



# Brighton Dragon Boat Club (BDBC) Beginner Paddling Guide

*The BDBC is founded on the principles of inclusivity and mutual respect.*

The information in this document is for all members of the Brighton Dragon Boat Club. It is intended to be a guideline to help prepare new paddlers with background information, prior to their first session in the boat.

The Brighton Dragon Boat Club was founded in 2007 by a group of volunteers who wanted to have fun and improve their paddling. The goals of the BDBC are simple and true to the founder's vision:



stay safe  
have fun



provide learning opportunities to those members who are trying to improve their paddling by improving technique or endurance, or both.

*The BDBC membership is limited to those 12 years of age and over due to safety precautions.*

*There are two membership options: **COMPETITIVE** and **RECREATION***

## DRAGON BOAT BASICS

**Partner:** is the person that sits on the same row as you, while paddling and getting on/off the boat at each session. It is possible that you may have a new/different partner for each paddling session.

**Where to sit:** There are 10 rows of seats on a dragon boat and paddlers either paddle on the right- or left-hand side of the boat. During recreation paddles, it is recommended that each paddler alternate which side they paddle on. This helps prevent soreness/stiffness on one side caused by repetitive movements. That being said, if you have a preference or a medical issue and need to paddle on the same side for each session, you may do so.



## PREPARING FOR YOUR FIRST PADDLE

BDBC provides Personal Flotation Devices (current inventory ranges in size from small to double XL), seat pads, and paddles (current length ranges from 45 inches to 51 inches), at no additional cost, for each paddling session. If you choose to use BDBC equipment, you are required to return all items to the storage unit at the end of each session. Club members will be provided with opportunities to purchase their own equipment and embossed clothing, if they choose to do so. Additional details will be provided after the 2024 season begins.

## RECOMMENDATIONS



Bring water to each paddling session. As the season progresses, temperatures will fluctuate and your workout will likely become more intense. It is important to stay hydrated.

Each paddler should prepare for each session by completing their own warmup. Some coaches may include a warmup on the dock. However, depending on issues the coach may be dealing with, such as arranging the seating lineup, there may not be enough time for the coach to include a warm-up prior to getting on the boat.

## DRAGON BOATING EQUIPMENT

### Personal Flotation Device (PFD)

Everyone must **wear a PFD at all times** while on the dock or in the boat – no exceptions. It must be zippered up and the bottom buckle must be clasped together. Under arm adjusters are to be tightened snugly. At the end of each paddling session, PFDs are to be returned to the storage location and hung up on the hangers provided.

### Seat Pads

Seat Pads are provided by BDBC and at the end of each session they are to be returned to the storage location.

### Paddles

Appropriate paddle length is determined while you are in a sitting position. It is recommended that you recheck it when you are in the boat. BDBC coaches will assist all paddlers with determining correct paddle length.

### Equipment Storage Shed

The storage location has an area for each paddler to leave their car **keys** during paddling sessions. The storage unit is locked prior to leaving the dock and opened when the boat returns to the dock. BDBC is not responsible for your personal property. It is recommended that you do not bring any unnecessary items with you. Either leave them at home or lock them in your car while you are paddling.

## BOAT ATTIRE AND ETIQUETTE

### The Wait List For Paddling Sessions

Please remember everyone at BCBC works in a volunteer capacity. Coaches and steers willingly give up their time to ensure sessions are held on a regular basis (weather permitting) and that sessions run smoothly. If you have registered for a session and your circumstances change, please go on the website [brightondragonboat.ca](http://brightondragonboat.ca) and cancel your session. Frequently, there may be a wait list and by doing so, another paddler will have an opportunity to paddle which will help with keeping the boat balanced.

If you register and receive the message that you are currently on the waitlist, please monitor your email for an update. The coaches review the registrations and updates on a daily basis, and you may, in fact now be scheduled to paddle. It is a great habit to review the website before each paddle to review/confirm your status.

### What To Wear

All clothing should be comfortable and not restrict any movement that is consistent with exercising.

### Don't Rock the Boat

Movement on the boat is restricted to paddling. The coach may stop the boat for a rest break, or stretching break, or to move a specific paddler to a different seat. All other movement must be kept to a minimum to ensure that the boat is balanced and safe for everyone.



## Dragon boating is a water sport

You should not be surprised or unprepared if you/your clothing gets wet during any session due to the wind or any other cause. You may wish to bring a towel and or spare clothing to each session (but not on the boats) so you can dry off afterwards and or protect your car seat from damp/wet clothing.

