

# TAKING CONTROL

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IN THE LAST EDITION WE COVERED HOW TO GET A CANOE MOVING AND TRAVELLING STRAIGHT WHEN PADDLING WITH A PARTNER. THAT'S GREAT WHEN YOU WANT TO TRAVEL FROM A TO B, BUT MANY THINGS CAN HAPPEN ALONG THE WAY, BOTH PLANNED AND UNPLANNED, AND TO BE IN FULL CONTROL OF YOUR CANOE IN ANY GIVEN SCENARIO YOU'RE GOING TO NEED TO MASTER PLENTY MORE TECHNIQUES. HERE WE WILL COVER HOW TO CHUCK A U-TURN, HOW TO GLIDE AND HOW TO MASTER THE ALL-IMPORTANT J STROKE.

## USING THE FORWARD & REVERSE SWEEP TO TURN

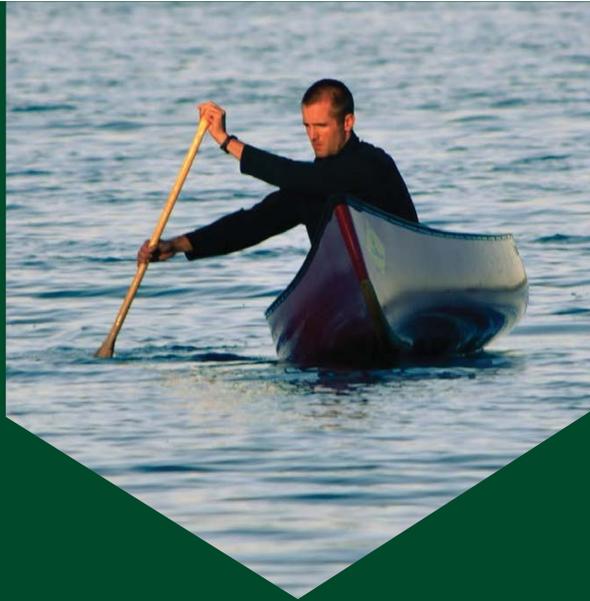
Turning a canoe around isn't as quick and easy as people think, and many beginners end up ungracefully fighting each other with opposing strokes rather than spinning on a dime. It's essential to learn how to work with each other rather than against each other to do a neat U-turn. The strokes required are a combination of the Forward Sweep and the Reverse Sweep (covered individually in edition 3 of Paddlemag and viewable live on paddlemag.com). We discussed how the stern paddler can use the forward sweep in the last issue, but let's revisit this so that both paddlers get it sorted. The main use of a sweep stroke is to turn the boat. To paddle in a straight line you paddle close to the boat, so to intentionally turn it you need to paddle further away from the boat. Each paddler needs to locate the end of the boat nearest to them (bow or stern) - this will be referred to as the 'TIP'. Next, they need to locate the point that is perpendicular to the side of their body (at 90 degrees), which will be referred to as their 'HIP'. The paddle should describe a wide arc between each paddler's respective hip and tip - which is the source of the expression to paddle 'hip to tip' or 'tip to hip'. When you try this you'll realise that if each person is paddling 'tip to hip' then they are actually doing the opposite stroke to each other, which causes the canoe to spin in its place. Doing this stroke forward is called the Forward Sweep and doing it backwards is the Reverse Sweep.

To do this effectively your body should start in an upright forward-facing position and your arms should be kept low so that the paddle is almost horizontal. Make sure the blade is fully submerged yet still sweeping the surface of the water. The power comes from the core muscles as the stroke moves through and the arms can help accentuate the part of the stroke at each tip of the canoe, which is the most effective section of the stroke as this part of the boat has the most leverage on the canoe's pivot point.

Now you know how to spin on the spot and make your canoe do doughnuts. Awesome. But of course there's more to manoeuvring a canoe than simply being able to spin it around.

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### THE FEATHERED DRAW - LEARNING TO GLIDE

IMAGINE THAT YOU'VE TRIED TO PARK YOUR CANOE ALONGSIDE THE SHORE BUT INSTEAD YOU'VE COME TO A STOP AND YOU'RE STILL A LONG WAY AWAY FROM THE BANK. CAN YOU MAKE A CANOE GLIDE SIDEWAYS? YOU BET.

