ADVENTURE ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

# CANOEING

Schools must follow the Department’s Excursion Policy and Guidelines and the requirements outlined in this document when planning, conducting and approving adventure activities.

These guidelines are for developing risk management plans specific to the location, activity and group participating. They are not intended to be used as a training manual. Staff instructing the activity must have sufficient knowledge/expertise in the activity.

Canoeing includes a wide variety of activities undertaken in either a kayak or a canoe. In these guidelines the term canoeing as an adventure activity covers all activities conducted in a canoe or kayak style craft, including inflatable canoes and kayaks on inland and enclosed waters. This guideline does not include canoeing sports, sea kayaking or rafting. Separate guidelines have been developed for sea kayaking and rafting.

Canoe or kayak activities conducted on open waters and moving water can pose an increased risk to student safety. Access to safe banks and shorelines can become more difficult and group management and rescues more complex. Such canoe and kayak activities require an emergency response plan which considers:

* educational merits of the activity
* size, age and previous activity experience of the group
* skills and experience of the supervising staff
* prevailing, forecast and observed weather conditions
* availability of rescue vessels
* characteristics of the location.

If an overnight camping component is planned, please also refer to Camping guidelines.

## venue Definitions

[Transport Safety Victoria – Maritime Safety](https://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/maritime-safety) provide the following definitions of waterways in Victoria to aid guidance of minimum safety equipment and preparation:

**Inland waters** – rivers (inside the seaward entrance), creeks, canals, lakes, reservoirs and any similar waters either naturally formed or man-made and which are either publicly or privately owned but does not include any navigable rivers, creeks or streams within declared port waters.

**Enclosed waters** – any declared port waters inside the seaward entrance. See the [Victorian Recreational Boating Safety Handbook](http://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/maritime-safety/recreational-vessel-operators/powerboat/victorian-recreational-boating-safety-handbook) for all listed port waters.

**Coastal waters** – all waters other than inland waters or enclosed waters, including all beaches with direct access to ocean waters, any beach exposed to ocean swell, and any beach that is exposed to currents, rips, strong winds or surf. This may include enclosed waterways at times with these features.

In addition to the definitions above, this document uses the following terms for specific types of waterways:

**Flat water** – non-flowing water not affected by tides or currents and relatively sheltered from wind.

**Open water** – a wide body of water that has the potential to be greatly affected by wind.

**Swift water** – flowing river water which may be categorised according to the international river classification system. This covers water commonly known as moving water or white water but also refers to flowing water which may not look either swift or white to an observer.

**Coastal offshore** – all waters greater than two nautical miles from the coast.

## International river classification system

**Grade 1:** slow to fast moving water with few or no obstacles. There may be river features such as strong currents, ripples and eddy lines present. Passages are wide open and easily discerned from the river.

**Grade 2:** well defined rapids with small obstacles and regular features such as waves. Passages are open and obvious without scouting but may require manoeuvering.

**Grade 3:** rapids with regular features that require manoeuvring to negotiate. Passages can be narrow and features such as holes and irregular waves must be run to negotiate the rapid. Higher risk of injury.

**Grade 4:** rapids with highly irregular features. Complicated passages that often include vertical drops and may require scouting to find safe passages. Linked manoeuvres are required in convoluted passages. Increased risk of injury and possible risk to life.

**Grade 5:** rapids with violent and irregular features. Extremely congested passages that require scouting to determine safe routes. Most Grade 5 rapids include vertical drops and require running large-scale features in a complex series of manoeuvres. Definite risk of serious injury and possible risk to life.

**Grade 6:** the difficulties of Grade 5 taken to the extreme. Rapids with extremely violent and complicated features where experts require considerable advance scouting and planning to determine possible passages. All Grade 6 rapids require the paddler/s to negotiate powerful rapids and large technical features. Always a risk to life. Generally only possible at certain water levels.

## Staffing definitions

**Staff** – any adult approved by the principal who provides supervisory, instructional or educational elements of the activity or excursion. See Excursions Guidelines: Staffing for further details.

