

*Paddle Smart  
Paddle Safe  
Have Fun!*

# Smart Start Safe Paddling

For



**1**

*Chapter 1:  
Smart Gear*



# *How To Use This Resource*

Information presented in these slides support both the on-shore Smart Start for Safe Paddling program and the on-water Smart Start On-The-Water program.

- Those presenting the on-water program must hold, at minimum, an active ACA Level 1 Instructor Certification or Community Paddlesports Leader Certification.

These slides are designed to support instruction, not replace it. These slides are designed to accompany, not replace, teaching aids such as boats, paddles, and paddling equipment. Presenters should pair this content with real equipment, demonstrations, and discussion (not just lecture).

Select examples that match the craft, venue, and experience level of your participants.

When used on the water, instruction should include hands-on practice with the boats, paddles, and safety equipment participants will actually use.

*\*If this presentation is used to teach a course compliant with NASBLA's human-propelled boating standards, all slides must be used. If not, presenters should select slides that best meet their students' needs.*



# Overview



The Smart Start for Safe Paddling program is a suite of resources that provides essential information to help novice paddlers stay safe and have fun while on the water. The comprehensive program book addresses each NASBLA core and human-propelled standard, and provides in-text citations for easy cross reference.

- Resource Book
- Student Workbook
- Facilitator's Guide
- Free Online Safety Course
- Presentation Slides (This Document)
- On-Water Course Outline
- Infographics
- And more!





# Focus Areas



Smart Start for Safe Paddling gives paddlers a foundation for safe, enjoyable time on the water. This program presentation is organized into four focus areas. The following slides address Chapter 1: Smart Gear.



Smart Gear

Smart Skills

Smart Plan

Smart Decisions

# 1 *Smart Gear*



In this chapter, we will focus on the equipment and clothing choices that support safe paddling. Key sections – life jackets, clothing, paddlecraft, paddles, and other equipment.

Safe paddling is comprised of more than a boat and paddle. Think about the paddling experience as a system with four critical parts:

1. The paddler: life jacket, clothing, and thermal protection
2. The vessel: the boat or board itself, including fit and capacity
3. The paddle: the tool that powers and controls the craft
4. The support gear: rescue tools, signaling devices, and communication equipment

Every part matters, and each part should be designed to match the group members, water, weather, and trip plan.



# *First Section: Life Jackets*

# 1 Life Jackets: Wear Them!



A properly fitted life jacket is one of the most important pieces of paddling gear. Most paddlers do not expect to end up in the water, but safe paddlers plan for that possibility.



A life jacket can only help if it is on your body, properly fitted, in good condition, and suited to the activity. Wear yours every time you get on the water.

Life jackets are often called Personal Flotation Devices, or PFDs.

**Federal Law:** Boaters under the age of 13 must wear a USCG approved life jacket at all times while on the water.

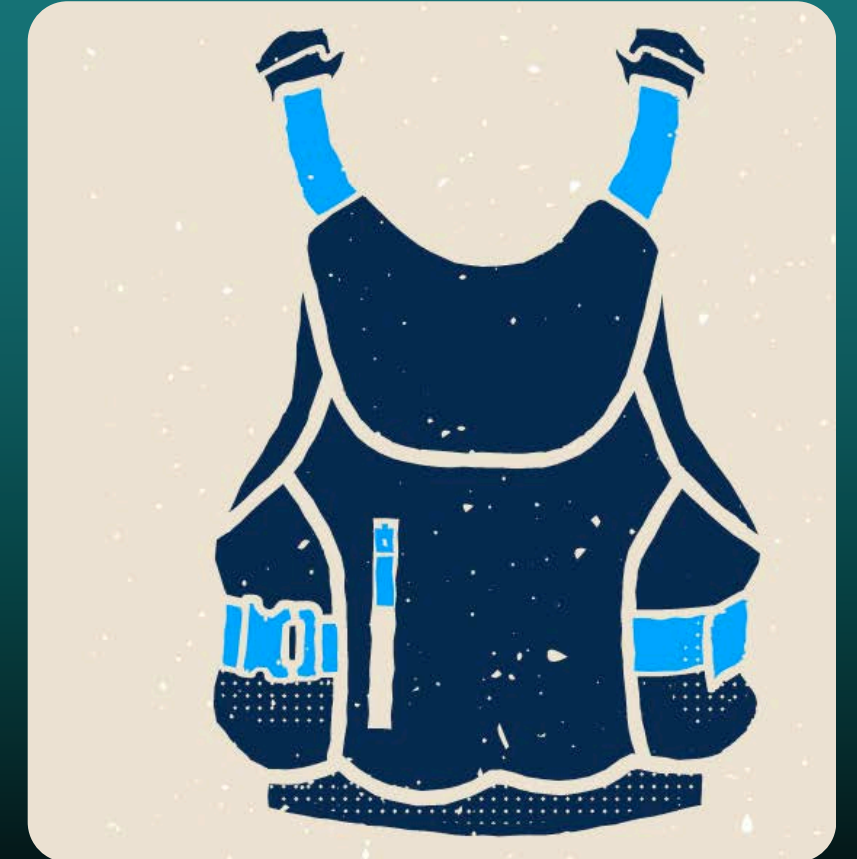
**State Specific Laws:** It's important to know the local laws and regulations. For example, New Mexico requires all paddlers to wear life jackets on the water, and Massachusetts requires them from September 15 to May 15.

**Accessibility versus Reality:** Accessing and putting on a life jacket in the water after a capsize is extremely difficult. Having your life jacket "accessible" but not on your body isn't enough.

