
- To have fun.
  - Encourage variety in strokes, length, shape, etc.
  - To encourage thought about stroke choice.

Delegate a 'Team Leader'; this person is the main coordinator for this exercise and should be confident. Identify a short course that has three distinct 'legs'. A simple game of 'follow the leader' starts the ball rolling. Specify to the leader that they should include a certain variety of movements, 360° spins with sweeps, quick stops, four strokes in reverse, etc. The group should follow on straight behind each other. Once you've completed the exercise, pick a new leader and specify a new content to the route, more spins, sideways, etc. Rather than following 'line astern', attempt the whole course in a 'Delta' formation, leader at the front. Finally, identify another leader, redesign the course and its content and perform the whole course in 'Diamond' formation.

Other variations include:

- *'Follow the Leader'*: On a rocky shoreline or rapid.
- *'Custer's Last Stand'*: With the leader in the centre, have the group circle and on the leader's command change direction, spin, draw in or out.
- *'North, South, East, West'*: In a defined area specify a North side, South side, East side and West side. The team leader shouts out the point of the compass and the whole group have to move to that side. The boat should always be facing the same direction so forwards, backwards strokes and draw strokes can be used.



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*Photo 9 The brace often turns into a reverse sweep thus killing all the forward speed - not good!*

achieve that. However, the tendency is for paddlers to create a turn on the flat with no edge and a brace that actually becomes a reverse sweep. On white water this kills all the speed and doesn't allow the boat to cross into or out of eddies. This is often why people miss eddies!

A true understanding of the boat handling skills is essential to understand the context of the technique if it is to become skilfully applied. It's the only way the coach can truly understand the end result and the goal-setting process.

## ► RECREATIONAL BOATERS ARE PEOPLE TOO!

The ability to surf a wave and move around it is essential. Learning how the boat reacts on all the different parts of a wave will develop a great understanding of positioning, and positioning is key to achieving the more advanced freestyle moves such as blunts, flip turns, donkey flips and a host of other tricks that are still being invented.

Ask yourself what motivates you to paddle white water? The answers will be as varied and as individual as you are. Our individual motivations may be varied but we can be sure that if people don't feel safe, enjoy the activity and enjoy the learning, their motivations and goals cannot be met. It's a Maslow thing.

It is probably unfashionable to say that some people have a natural aptitude for white water paddling, in the same way that some people have a natural aptitude for playing a musical instrument. This does not preclude people but it does mean that the coach needs to anticipate the kind of problems they are likely to encounter.

Some people will struggle with the continually changing and active environment. Others may enjoy the apparently unpredictable water but struggle with the subtle changes in technique required to control the boat. They may find it difficult to handle the concepts and principles of boat control and want specific techniques which are not the best overall answer. For some the actual speed can be too much.

## FINDING OUT ABOUT YOUR PADDLERS

As the coach you will be building on something. Your observations will help, but coaching and learning are personal skills; it is people we teach after all! Take some time to find out a little bit about the people you are teaching. Name, age, what they do? What other sports they do? When did they last paddle... and what? How was it? Did they like it? What do they want from you? What do they feel they need to work on? When they've been learning new things in the past what worked best? What doesn't work? Listen to the answers, not just their content but also how they are presented.

## DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE

Developing confidence can mean a great deal of things. Confidence is the key to white water. Simply doing lots of it will develop confidence. However, people will come to you because they want to develop that confidence more rapidly and without having it

knocked back. This puts you in a privileged position and is one you should accept carefully. People will want to learn to be confident and you can coach that in the same way you coach any skill. People can lack confidence because they are new to the sport, have had an experience that knocks them back before skills are developed sufficiently, or because they haven't had their confidence topped up recently. This can be intrinsically via their own experience (i.e. they haven't been paddling recently or they haven't seen an improvement in their own performance recently) or extrinsically (they haven't been told they are doing well recently or they haven't seen themselves doing well recently).

Sometimes little things can knock fragile confidence. Two words have a big influence, *but* and *should*. The word *but* negates anything positive you've said before the *but*, and *should* implies there is a correct way to do something and therefore an incorrect, i.e. wrong way. Try to take *but* and *should* out of your coaching vocabulary.