**Teacher** – a staff member registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching who provides a supervisory role on a program.

The following roles can be filled by school staff, a teacher or an external provider, or a volunteer (See [Volunteers in Schools](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/volunteers/policy) policy).

**Designated Instructor** – the appointed staff member on a program who provides the lead technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Instructor** – a staff member who provides professional, technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Assistant Instructor** – a staff member who provides assistance to the instructor(s) in the provision of technical expertise and supervision for the activity. An assistant instructor role may be filled by a volunteer (See: Volunteers in Schools Policy).

## Student preparAtion and skills

Planning for canoeing activities should begin with an assessment of students’ current knowledge, skills and experience in canoeing, swimming and water environments.

Students can be classified as either:

* **Beginner swimmers**

Students with little or no experience including in shallow water.

* **Intermediate swimmers**

Students with basic skills, able to swim 25 metres with a recognisable stroke.

* **Advanced swimmers**

Students able to swim 50 to 100 metres using two recognisable strokes and to demonstrate one survival stroke in deep water.

Schools must consider the swimming competency of students in particular water environments when deciding on the venue, staff-student ratio, risk management plan and emergency response plan.

The assessment of students’ current knowledge, skills and experience in the activity should be documented using [[https://www.education.vic.gov.au/_layouts/images/icdoc.png](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/participrep.doc)Documentation of Participant Preparation, Prerequisite Skills/Knowledge​ ​ (doc - 139kb)](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/participrep.doc).

The instructor should ascertain the previous experience of each student.

Instructional staff must brief students on:

* equipment, clothing and footwear that is suitable for the activity and location
* safety measures appropriate to control risks associated with the activity and the environment
* minimal environmental impact techniques relevant to the activity and location
* historical and cultural considerations relevant to the activity and location
* activity scope and boundaries
* communication and communication signals
* relevant terminology.

A basic introductory briefing should also include:

* equipment use
* the response of students in the event of a capsize or accidental submersion
* principles of self recovery and assisted recoveries
* communication signals
* float and swimming methods
* explanation of relevant paddling terminology.

Students should undertake navigation training suitable for the location and activity.

Students should be instructed on:

* basic water behaviour and hydrology
* how to enter, sit or kneel in craft securely and safely
* specific boat based risks, such as impact and entanglement, associated with paddle T-grips if applicable, and ropes and straps, branches, and how to manage these
* specific swimming based risks (such as entrapment) associated with underwater obstacles, strainers, sieves and hydraulics/stoppers and how to manage these
* capsize procedure and what to do if caught in or beneath the craft
* re-entering and assisting others to re-enter craft
* appropriate swimming and self rescue techniques including defensive and aggressive swimming
* how to receive a throw bag.

To paddle on moving water, students should be able to:

* control their craft effectively
* identify river features including the area of main current flow, eddies and eddy lines and safe eddies
* break in and out of the current
* ferry glide across the current
* swim into a safe eddy
* empty a capsized craft
* manoeuvre a capsized craft to shore
* assist a swimmer back into the craft
* identify and avoid river hazards including strainers, sieves and stoppers.

In some cases, parts of briefings and instruction may occur on or next to the water/swiftwater. Supervising staff must be able to provide close instruction, supervision and seek acknowledgement of understanding.

Canoes and kayaks can be heavy and awkward to carry. Students must be shown safe methods to get paddle craft on or off waterways and boat landings.

Students must be instructed on safe lifting techniques for carrying and lifting canoes if required to do so. For assistance in the determination of appropriate lifting techniques, load sizes and weights, please see WorkSafe’s [Manual Handling Topic.](https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/hazardous-manual-handling-safety-basics)

## Equipment

All equipment used must be in sound condition, suitable for the activity and meet applicable industry safety standards.

##### Canoes and kayaks

The designated instructor must ensure structural strength is sufficient to withstand the intended use and to minimise the likelihood of entrapment.

Cockpits must be clear of attachments and smooth on the edges to enable paddlers to exit quickly.