# 1 Life Jackets: Types

## Life Jacket Types

- Inherently Buoyant: Foam filled, minimal maintenance needed
- Inflatable: Compact, comfortable vests that inflate automatically upon immersion or manually
  - Waist mounted
  - Over the shoulder
- Hybrid: Combines both foam and inflatable technology



# 1 *Life Jackets: Fit and Inspection*



Before getting on the water, check that your life jacket:

- Is the right size for you
- Is fully fastened
- Fits snugly without riding up
- Is in good condition with no broken buckles, torn straps, or damaged fabric



**Zip It!**



**Buckle It!**



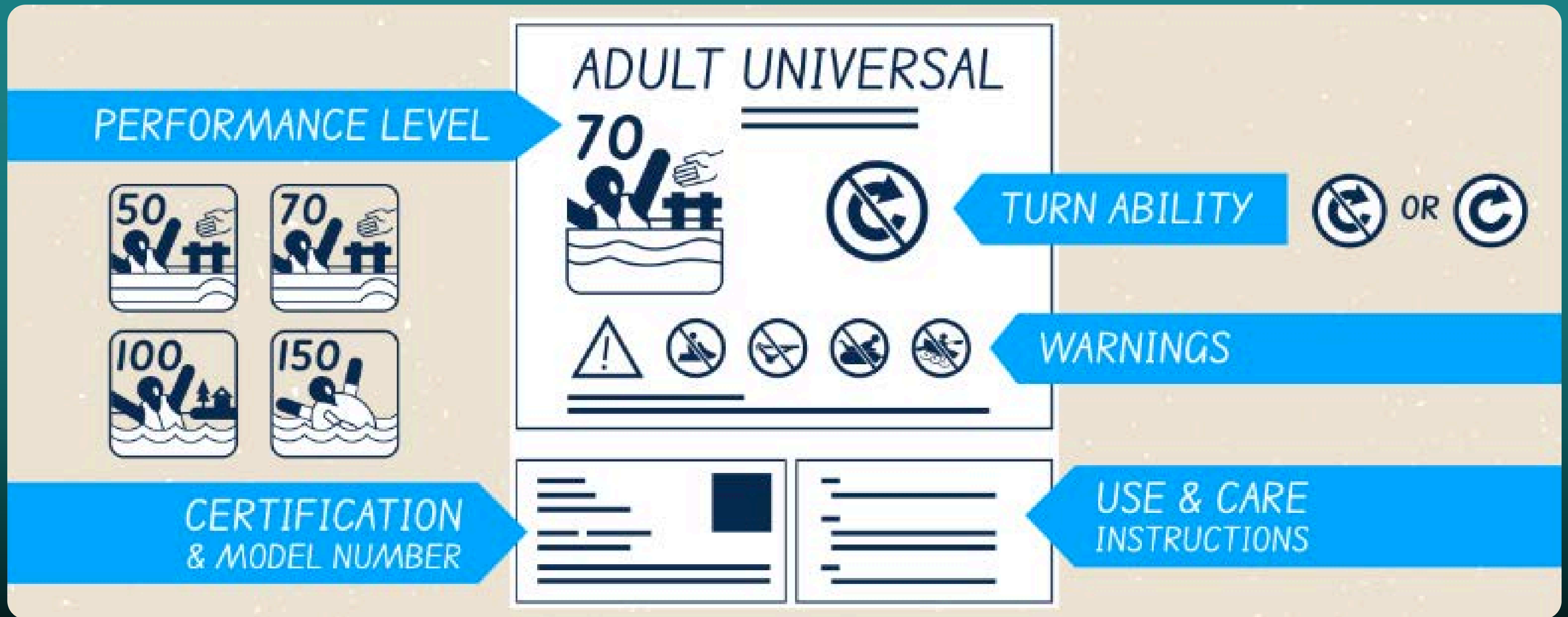
**Fit It!**

Perform a simple fit check: fasten it, tighten it, and have a partner lift gently at the shoulders. It should stay secure on your body.

# 1 Life Jackets: Labels



Take a minute to read the label on your life jacket to determine if it is the right fit for you and your activity. Here's what the various symbols mean:

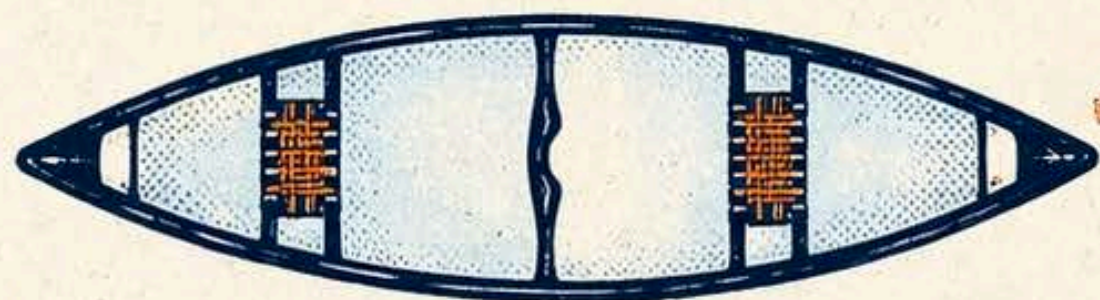




*Next Section: Paddlescrafft*

# 1

# Let's Talk Boats & Boards



## CANOE

**Deck:** Open deck architecture.

**Stance:** Paddled kneeling or seated on an elevated bench/saddle.

**Propulsion:** Single-bladed paddle.



## KAYAK

**Deck:** Open or closed (decked) cockpit with a coaming rim.

**Stance:** Paddled from a seated position low to the water line.

**Propulsion:** Double-bladed paddle.



## STAND UP PADDLEBOARD (SUP)

**Deck:** Flat, surfboard-style open deck.

**Stance:** Paddled lying, kneeling, sitting, or standing upright.

**Propulsion:** Single-bladed paddle.

# 1 Geometry of Paddlescraft



Design features impact stability, maneuverability, carrying capacity, and tracking.