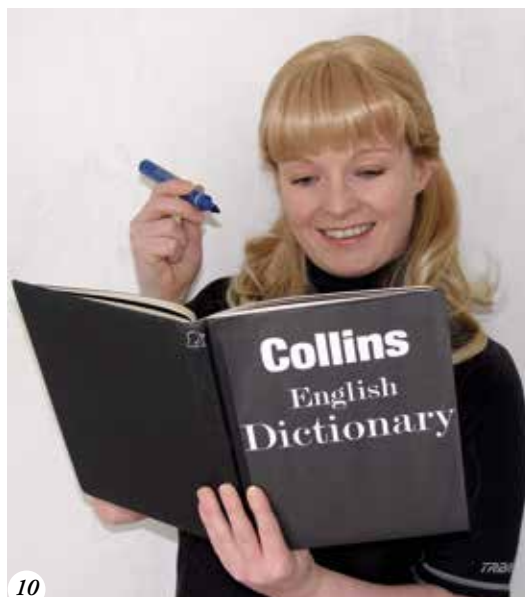


Photo 10 No such words as 'but' and 'should' in Loel Collins' Dictionary.

What we do know is that the more predictable an environment becomes the less anxiety a paddler feels and the greater opportunity they have to pre-empt actions. This reduces fear and on the whole improves performance. This is why confidence comes from experience. We know judgement is based on experience and judgement for paddlers is having the experience to pick the right skills to paddle the rapid. We know

that experiences have to be varied and positive but that this has to be gauged against negative experiences that are to some degree less successful. The role of the coach is to ensure those experiences are appropriate and safe. It's another one of those play-offs but here the balance is one of independence or dependence. As coaches we aspire for our students to be independent of us. Coach dependency can be a real problem but so can independence that comes too soon.

### ► Implications

When coaching the ability to read and understand white water, we need to take a very supportive and student-centred approach, one in which the students have ownership of the process and the information they are discovering. You know what you want them to find out and you ensure it's a safe environment, with you guiding the process. This is not and must not be exploratory because the safety issues will make it guided in nature, you must know what you want to achieve. Exploratory used poorly can be little more than an excuse to let the worst happen under the outdated guise of 'character building'. Simply throwing someone into a stopper and then picking up the pieces isn't coaching. It's massaging your ego and destroying your students, and is not what we do!

## ► UNDERSTANDING WHITE WATER

The clue is in the name! White Water Coach.  
The biggest single step!

Many people, when they first sit on moving water literally cannot make out the different parts of the river. To many novices the banks are dry, the river is wet and the water is flowing downstream, and that is the limit of their understanding. As a consequence, choice of venue becomes vitally important, not simply to ensure an appropriate teaching/learning physiological environment, but in terms of the easy identification of features and the physical details of the site.

*'Eddy, chute, eddy, just ain't enough!'*

For instance at a basic site the coach will want to explain:

- The location of eddies.
- The location and direction of eddy lines.
- The location and direction of chutes.

- The direction the water moves within the chutes and within the banks.
- The waves and what they mean.
- The direction the water is moving in each of these features.

The coach will need to develop strategies to enable him to do this, both from the bank and from the boat.

## COPING WITH RIVER MOVEMENT

Many paddlers initially struggle with the speed of a moving river. This stems from the need to appreciate the fact that, even if the paddlers do nothing, the river is still moving. Developing confidence and understanding of the speed of the water can be approached very effectively by drawing analogies with the paddlers' other experiences. Skiing, mountain biking, driving, all work and are often a good place to start. People who lack these previous experiences or who have struggled with this aspect of their other sports may need a more methodical approach. Illustrating the speed with a demonstration and even experiencing the movement by having people float past a point are useful strategies. Having people paddle up current and down current can be used to start to develop a feel and appreciation of the forces involved. Any warm-up should allow the student to experience the site in order to reduce the impact of the environment on the paddler.

### ► Video Game

An analogy of a video game works well for people who are increasingly using the TV. Encouraging the paddler to sit in their boat and imagine this action as it passes them by puts the movement into a context many people will understand.

### ► Dancing On The Bank

Walking or dancing on the bank works well. People can throw a log in the water and walk opposite the log on the bank. The same approach can be used for complex sequences. These are aspects of visualisation and physical rehearsal. Two aspects must be considered, firstly the paddler must have some experience in order to visualise effectively (even in this rudimentary way) and the emphasis must be on position rather than stroke sequences (particularly with inexperienced paddlers).

### ► Variations

The limitless variations of the white water environment will force the coach to teach in terms of the con-



## EXERCISES ON WAVES

### • *Off at a Tangent*

Aims: - Illustrate the effect of waves on a boat.

- Develop understanding of moving water.
- Illustrates the principle of gravity (water always runs downhill).
- Use of a wave to move a boat.

Find a small diagonal breaking wave, ideally crossing the current at 45°. Identify an obvious marker immediately below the wave to act as a reference point to gauge the results.

Run a comparative session that encourages the paddlers to hit the wave in different ways to examine the results (Fig. 3).