Carrying points at the stern and bow need to be permanent and of sufficient strength to be used in rescues and boat retrievals. All rope must be stored in a manner that it cannot cause entrapment.

The use of a throw bag style pouch to contain rope is a common method.

All craft must contain sufficient fixed permanent buoyancy to prevent the boat from sinking if capsized. Kayaks need buoyancy fitted to bulkheads fore and aft. Craft should be matched to the activity undertaken.

Repair methods and equipment will vary according to the construction materials of the craft.

Temporary repairs may be undertaken as long as the structural integrity of the craft is maintained.

Temporary repairs are to be replaced with more permanent repairs prior to the next use.

##### Inflatable paddle craft

Construction of craft, including air chambers and buoyancy and the requirements for perimeter/outside grab lines and D-rings must comply with the International or Australian Standards (AS 2677 – Inflatable boats). Craft type and size should be matched to the activity undertaken.

When the boat is fully inflated, the perimeter grab lines threaded through the D-rings or webbing on the side of the raft should be taut.

A bow and stern line may be securely attached to the craft. All rope must be managed in a manner that it cannot cause entrapment.

Types and sizes of craft should be selected based on their suitability for the river section, the water level and the abilities of the participants.

Manufacturers’ craft weight load limits for people and equipment must not be exceeded.

Small inflatable plastic, single chamber paddle craft may only be used in Grade 1 or 2 rapids in non-remote locations where access and support are readily available.

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##### Helmets

Helmets specifically designed for water activities must be worn when participating in a canoeing activity on moving water or where the activity involves entry or exit through the surf zone. On deep Grade One moving water and with students with well-developed boat handling skills and limited capsize potential, it may be appropriate risk management to trade broad brimmed hats for sun protection in place of helmets. Otherwise, helmets may be provided after consideration of:

* students’ canoeing experience and skills
* the risk of participants sustaining a head injury due to the nature of the activities being undertaken during the session, for example, in certain active canoeing games.

##### Paddles

Paddles must:

* be buoyant
* be of appropriate construction for the activity.

Paddles should be the correct length for the paddler and type of paddling activity to avoid injury.

As a recommended minimum, a spare paddle should be carried on canoe trips in the guide or instructor craft.

##### Life jackets

The wearing of a securely fitted Australian certified life jacket is required under Victorian marine safety law on all paddle craft that are underway on all Victorian waters. Type 2 ­– Level 50 life jackets are considered the most appropriate for canoeing activities. See: [Life jacket laws](http://www.wearalifejacket.vic.gov.au/lifejacket-laws).

##### Rescue equipment

Rescue equipment that is suitable for the location or trip and water conditions must be in good order, securely stored and readily accessible. Staff must be proficient in its use. Under the Marine Safety Regulations 2012, a bailer or bilge pump is required for human powered vessels, which include canoes and kayaks.

Other key safety equipment items that should be carried include:

* a towing system
* rescue knife
* throw bag
* whistles
* wrap or pin kit
* repair kit.

##### Spray decks

When spray decks are used, they must be an appropriate fit for each kayak and fitted with release tapes or toggles. They may be used in all categories of water conditions. Students must only use spray decks after direct tuition, practice and close supervision of their capacity to exit the craft.

## Clothing

Participants must dress in a manner that will not hinder flotation. For example, heavy boots or bulky clothing must not be worn. Lifejackets must be the outermost layer. Participants must wear footwear suitable both for in the craft and for use in the event of capsize or a walkout.

Sunglasses should be well secured. Loose jewellery should not be worn. Rings, if worn, should be removed or taped. A complete change of clothing should be available.

## Experience and qualifications

Staff instructing the activity should have sufficient knowledge and experience of the activity and the activity environment to operate in all reasonably foreseeable conditions.

The designated canoe instructor/s must have one of the following:

* an Australian Canoeing Instructor or Guide qualification, or proven equivalent qualification or National Training Package units of competency appropriate for the level of activity being undertaken
* equivalent documented training and experience from another training provider or education institution.