**SHORT**



**LENGTH**



**LONG**



Longer = Faster tracking, especially on open water, but harder to turn.

**NARROW**



**WIDTH (BEAM)**



**WIDE**



Wider = More stable with stronger primary balance, but slower through the water.

**FLAT PROFILE**



**ROCKER (BOW/STERN CURVE)**



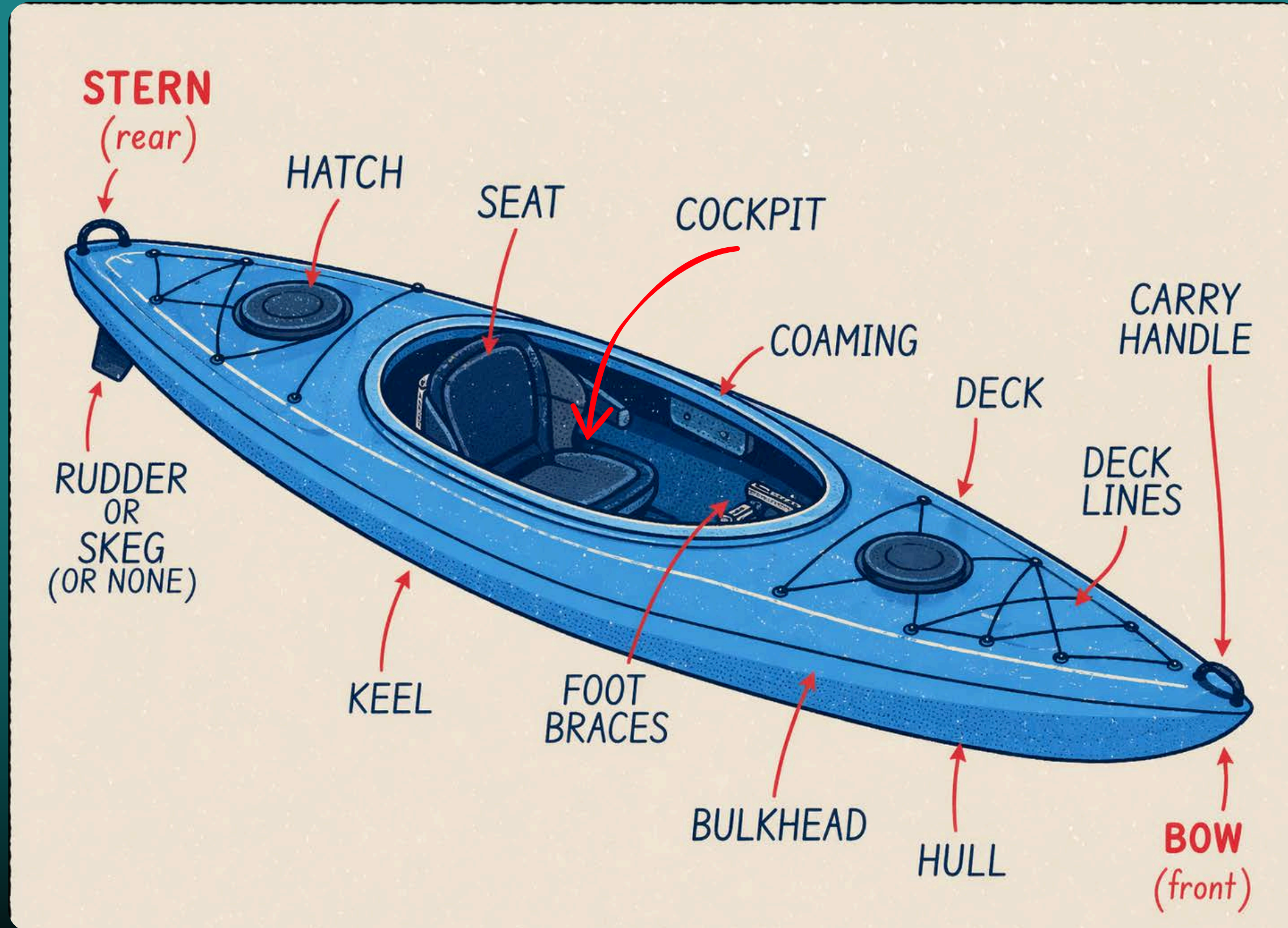
**HIGH CURVE**



Higher rocker = More agile and easier to turn, but harder to keep in a straight line.