### • *Zigzags*

Aims: - Illustrate the use of waves to cross current.

- Develop reading water skills.
- Develops timing of strokes.
- Develops use of head and body in rotation.

On a series of standing waves, from the eddy on one side get the paddlers to 'ferry glide' across the wave into the opposite eddy. The key principle is to move onto the wave at its lowest point (in the trough).

Once achieving the initial cross with no paddle strokes on the wave, encourage the use of a stern rudder on the upstream side. Plenty of upstream edge. Get the paddler to surf back to the opposite eddy in that position. As they cross the eddy line get the paddler to raise the front hand and look back on to the wave. 'Visualise sliding your bottom away from the paddle'.

Once achieved, aim to paddle back onto the second wave and then repeat onto the third and then the fourth.

Aim to get the turn closer to the wave each time by reducing the strokes needed to get back on to the wave and starting the sequence on the eddy line and even before whilst still on the wave. The final result is that the surfer can surf and change direction on a single wave.

### • *Waltzing:*

Aims: - Water awareness.

- Timing strokes.
- Accuracy.
- Forwards and reverse work.

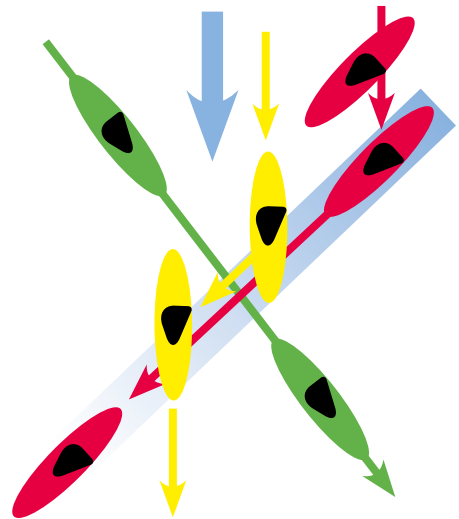


Fig. 3 Plan of a diagonal breaking wave with the path of different approaches.

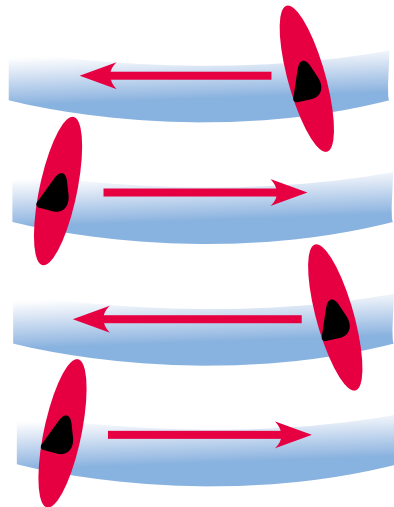


Fig. 4 Zigzags

On a rapid with clearly defined eddy lines, pick a sequence of eddies. The exercise is to 'tickle' the top third of each eddy with one end of the boat. As the boat crosses into the eddy the paddler uses a gentle opposing sweep to help spin the boat and keep it in the current. The boat re-enters the current facing the opposite direction. The paddler then has to put the downstream end of the boat into the next eddy and be spun round to face the original direction again.

This exercise can be combined with ferries and also only done with single strokes between eddies. Even eyes shut works in some places.





## EXERCISES ON WAVES – CONTINUED

### • *Mogul Turns*

Aims: - Illustrates the appropriate place to turn in waves.

- Develops timing of strokes.
- Develops water reading skills.
- Illustrates the 'free end principle'.

On a series of standing waves, create an exercise in which people float from the top through the waves. Allow people to do this a couple of times, eyes shut, eyes open, facing upstream, facing downstream and across the current.

Once the paddlers have become confident at that site, run a comparative exercise in which the paddlers are encouraged to try to turn the boat on the top of the waves and then in the troughs.

The paddlers may need several runs but the points should be illustrated that easier turns happen when the boat is on the crest of the waves whilst the ends are free, as opposed to being in the trough of the waves when the bow and stern are trapped by the wave upstream and downstream.

Once demonstrated try to turn 360° in 3 waves, then in 2, then on 1.

Try turning the boat to face one bank then the other. Turn on one wave above an eddy to create the ideal angle of attack.

### • *Choreography*

Aims: - To combine previous exercises.

- To put exercises into realistic practice.

Design runs down a rapid that meet the following criteria:

1. Changes in direction.
2. Changes in speed.
3. Changes in height.
4. Fluency.
5. Use of the whole rapid.
6. Variety of movements.