It is recommended that you wear layers and keep in mind as you progress through the season that your fitness, endurance and paddling ability will improve. There may be times that you are cool at the beginning of the session and 10-15 minutes later you will no longer require a sweatshirt or hoodie.

## Footwear

Footwear is optional and may be athletic/fitness running shoes, deck shoes, water shoes, athletic/hiking sandals or bare feet. **Note flip/flop sandals are not permitted due to safety concerns.**



## Necessary Habits

- Prior to getting on the boat**, wipe/stamp your feet on the mat at the front of the dock to remove any loose dirt and or stones from your footwear. This will help maintain the non-slip flooring condition of the boats.
- Do not step on the seats** when getting on or off the boat. If, at any time, you need assistance with these processes, ask the coach/steer and or your partner for help. The seats are breakable.
- Sunscreen:** after applying sunscreen it is strongly recommended that you wash your hands before you begin paddling. Sunscreen residue will leave your hands with a slippery residue that will in turn make it very difficult to maintain a grip on your paddle and jeopardize your ability to paddle correctly.
- Paddling gloves:** are not provided by you may choose to buy your own and wear them.
- Sunglasses/hats:** If you choose to wear sunglasses, it is recommended that you have them attached to a floatable tie back. Sunglasses may become dislodged due to wind or head movement. Hats may also become lost for the same reason. The choice of wearing sweat bands is at the discretion of each paddler.
- Water bottles only:** do not bring food or other beverages onto the boat. There is no garbage receptacle on the boat; you will need to take your garbage with you when you get off of the boat and take it home. Reminder that BDBC operates within the scope of being environmentally friendly.
- Nothing left behind:** you are responsible for ensuring you do not leave anything behind in the boat.

## PREPARING FOR PADDLING

### Weather Cancellations

Prior to each paddling session, the coach and steer person will evaluate the current and expected weather conditions and may cancel that session. The website will be updated to show the current cancellation. BDBC recommends that you check the website prior to leaving your home/office to see if there are any updates for the currently planned session. Please keep in mind the weather may change quickly and is different in Brighton Bay than in town. High winds, for instance, may mean unsafe wave conditions causing a last-minute cancellation. BDBC apologizes for this inconvenience.

### BDBC Location of Dock

Currently, all BDBC paddling sessions start at the docks located beside the Harbourview Marina Restaurant in Gosport (now part of Brighton). Their address is 5 Bay Street West, Brighton, Ontario. For one-time events, festivals or excursions that you may participate in, the address will be provided at that time. BDBC's equipment shed may be hidden by parked boats but don't worry – you've found us!



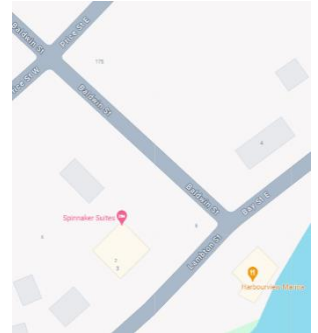
### Parking

Do not park in the restaurant parking lot or docking lot adjacent to the bathroom. You can park on Bay St, Baldwin St. and Price St. As shown with image, do not park on the water side lengthwise – park nose out, make space!

There are two bike racks beside the storage facility that are available to BDBC members at no charge. It is your responsibility to bring your own lock(s). When possible BDBC recommends car-pooling.

### Washrooms

There are washrooms available which are located on the east side adjacent to the restaurant.



## SAFETY

Your safety is the highest priority of the coaches and steers. All individuals need to be cognizant of their surroundings and move in a safe manner to prevent any accidental injuries.

***IF, at any time, you do not feel well, pull your paddle into the boat and inform your partner and or the coach. Ensure that your elbow is also inside the boat as well.*** This will give the person in front and behind you room to continue paddling with the correct technique.

If you need a ***temporary rest from paddling***, pull your paddle and your elbows into the boat to ensure individuals paddling in front and behind you have room to paddle correctly. You should then resume paddling, when you are ready.

## SCHEDULED PADDLING TIME VS. WHEN TO ARRIVE

Paddling sessions are scheduled for when the boat leaves the dock. **You must be there sooner.** All paddlers should plan to arrive for each paddling session one half hour (30 minutes) prior to the start of the session. This provides you with time to park, put on your PFD, get your paddle and seat pad, and go through the boat loading procedure.