**Note**: It is considered best practice that the designated instructor/guide has taken a familiarisation trip or has conferred with others who have recent experience on the waterway and know the area well.

Canoeing instructors/guides must have rescue equipment, suitable for the location and activity. For each guide, this could include:

* a throw rope, towline system, safely protected river knife and whistle
* access to equipment to perform a ‘mechanical advantage’ rescue.

The designated instructor/guide must have the following experience, knowledge and skills:

* paddling techniques
* rescue skills
* canoe/kayak instruction
* specific local weather patterns
* obtaining marine weather forecasts
* group management
* local and catchment area knowledge.

An assistant staff leader may hold a qualification such as a Certificate III in Outdoor Recreation with paddling units or hold equivalent paddling training and experience. Employing an assistant staff member in the ratio of leaders to participants should only be done after careful consideration of the nature of the paddle activity undertaken, the experience of the staff and group, the body of water, the paddling conditions and after satisfying any risk management requirements.

The designated assistant must:

* have experience in the activity at the level being offered to students
* be able to assume a supervisory role during the activity
* have the ability to participate competently in emergency response procedures
* have conferred with the instructor on the safety requirements of this role.

The designated assistant should have:

* proper paddling techniques
* rescue skills
* group management skills.

 [Documentation of staff qualifications and experience (doc - 151kb)](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/staffqual.doc) must be used to document staff experience and training in lieu of the listed qualifications.

Where an external contractor is chosen to run all or part of this activity, see: Excursions Guidelines – External Providers.

## Supervision

Supervision is a critical factor in managing risk in the outdoors.

A minimum of two staff members must be present for each activity, one with responsibility for activity instruction and the other able to assist the instructor.

It may be necessary to increase the staff allocation based on ability to observe or monitor students on activity with consideration to:

* students (medical conditions, age, physical, mental and emotional maturity, ability and experience)
* group (dynamics and size)
* staff (medical conditions, age, ability and experience, qualifications and skills)
* location (remoteness, communications and environmental conditions).

Reasons for increasing staff allocations must be documented.

The following table shows the minimum staff-to-participant allocation that must be used for canoeing activities. Any staff member who is neither a designated instructor nor assistant instructor is counted as a participant in the supervision ratios.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Inland waters: flatwater** | |
| Staff numbers | Participant numbers |
| 2 | Up to 12 |
| 3 | 13–18 |
| 4 | 19–24 |
| Grade 1–2 Inland waters: swift water\* | |
| Staff numbers | Participant numbers |
| 2 | 1–12 |
| 3 | 13–18 |
| 4 | 19–24 |
| Grade 3 Inland waters: swift water\* | |
| Staff numbers | Participant numbers |
| 2 | Up to 8 |
| 3 | 9–12 |
| 4 | 13–16 |
| Inland open waters/enclosed waters/coastal waters\* | |
| Staff numbers | Participant numbers |
| 2 | Up to 8 |
| 3 | 9–12 |
| 4 | 13–16 |

\* Minimum of two designated instructors/guides that meet the experience/qualifications criteria is required. Additional staff must have experience in the activity at this level.

Students must not be taken on rapids known to be, or likely to be at or above Grade 4 (see the International River Classification System in these guidelines under definitions above).

The teacher in charge is responsible for the supervision strategy, which must be endorsed by the school principal as part of the excursion approval process. Staff members must supervise students according to that strategy and in accordance with their duty of care. It is the role of the teacher in charge to clearly and adequately explain the supervision strategy to all participating staff members.

Students not directly participating in the activity must be separately supervised in line with the Excursions Guidelines – Supervision.

## Peak bodies and expert advice

Australian Canoeing <http://www.canoe.org.au/>

Australian Canoeing – Risk Management <http://canoe.org.au/safety/>

Paddle Australia <https://paddle.org.au/>

Paddle Vic <https://vic.paddle.org.au/>

Victorian Rainfall and River Height Data <http://www.bom.gov.au/vic/flood/index.shtml?ref=hdr>

For further enquiries, please contact [community.stakeholders@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:community.stakeholders@edumail.vic.gov.au)

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