Allow the paddlers to choreograph their runs, discuss what meets the criteria best and how they will achieve it. Use visualisation to enhance the run, then walk down the bank performing the run, and finally perform the run.

cepts and principles for effective paddling rather than set piece moves. The initial building blocks must be in place and these must be introduced within the context of the principles that underpin good white water technique. As the environment changes the principles will remain the same even though the exact technique may differ. It is important to reference the techniques back to the principles you wish to illustrate. Part of this process will be for the coach to accept variation in performances, and will require the coach to consider the performance in terms of how the form presented could be applied in other environments and gauged relative to the principles rather than technique. This positive and supportive approach actively encourages a variety in performance, all of which we want to achieve as a coach.

A vital skill for any paddler and any student is the ability to read water from the boat. The impact of continually getting out of the boat to examine the site or the rapid is significant, and the value of being able to spot a clean and predictable line on moving water will make exercises work and illustrate techniques as being applicable. A few simple points from the coach may allow you to move more fluently between venues, run

simple single drops and improve the paddlers' ability to anticipate what will happen to them. Simply verbalising your thought process about line selection is a good place to start, and simple concise points that are clearly visible can be highlighted.

The coach, using his line to demonstrate the effect of the water, is a particularly good tool and works well. However, the key to learning to understand moving water is for the student to experience its effects.

Horizon lines mean a change in gradient and the steeper the rapid the closer you will have to get to the top of the rapid to inspect it. Mist below the horizon line is a bank inspection. Bits of splash and spray with no sequential standing waves need to be avoided.

Water within a wave will always move to the downstream end. Therefore the water will have that effect on you. Given a safe environment, an exercise that has the paddlers hitting diagonal waves at different angles will clearly illustrate the points. Setting sequences that specifically use the troughs of standing waves or even just the faintest hint of a trough can achieve some smashing results and if combined by reducing the

number of strokes used to complete a move will rapidly confirm that using the water is best.

### ► Looking At Features

Rather than looking for individual features look for sets of features. Standing waves should come in lines and the direction of the line is the direction the current is moving. An isolated standing wave is best avoided. A horizon line followed by an area of flat water is often a stopper; if that water is aerated the point at which the white area is furthest downstream is often the line. If there is no bubble line to make the point, get out and look. If the water is unaerated, get out and look. If in doubt, get out and look.

Look at how the water moves. Anything that is not constantly formed is doubtful, so get out and look.

### ► PLANNING A SESSION ON WHITE WATER

Increasingly the physical fitness of paddlers will limit the duration and content of the coaching sessions. The pace of each session, the structure of the whole day, and the nature of sessions in the long term will need to be considered. Paddlers will be unable to learn effectively if they are tired, indeed it often contributes to the 'grooving in' of poor technique and should be avoided.

## THE PACE OF THE SESSION

White water paddling can be very exhausting but is particularly tiring if you are being coached. The enthusiasm of the coach can often lead to repeated cycles of practice that rapidly become tiring. With many people a good warm-up will be tiring and the coach must ensure that the warm-up is considered as part of the session. The coach should guard against over-tiring the paddler by structuring the practices so that the site allows for rests and enables the paddler to take 'time out'. Overusing a site does not allow for the variety required in effective practice when skills are being refined, and also adds to the onset of boredom which will lead to tiredness and demotivation. The coach should keep a careful eye for unexplained drops in performance, people sitting out. Listen to people when they say they feel tired and watch for negative body language. A useful strategy is to deliberately change the exercises at a given site so it is not repeated more than 3 times and after 3 different exercises move to a different site. Having said that, one single go is not enough so the coach will need to strike

the happy mid-ground. A single session of around 90 minutes would be productive maximum.

Once they begin to get tired, the ability of your paddlers will diminish throughout the day. A simple structure can be applied as a guide. A two-session day can be used with paddlers who are taking on strenuous sessions or are unfit. A 90min session with a good rest with water and food, followed by a 60min teaching session can work. A three-session structure can work with fitter paddlers, 90min (teaching), break (water and food), 60min (coaching of skills from session 1) rest (water) followed by a 45min supervised paddle with minimal input (only when requested from paddler).

### ► COACHING ON THE MOVE

Increasingly, white water coaching as a discipline has two sides, the 'park 'n play' and the 'play the river'. Much of the specifics mentioned in this chapter will apply equally to both aspects of the coach's role, however it is worth considering coaching within the context of a river journey. For many people who learn to paddle on white water, it is not the paddle wagging and gymnastics of freestyle that attract them, it is the travelling that they aspire to. An important role for the white water coach is that of coaching within the journey and that does raise some issues for the coach that are best considered within a guiding/coaching framework.

In the long term the coach will want to address the actual fitness of the paddler and will need to structure the sessions to develop the fitness required (see Chapter 2).

