

Freestyle

Freestyle Award

Award Description

This award is designed to develop the foundation freestyle moves on moving water, waves, holes and eddy lines.

Extended Award Description

Your Freestyle Award will give you the ability to have loads of fun while progressing to a wide range of exciting freestyle moves. You will look at the factors which affect your decisions on where and when to go out, create a proficient use of skills and equipment to enjoy, and be in control throughout our freestyle session. Your Freestyle Award should be seen as a sound basis for independently building the experience and expertise associated with Advanced Freestyle Award holders.

Award Content

1. Location

To have an enjoyable day playing in our freestyle boats, we need to make sure we choose a suitable spot to paddle. There are a wide range of easily accessible spots for us. We may use an indoor pool or a lake, a flat section of river or sheltered part of the sea.

We can take some key factors into account when choosing our venue and when deciding if it is suitable:

Factor: Water depth

We may need to know: How deep is this flat water? Is the water deep enough for us to go on end or upside down? Are there parts that are shallower than others? What moves will we be practicing and is the water deep enough for these? Are there any objects under the surface to avoid?

Factor: Features

We may need to know: What features does the water we are going to be paddling on have? Are they safe to play in? Are any weirs safe to play in? How would we find this out? Do the features change as the water levels change? Are the features affected by tide or wind direction? Are the features suitable for our ability level? Is this a good place to practice the skills we want to? What makes a feature good for surfing, spins or pop outs? What factors might make those moves easier or harder?

Factor: Rapids – some freestyle features are part of a longer rapid

We may need to know: What is the rest of the rapid like? Are we able to safely paddle the rapid to get to the feature? What is downstream of the feature? Why is it important for us to know this? Is it easy to get back to the feature we want to play on once we wash off?

Factor: Weather

What we might observe: What is the air temperature? What is the water temperature? How strong is the wind? What direction is the wind blowing? Is it going to rain? Will that affect the features we are playing on? How might the weather affect how long we play for?

Factor: Water quality

We may need to know: What is the water quality like? Are there any factors that could make the water quality worse? What could the consequences be for us if the water quality is poor?

Factor: Access and environment

We may need to know: What restrictions might be in place on a piece of water and why? If this is an artificial course, do we need to sign in and pay to use the site? Are there any rules we need to stick to? Are there larger, powered boats using the area we plan to use? Will this present us with any issues? How can we reduce our impact on the environment and animals around us?

2. Getting Ready

Before getting to the water we must choose suitable kit and equipment and have the correct knowledge to use it. Key points we may consider are:

What will we wear?

What are the clothing options available to us as freestylers? Why might we choose one over another? Would the location or weather affect these choices? Are we confident in the use of our chosen personal safety equipment?

What will we use?

What are the different equipment and boat options available? What difference does the shape and size of our boat make? What is the difference between a freestyle boat and other boat types? How will we choose a boat which is the right size for us? How will we ensure the boat is outfitted and the seat positioned to suit us?

What will we take?

What additional equipment might be useful to have with us? What safety kit would it be useful to have with us or available on the bank?

3. At the Water

Before we get on the water we need to be confident in our ability to deal with any complications it might bring. We must also consider how we will safely get on the water.

Consideration: Safety and rescue

We may need to know: How can we protect ourselves and others from any potential hazards? What damage to our health might repeated immersion in cold water cause? How can we help prevent this becoming an issue? What would we do if someone we are paddling with gets really cold or overheats? What potential injuries might we need to treat? How might we do this?

Consideration: Getting to the water

We may need to determine: What is the best way to carry, load and secure our craft to protect ourselves or others from injury and prevent unnecessary damage? How will we get our craft and additional equipment to the water?

4. **Freestyle Skills**

Freestyle is about moving your boat about on every possible axis while having lots of fun. This award takes us through the fundamental skills and moves that can be learnt and performed on moving water, waves, holes and eddy lines – but many of them can be practiced on flatwater too.

Skill: Good posture

We may need to know: How might bad posture affect what we are able to do? How can we experiment with our posture to help with strength and rotation? What injuries could bad posture cause?

Skill: Warming up

We may need to determine: What are the benefits of doing a warm up? What makes a good warm up for freestyle? What difference might we see in a good freestyle warm up, compared to a warm up for a different sport or paddlesport discipline?