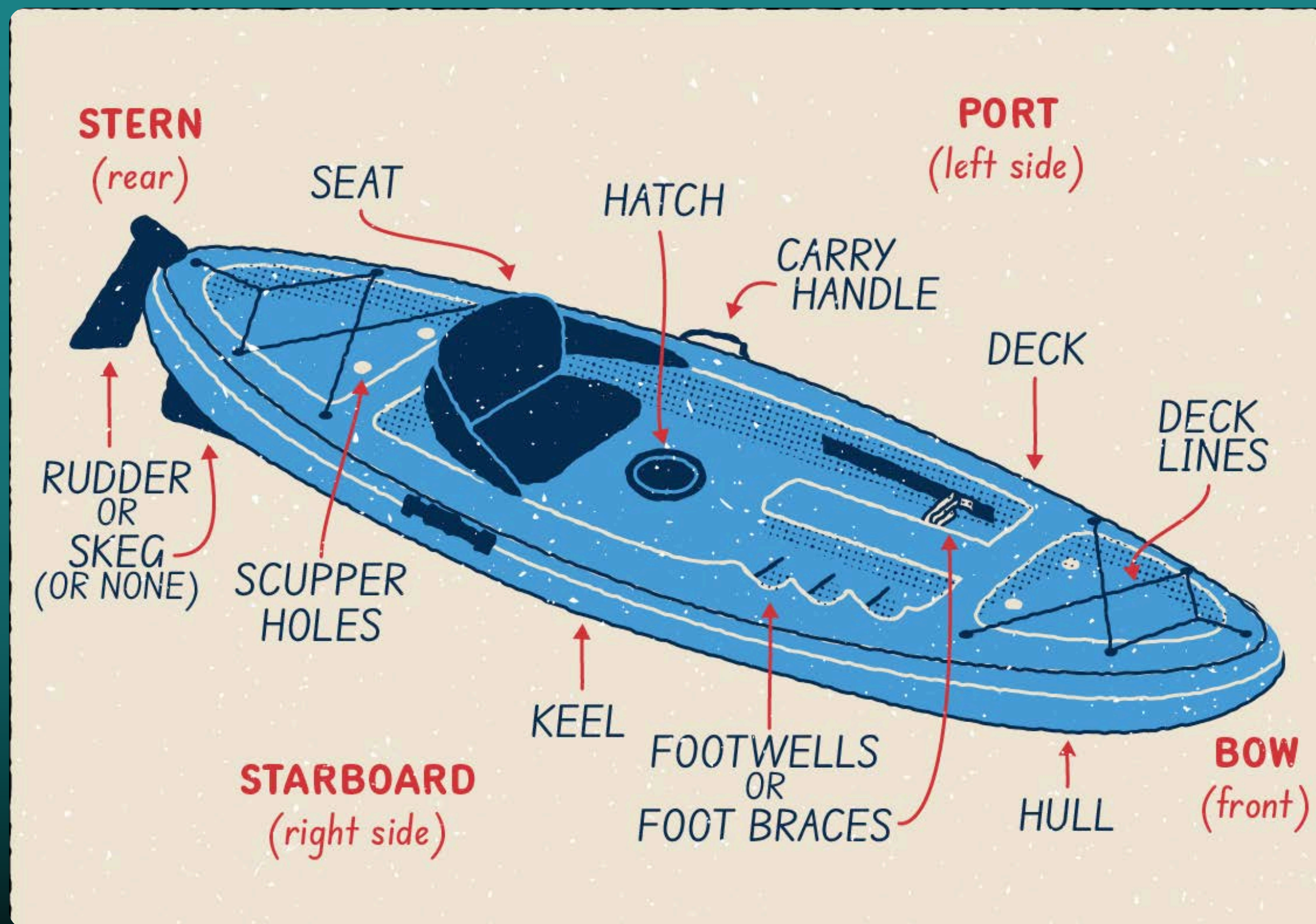
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# Parts of a Recreational Kayak (Sit Inside)



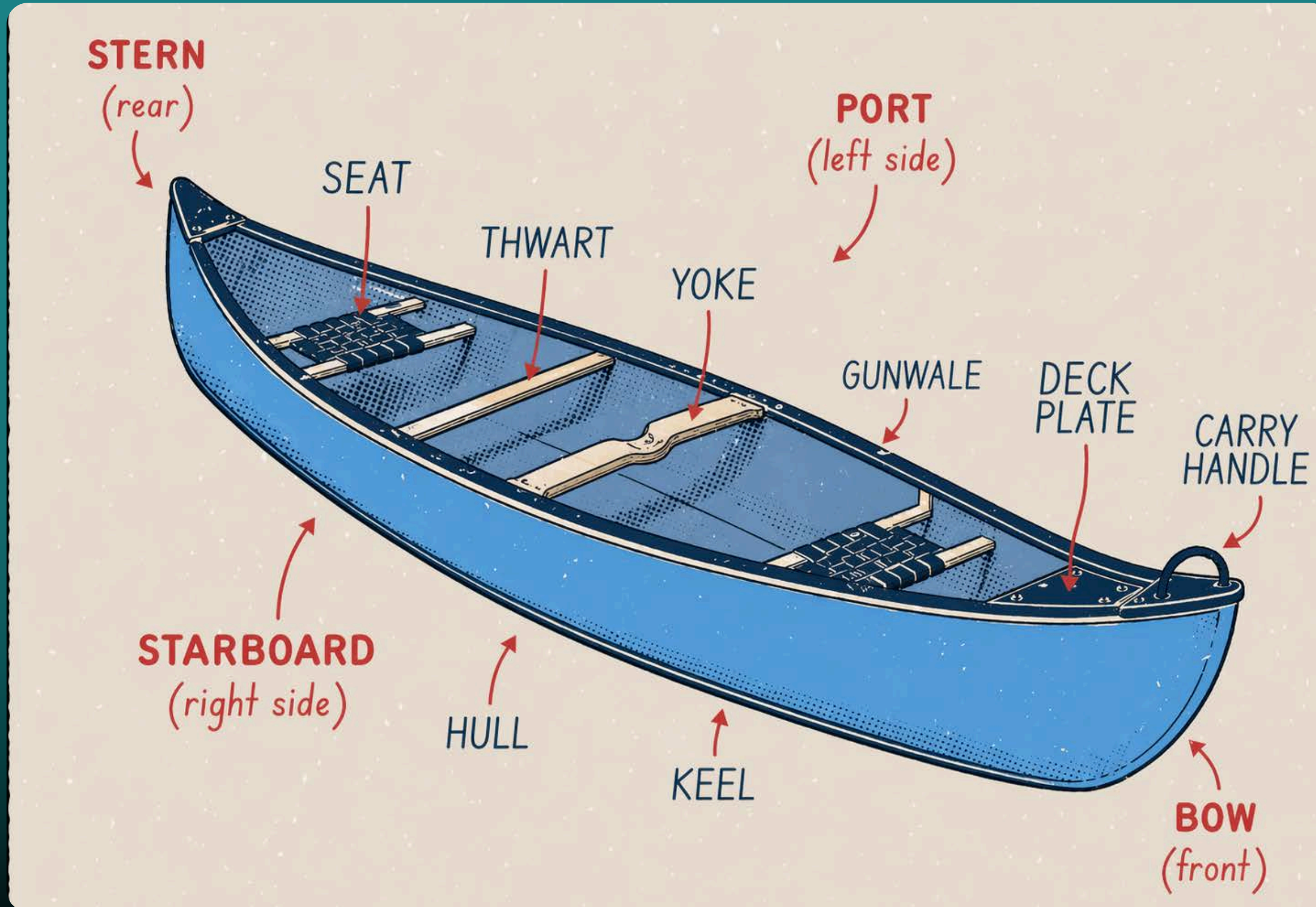
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# Parts of a Recreational Sit-On-Top Kayak