This is no 'big thing'; the context of coaching within the journey can be different to that of a site-based session in something as simple as the fact that your paddlers will predominantly be facing downstream rather than upstream. This literally changes the paddler's view of the river and their ability to interpret the water can be lost.

The trip will take longer if you are going to coach en route. The river should be predominantly within the ability of the group but you should not discount a river that has sections at the limit of your group or above. Ideally these sections should be short and positioned along the trip as the 'highlights' of the trip or act as punctuations between sections. Sometimes the things we take for granted are the kind of things people want; these are not so much coaching points, more practical points or top tips. For instance, ensuring the clothes are in the car at the bottom of the river and making sure someone has the car keys for that car.



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*Photo 11 Rapid seen from high on the bank*

So our job as the coach can also be to consider the practicalities of doing a trip, its planning, and its problems. Practical hard skills like navigation, map work, accident procedures, river strategies, setting up a shuttle, getting a weather forecast, understanding it, access and egress and living from a boat all fall within our remit as coaches. Safety, rescue and river etiquette are of particular importance.

Choice of river can make a big difference. Consider the weather for the day. Trying to coach on a river that is exposed and being hit by a gale is almost impossible so pick a section of river that could be sheltered. The access and egress points should be considered; a long hard carry out at the end of the day will undo all your good work. Likewise the hardest rapid at the end of the day can mean ending the trip on a low point if someone swims, so pick a section where the hardest point is not right at the end and if you have time make sure you finish the river on a high note. The trick is to know the river or have good guidebook and map info at hand so you can plan ahead.

The pace of the day will need to be watched. It is very easy to coach eddy to eddy; this overloads your paddlers and takes most of the day to cover 2km on a



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*Photo 12 Same rapid seen from boat level*

5km trip, leaving you to rush the rest. Here you need periods of coaching on the fly, set exercises to work on and even simply free paddle, with paddlers working to individually identified goals. The trick is to vary the pace and content of the sessions for the individual. This does mean for the coach that you will be working intensively throughout the day because as one person needs some 'down time' the next will possibly need your attention.

The great thing with coaching on journeys is that the environment will vary as you travel downstream. It is really easy to miss things that would be good to coach and likewise easy to spend too much time at one point when the better spot is just round the bend. The trick is to use everything once, good things twice and excellent things three times but then move on. Some things you can only use once and the coach will need to plan and brief some things very well prior to the actual exercise. Some rivers by their character are continuous and the coach will end up working via sequences and circuits. Other rivers may be more pool-drop in nature and the coach could run a series of linked individual sessions.

## LEADING AS A COACHING STRATEGY

A good river for coaching will have both. The trick here is for the coach to know the river well but also for the coach to have lots of different exercises that he can use on the river. Coaching your way down the river maintains control as effectively as any formal leadership style. The coach will want to consider the value of different guiding and leadership strategies from the coaching perspective.

For instance, basic eddy hopping is a great way of developing the skills for breaking in and out and river reading. The difference is that the coach will select eddies on the basis of coaching rather than leadership (i.e. CLAP). See Chapter 15 Sea Kayaking for some very transferable ideas on the teaching of leadership.

The eddy-hopping type exercises prove to be very useful for the coach because they enable a variety of different river skills to be covered and specific issues to be addressed. For example:

Eddy-hopping sequences can be followed that use water features, the troughs of waves, diagonals, etc.

👉 A paddler has difficulty understanding the need to have an angle of attack into eddies, so the coach can set an eddy-hopping sequence that uses alternate sides, has wide crosses or returns to the mid-point of the current.

👉 A paddler has difficulty identifying eddies. The paddler can actually lead but the coach joins them in each eddy to discuss/examine possible strategies before the paddler moves off to the next area. Simply verbalising the process you employ can be very effective as long as you know what you're doing!

👉 Using an eddy-hopping system that relies on coordinated signals ensures the paddlers start to pick eddies that have line of sight with each other.

👉 To refine coping strategies how about playing a game where each person has to catch the next possible eddy to the one chosen by the previous paddler.

The options are actually endless and these are not definitive. They all maintain supervision by coaching rather than 'leading' and they all make progress downstream. They all stem from common practice for river runners.

## FURTHER READING

*White Water Safety and Rescue - 2nd Edition, Ferrero F, Pesda Press, 2006, 0-9547061-5-3*  
*Kayak Rolling, Collins L, Pesda Press, 2004, 0-9531956-8-6*

### LOEL COLLINS

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His passion lies in coaching white water skills and exploring and travelling in both kayak and canoe. He has paddled and taken part in first descents in many parts of the world including Papua New Guinea, Pakistan and Iran.