Skill: Getting on and off a feature (small wave or hole) - before we start throwing cool tricks in the feature, we need to be able to get onto the wave then get off it again when we want to, whilst maintaining control.

We may need to determine: How much speed do we need to get onto the feature? Does the amount of edge we use affect how easily the boat exits the feature? How does our body position relate to getting on and off the feature? Can we drop in from above the feature if needed?

Skill: Surfing and moving around the feature - this will enable us to set ourselves up for tricks.

We may need to consider: How can we use our skills to surf forward, backward and sideways? How much do we need to use the paddle to balance while surfing? How does our trim relate to where the boat sits on the wave? Do we want to lean, edge or both while side surfing? How much?

Skill: Tailies (a.k.a. Stern Dips or Tail Squirts) - elevation is less important than good technique with this move.

We may need to consider: How can we use our speed, edge control and torso rotation to perform this move? How can we use the flow of the river and timing to help with this? How can the size of our boat affect how high we can get the bow? What makes a good eddy line for tailies? How much do we need to rotate for this move? Where should we be looking at the start, middle and end? What happens if we edge more or less? How might the flow affect how much we edge? Can we perform this move on both sides? What moves could we link this to? What more advanced move does this look like?

Skill: Spin 360 - a lot of freestyle moves involve rotation. By rehearsing our skills on the flat, we will develop our coordination and prepare our body for what we are about to do. This means we will be set up to learn cool rotational moves quickly.

We may need to consider: Why is this move important? How will we perform this move? What tools and techniques can we use to help us perform this move? Is one direction easier than the other? Where is the best place on the feature to do the spin? How does the shape of the feature affect how easy this move is? Where should we be looking throughout the move? Does our boat stay flat throughout the move? Would it make our move easier or faster if we put the boat on edge?

Skill: Shuvit

We may need to consider: How can we perform this move? How will we know if we have performed it well? Where is the easiest place on the feature to do the shuvit? Can we perform this move equally well on both sides? Do we feel more comfortable on one side than the other?

Skill: Pop out - a fun way to practice the pop part of one of the coolest looking moves; the loop! This is also one of the most accessible ways to get the boat vertical.

We may need to consider: How do we perform this move? How does someone else help us? What features and flows can we use to make the move easier? What features make it easier to bury the bow? How can we keep the boat straight as the bow goes under water? What factors help to get a good pop? Where should we position our body as the bow goes in and as the boat starts to go on end? What happens if we 'jump' and raise our paddles to the sky?

Skill: Rolling - being able to roll back up means we can relax and try any trick without worrying about going upside-down.

We may need to practice: Can we roll quickly from any position? Have we practiced capsizing unexpectedly in a variety of positions?

Skill: Correcting when off balance - understanding where our balance points are and how we correct balance allows us to be confident in performing all our funky tricks.

We may need to practice: Can we put the boat off-balance and correct it? Can we do this on any axis? Can we use our torso position to adjust our balance? Where are the balance points? What can we do with the paddle to help correct our balance?

Skill: Dealing with mishaps

We may need to consider: How would we safely get ourselves or others back to the side or back into their boat? How would we deal with loose kit? What do airbags do and why is that useful? Is there any other kit we might use to help with rescues in moving water?

5. After our Session

Every time we go paddling we have an opportunity to learn and improve. We can maximise how much we learn from our session by thinking back and

reflecting on what we did, even if it seemed like all we were doing is playing and having fun!

What did we do: What skills did we play with today? Have we improved on any of them? If so, what helped? Did we find anything particularly challenging? Were we able to do everything as well on both sides?

Using video: Video is a great way to watch back what we do. It can help us see if something is working and what we need to change. It can also be handy to spot our good examples of a skill and weaker performances. Does our left and right version of the same move look the same?

Watching what others do: It might be useful to spend some time watching other freestyle paddlers doing tricks on flatwater. YouTube has loads of cool videos and can be a great resource.

What next? What can we focus on next time? Are there any games we can play to practice the skills we've learnt? How would we use these skills on different features or sections of river? What moves do the skills we have learnt move on to?

6. **Future Development**

Each day we spend playing in freestyle boats further expands our skills and knowledge, creating a more enjoyable experience on the water. With no two experiences ever the same, we never stop learning.

Continually evaluating our skills creates a natural evolution of ability. When we reach a certain point in this, it may be worth considering moving onto the Advanced Freestyle Award.