To start with we'll ignore the always-paddle-on-opposite-sides rule, and paddle on the same side. Both paddlers will turn their torsos to the paddling side. If you're able to square your shoulders to your paddling side then that's an added bonus. Both arms should reach straight out over the side of the boat and hold the paddle so that the shaft is nearly vertical. The top hand's indicator thumb should be pointing towards the back of the boat and the blade should be submerged fully. The top hand will stay as stationary as possible and the bottom arm is going to pull (or 'draw') the blade in to the boat. To 'feather' or 'recover' the stroke back to its starting position you'll need to point your indicator thumb back out away from the canoe at 90 degrees. This allows the blade to slice smoothly through the water. Once the blade has returned to its starting position, you can reset the paddle by simply turning your indicator thumb back toward the stern of the boat. And repeat.

Both paddlers should aim to keep in time with each other. Be sure to look up and focus on where you're going rather than looking at the water, and don't be afraid to send the water directly under the boat rather than into the side of your canoe (which slows your progress). This stroke is a slow and graceful manoeuvre. The feathered draw can also be employed by people paddling on opposite sides - doing this will cause the canoe to spin in its place much like the sweep combo did.

### J-STROKE

NOW THAT YOU CAN CONTROL YOUR CANOE A BIT MORE, IT'S TIME FOR THE STERN PADDLER TO LEARN HOW TO KEEP IT GOING IN A STRAIGHT LINE LIKE A PRO - TIME TO DRILL DOWN ON THE ELUSIVE J-STROKE.

"The J-stroke essentially does the same thing as a stern rudder, but it's better." This is what I was told when I first learned this stroke, but I didn't believe them. No other explanation was given - I was just told that this awkward-feeling stroke that hurt my wrist and made my shoulder sore was better than the one that I knew and had mastered and come to love. Rather than seek an explanation I did what a good student does: When the instructor was looking I did my very best J-stroke and smiled through the pain, then as soon as their head turned the other way I reverted to the stroke that I knew was really better. And man, was I ever wrong. Here's how the J-stroke works:

Hand and body position are the same as in the forward stroke. The difference begins as the stroke nears the body. As the paddle reaches your hips you begin to rotate your top hand (the one on the grip) so that your indicator thumb points DOWN. Since the grip and the blade are parallel to each other this should result in the blade becoming parallel to the boat as well; or perpendicular to the water's surface. As the stroke passes your body you should begin to push outward. The stroke's effectiveness comes from a small outward push of the blade. As the blade pushes out the canoe turns toward the stern person's paddling side. Small adjustments are much better than large ones. Try to focus on a distant point and keep the canoe on-course to that point. Sounds just like the stern rudder, doesn't it? Here's the major difference:

When you perform a stern rudder you are essentially grabbing hold of a stagnant bit of water, putting it into motion (which takes energy), pulling it back toward you, letting it fly out the back, and then introducing your paddle blade into more stagnant water at the side of your boat, and dragging it through it (which creates friction). With the J-stroke, you are grabbing hold of a stagnant bit of water, putting it into motion, pulling it back toward you, and then using this same bit of water to correct your direction. There is no dragging, and therefore less loss of speed. It really is a much more efficient stroke - and is necessary for a solo paddler if they want to get anywhere at a decent pace.

Here's how to solve the wrist and shoulder pain: If you're like me and lack flexibility then there's a good chance that this will hurt the wrist on your top hand. To solve this, simply change the way that you hold the paddle. Rather than having your palm flat across the top of the grip you can have it across the grip at an angle with your index finger lying across the top of the grip. This means that your wrist doesn't need to contort in order to get a vertical blade at the end of the stroke. If your lower arm is experiencing shoulder pain (in your deltoid) then don't be alarmed. This is very common. You can either exercise these muscles by continuing with the J-stroke (they will get stronger and you'll need to butter your shoulders to fit through doorways) or you can also lever the paddle off of the gunwale to complete the stroke (making sure you don't pinch your fingers).



### SUMMARY

Keep communicating and telling each other what you plan to do. Neither paddler alone can make the boat do manoeuvres as well as they will in tandem. Paddle in time with each other with all strokes. As a bow paddler, leave a short pause between strokes in your cadence to allow the stern paddler time to make corrective strokes and still keep up with you. Learn the J-stroke on both sides and practice it and then practice it some more. Now that you're gaining control, in the next instalment we'll expand this even further so that both paddlers can take the reins.