Prior to getting on the boat the coach, and or coach’s designate, will lead a 5-10-minute fitness warm -up exercise (this is done in front of the dock). **Reminder: each coach has the option at each individual session to complete/not complete a warm up session depending on other issues they are dealing with. Each member has the option to complete a warm-up at home or at the dock depending on their individual preference.**

This is followed by determining the line-up of the boat (this means determining who is sitting in rows 1-10 inclusively). Your position in the boat may change as the steer works with the coach to balance the boat. Then paddlers are loaded onto the boats, as per the coach’s instructions. Remember your assigned seat number!

## WHAT TO EXPECT

BDBC provides the boat, coach and steer persons. The Coaches and Steers work together to plan each paddling session:

1. where the boat is going from a geographic perspective
2. what technique is being focused on
3. building endurance

Each paddling session is one hour unless otherwise noted when you register. Coaches and steers do their best to manage this time to ensure the boat returns to the dock at the designated time. As a precaution, be prepared in case the boat is 5-10 minutes late. If you have a personal situation and cannot be late getting back to the dock, please advise your coach prior to getting on the boat.

## LINEUP ON THE BOAT

After the warmup is completed, the coach will ask everyone to line up with a partner. This process involves selecting your partner, determining which side of the boat you would like to paddle on (right- or left-hand side) as well as determining which row on the boat you will be seated in.

Ideally, you should match yourself with someone who is similar in size to you.

It is not unusual that the coach will review the line up and move people prior to loading the boat. Do not be concerned when this happens as moves are for the current session only. The next session may have a totally different line-up depending on who is participating. Frequently, moves are made to match paddling capability, as well as to have the boat balanced from a weight perspective when comparing right and left-hand sides of the boat. A balanced boat is easier to steer and helps to ensure everyone can paddle in sync throughout the session.

The coach will then advise which row you are to be seated on. There may be sessions when the boat is not full. In these situations, the coach will determine which seats will remain empty for that session.

Remember which row you are sitting on. Frequently, instructions/commands during endurance portions of each session will be given by row number. For example, rows 1, 2 and 3 paddle lightly.

With the exception of paddlers in row one, each of the seats have an equal responsibility to ensure all paddlers are paddling in sync. Paddlers in rows 2 to 10 inclusive should be paddling at a consistent rate with the paddler in front of you. Paddlers in row one, paddle in sync with each other and vary the stroke rate based on instructions provided by the coach. They are called the Pacers.

Frequently, you will hear the coach say, everyone needs to paddle together which means you need to be in sync.



## GETTING ON AND OFF THE DRAGON BOATS

- 1. **The dock is for people only.** Do NOT, put your paddle, water bottle, footwear or any other items on the dock. Instead, hand them to your partner and when you are safely seated in the boat, your partner will return them.
- 2. When paddling sessions are completed, reverse this process. Once you and your partner are back on the dock, leave the dock so other paddlers can safely disembark the boat and return to shore.
- 3. The steer person boards the dragon boat first.
- 4. The coach will then advise how the paddlers will be onboarded for rows one to ten inclusive. Learn the boat names, Draco and Tacoma so you know which one to board. Keep your paddles in the boat out of everyone's way until told otherwise.

- | Frequently, rows 8, 9 and 10 are onboarded first, followed by row 1 and the remaining rows. This may change due to current conditions such as the wind.
- | The coach is the last person onto the boat.
- | Prior to any movement away from the dock, the coach and steer will work together to determine if the boat is balanced or leaning left or right. If necessary, adjustments may be made.
- | After this check has been completed, the steer will provide the “commands” to ensure the boat is safely moved from the dock to open water. Each person on the boat shall assist the steer and coach when leaving the dock to prevent any damage to the dragon boats as well as any other boats that may be within close proximity to the dock or BDBC boats. If absolutely necessary, use your hands and arms to prevent the dragon boat from touching other boats. Do ***not*** use your paddles for this.
- | Depending on where you are sitting, you may need to pull in the bumper/fender. Wait until you are asked to bring them in. The boats will rub against the dock and be damaged if they are pulled in too soon.
- | Once the boat has been successfully moved from the dock to open water, the steer person will advise the coach, “it’s your boat”. The coach will then begin the session and provide commands for paddling.
- | Similarly, when the boat is returning to the dock, the coach will advise that the steer person is now in charge.
- | If you are sitting near the bumper/fender, place it back in the water. The steer person will then provide the commands to ensure the boat is docked safely without damaging it, or any other boats. The coach is the first person off of the boat and will secure it to the dock with tie-downs. Once these steps are completed, the coach will determine the order for unloading the boat. **STAY SEATED** until you are told to move so the boat stays steady for people getting on to the dock.