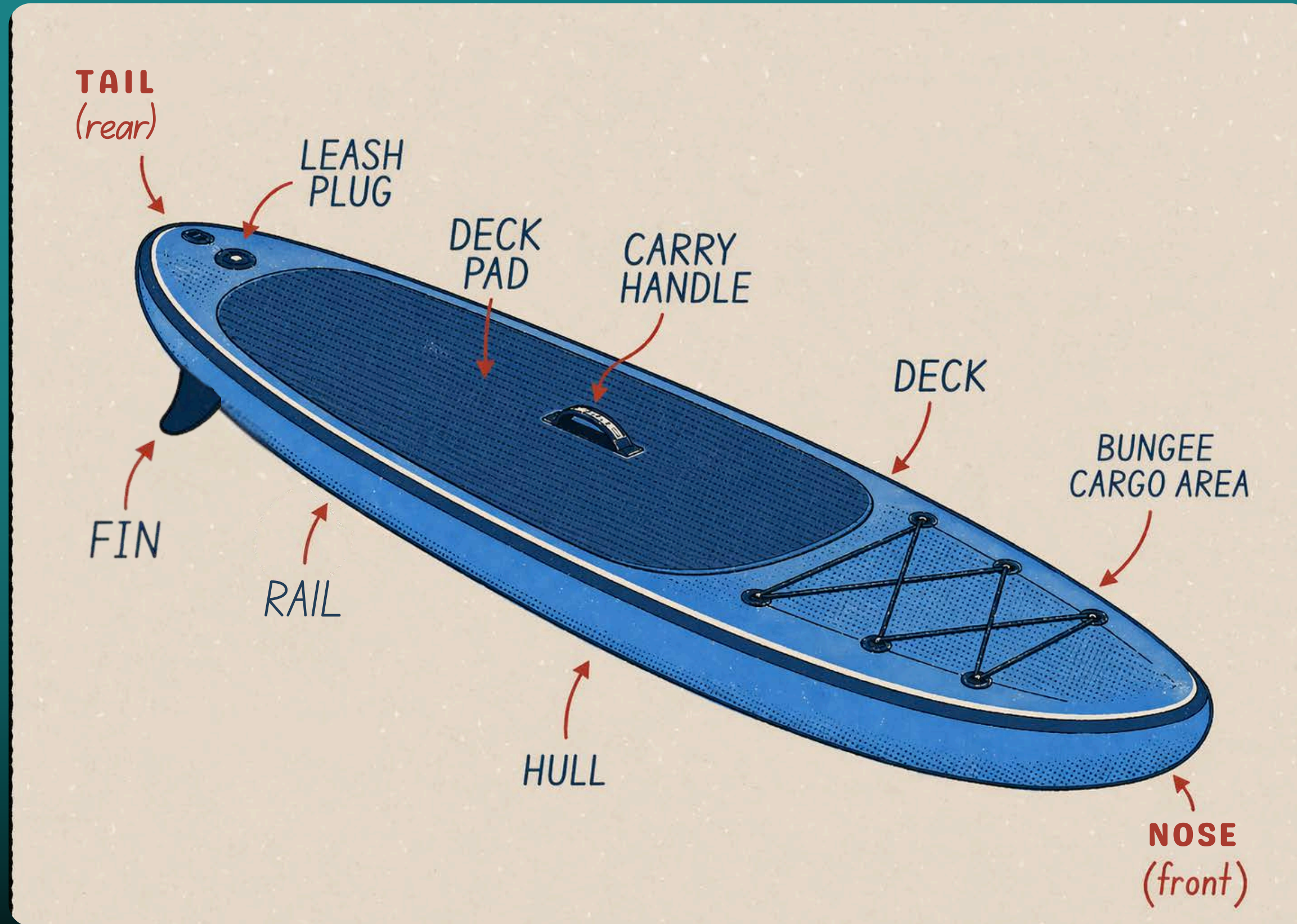
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# Parts of a Tandem Canoe



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# Parts of a Stand Up Paddleboard (SUP)