## DURING PADDLING SESSIONS

- | With the exception of paddling and getting on/off the boat, movement on the boat is restricted. The coach may stop the boat for a rest break, or stretching break, or to move a specific paddler to a different seat. All other movement must be kept to a minimum to ensure that the boat is balanced and safe for everyone.
- | The coach and steer are in charge of the boat during each paddling session. They will advise when they are turning control of the boat to each other. For example, when loading the boat, leaving the dock, turning the boat around and returning to the dock.
- | Your primary responsibility is to listen and execute the commands when instructed to do so.
- | ***You should have your eyes focused on your coach and the paddlers in row one at all times unless instructed otherwise.*** This is commonly referred to as “keeping your eyes in the boat”.
- | Each row on the boat is provided with regular rest breaks and or easy paddle breaks. Easy paddle refers to paddling at no more than 30 percent of your capability. Remember, if you need to take a temporary rest break do so. Simply move your paddle and outer elbow such that it does not impede any other paddler from having enough room to paddle correctly.
- | During rest periods, you should have a drink of water, or stretch. This time should also be used to
- | ask your coach questions if you need clarification on instructions/expectations as well as any other relevant questions you may have.





## COMPETITIVE OR RECREATIONAL PROGRAM

By Competitive Coach Phil Spencer

If you are trying to decide between the Competitive and the Recreational Dragon Boat Programs, then you should think about what you want out of your paddling experience. If you like a relaxed atmosphere with good fitness benefit, then choose Recreational. If you want a challenging workout which pushes your mental and physical ability throughout the season, choose Competitive. Though racing is not compulsory for participation in the program, Competitive paddlers will be focused on racing skills right from the beginning.

Both programs focus on fitness, and technique, but it is a matter of degree. The Competitive Program continually focuses on:

- ▶ improving technique
- ▶ ensuring that all paddlers buy in and function as a coordinated crew
- ▶ learning to support your crew mates by paddling correctly with power, passion and precision
- ▶ learning to think through each stroke, each piece, and make continual improvements to your performance
- ▶ learning to stay in stroke, rotate and drop to the catch, and pull hard. Dropping your body gives proper space for the paddler behind to also paddle correctly. In dragon boat paddling you should always give the gift of space.



The intensity in the Competitive program is significantly greater than in the recreational program. The competitive paddler's outlook is focused on hard workouts. The reward comes from performing well on a tough piece. You will know when we move the boat well, and when we move the boat better. Practices become steadily more challenging as the season progresses.

Commitment is also something a paddler needs to think about before joining the Competitive Program. You should plan to attend two competitive practices per week so that we advance as a crew. You should also join a rec session or two for extra practice during the week. If you are unable to commit to the Monday and Thursday evening practices, and you need to have more flexibility regarding paddling time, you might be better off in the Recreational Program. However, if you commit to regular competitive practices, you will become a stronger, more confident, race-ready paddler.

## COMMANDS WHILE ON THE DRAGON BOAT

All crews must use the same language. Please familiarize yourself with these commands.

Back Paddle	Commence backward paddling
Brace the boat	Extend the blade of the paddle flat on top of the water and hold firm to maintain boat stability
Draw	Pull water toward the boat
Feather the boat	Extend the blade of the paddle flat on top of water and skim the blade backward and forward across the top of the water to maintain boat stability
Hit	This is the precise time, your paddle “hits” or slips into the water
Hold the Boat	Submerge the blade of the paddle perpendicular to the side of the boat and hold on tight as this is the only “brake” for stopping the boat.
Let it Run	Stop paddling and bring your paddle across your lap
Now	This is the precise time your paddle should hit the water.
Paddles Up	Lean forward to the catch position ready to take a stroke
Pry	Push water away from the boat
Sit Up	Sit up in the boat, facing forward, paddle in hands across lap. From this position you should be holding your paddle such that you can automatically transition to the “paddles up” position.
Take it Away	Commence forward paddling

## ADDITIONAL INFO

### Key

- a) **Coach** – sits on the elevated seat at the front of the boat
- b) **Ladder Drill** - note some coaches may refer to this as the Gail Todd Ladder
- c) **Steer** – stands on the back of the boat and directs the boat with the oar
- d) **Drop at the catch** – the “catch” is the moment the blade touches or catches water.

During each paddling session, depending on how many rows of the boat are filled with paddlers, the coach will assign which seat rows are in which section while they call out paddling drills and exercises.

- e) **Front of the boat**
- f) **Pacers** – these are the two paddlers in the first row, they set the pace, the speed for how fast to paddle. It also can refer to the first few rows of the boat.
- g) **Engine Room** – the middle rows of the boat
- h) **Rockets** – last few rows in front of steer