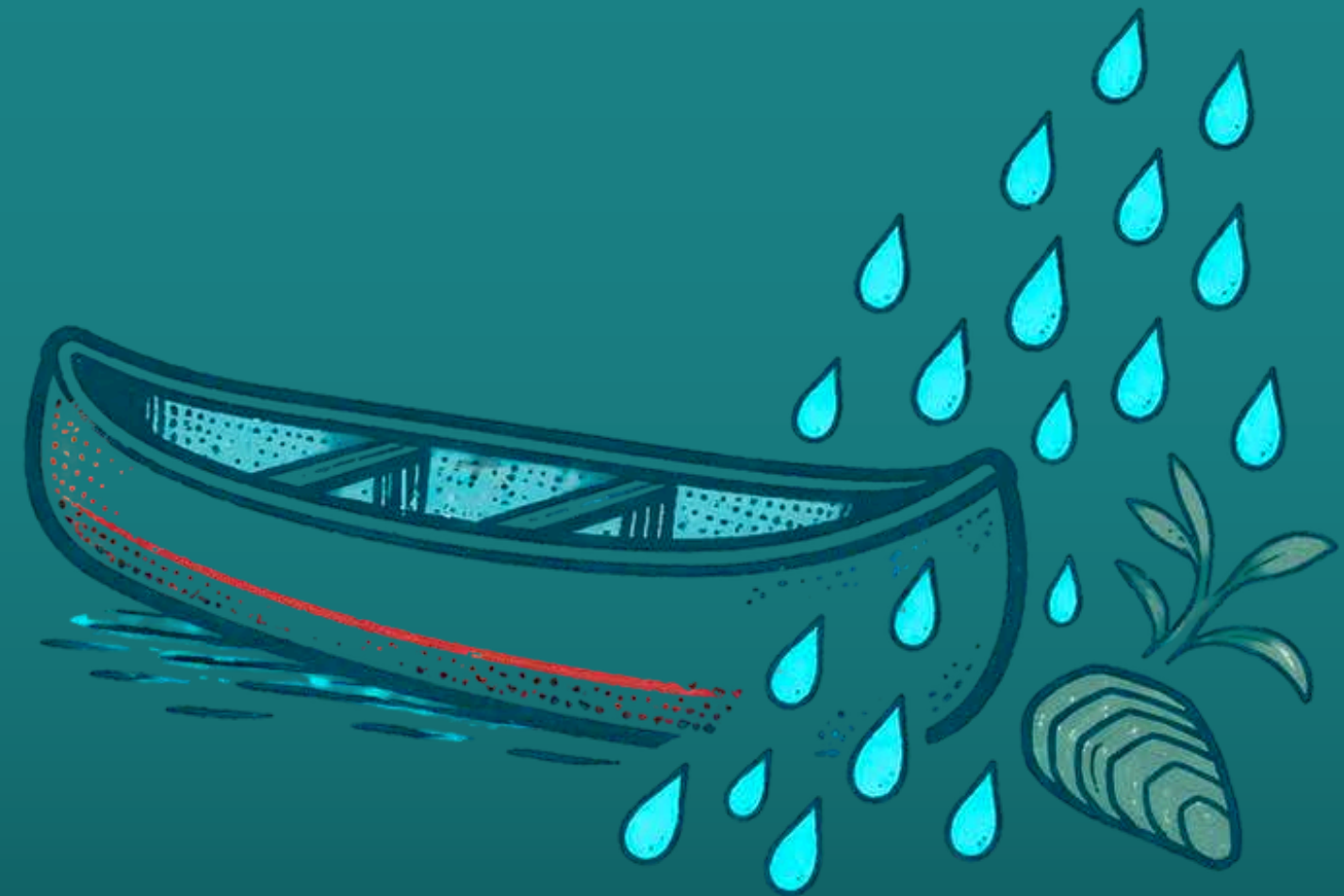


# 1 Taking Care of Your Boat & the Environment



## PROTECT YOUR BOAT

Sun and weather can wear down your canoe over time. Store it out of prolonged sun and weather when you can, and check it regularly for wear or damage.



## HELP STOP INVASIVE SPECIES

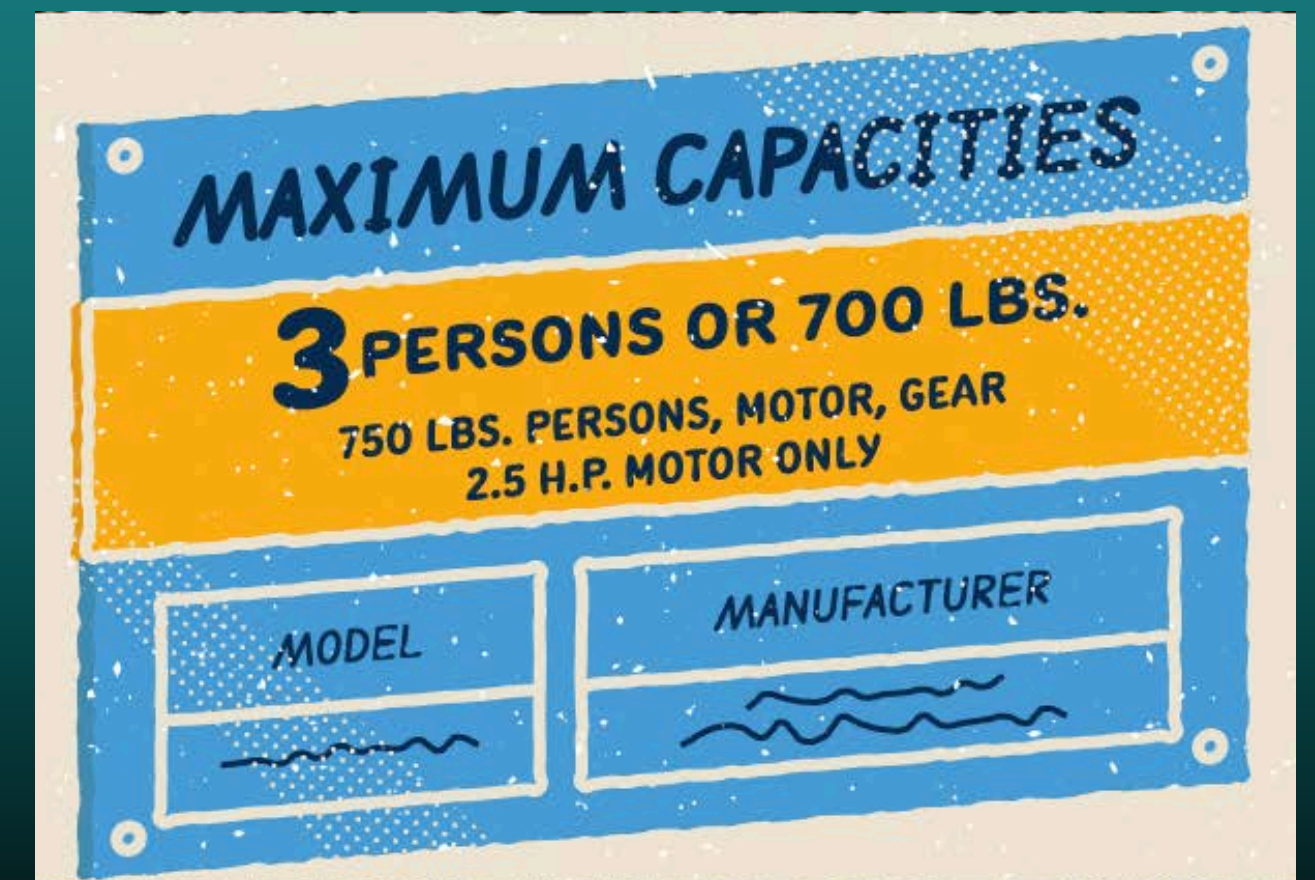
Clean, drain, and dry your canoe and gear after each trip. Remove plants, mud, and hitchhikers before heading to another waterway.

# 1 *Take Note: Boat Capacity*



Never exceed a boat's listed capacity. The capacity plate tells you the maximum weight and number of people the boat is designed to carry. That total includes paddlers, passengers, and gear. An overloaded boat sits lower in the water, becomes harder to control, and is more vulnerable to swamping or capsizing. Before launching, make sure the combined weight of people and equipment stays within the manufacturer's limits and that the load is balanced appropriately.

We'll talk more about how to properly load and secure gear into your boat in Chapter 2: Smart Skills.

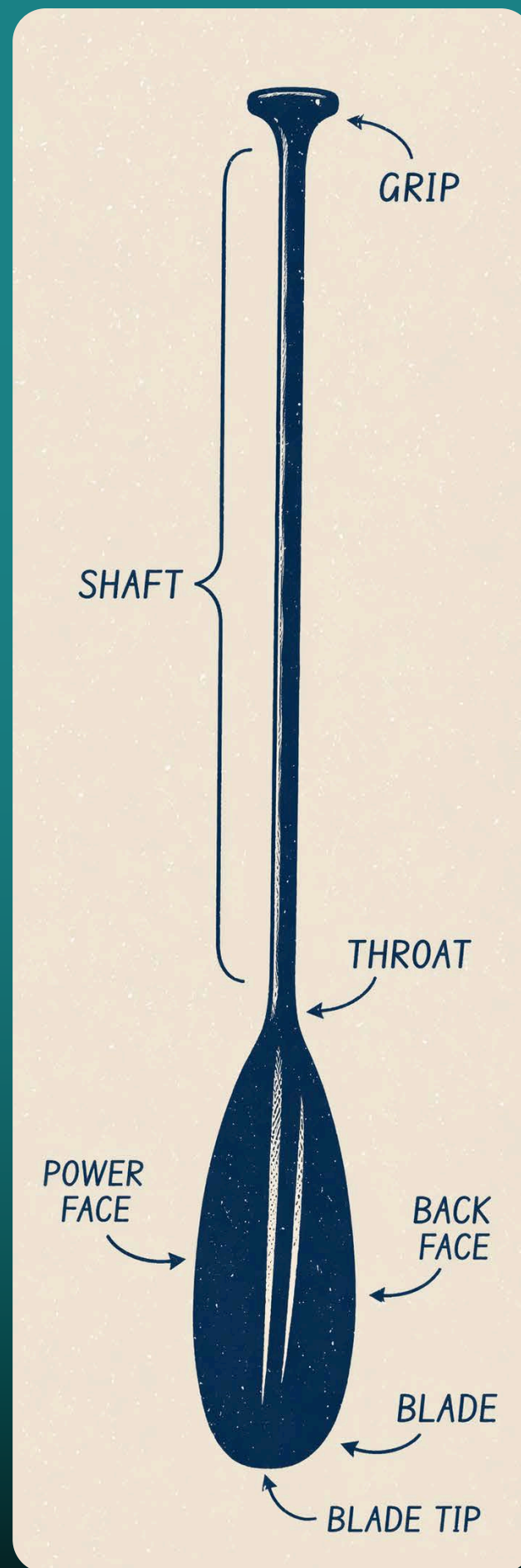




*Next Section: Paddles*

# 1 Paddles

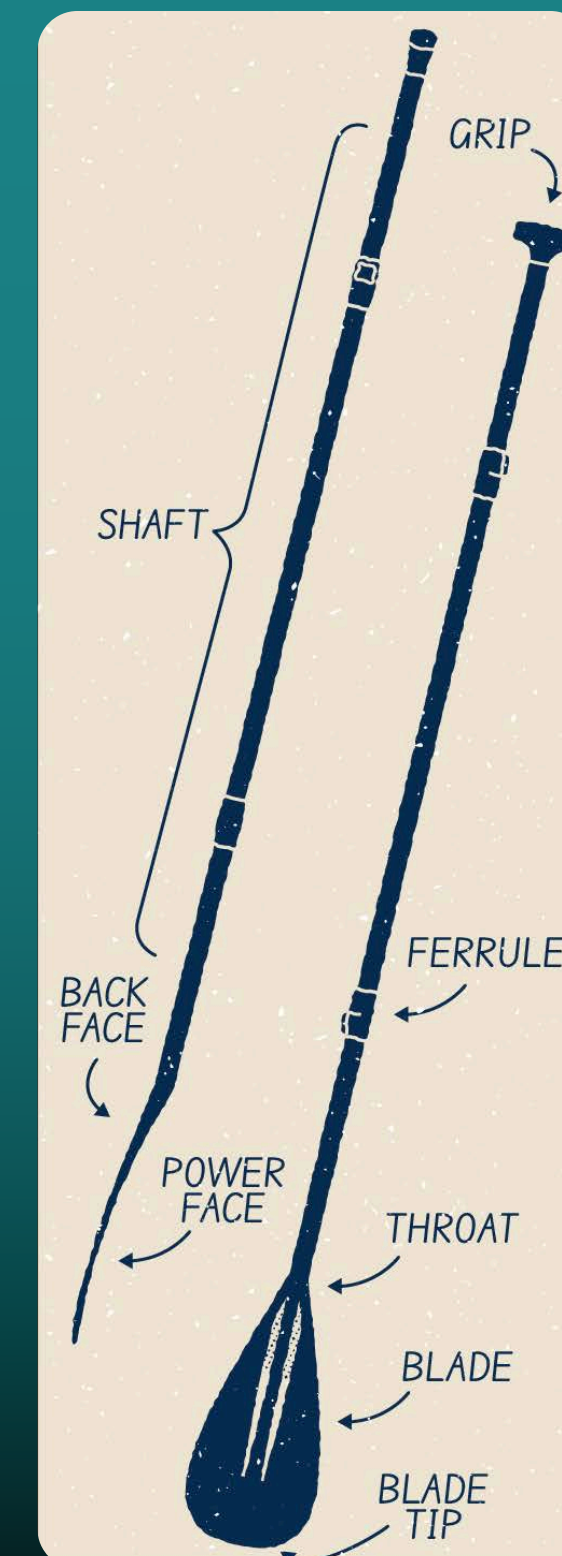
- **Grip:** The top handhold that helps with control, comfort, and steering.
- **Shaft:** The long section you hold; it affects leverage, reach, and paddling comfort.
- **Throat:** The transition between shaft and blade; it helps transfer power smoothly into the stroke.
- **Blade:** The part that enters the water and creates movement, turning, and stopping power.



Canoe



Kayak



SUP

# 1 Paddles

- **Blade tip:** The end of the blade that first enters the water; it helps with clean interaction with the water
- **Power face:** The side of the blade designed to pull against the water for efficient strokes.
- **Back face:** The opposite side of the blade; it matters for stroke mechanics and certain maneuvers.
- **Ferrule:** On many paddles, the connection point between paddle sections; it allows blade angle adjustment and easier disassembly for transport.
- **Drip rings:** Common on kayak paddles; they help keep water from running down the shaft onto your hands or lap.



**Don't forget to label all of your gear with your contact information!**

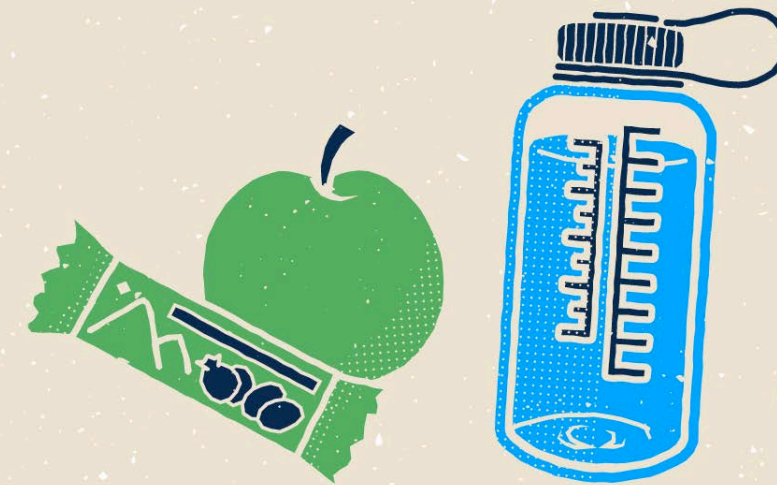
*Next Section:  
Additional Equipment*

# 1 Additional Equipment



Additional pieces of personal gear matter because they help paddlers stay safe, comfortable, and better prepared when conditions change. Here's why:

- **Protection:** Items like sun hats, sunscreen, layers, and proper footwear protect against sun, cold, wind, blisters, and cuts.
- **Preparedness:** Gear such as a whistle, headlamp, phone in a waterproof pouch, or first aid supplies help paddlers respond to problems more effectively.
- **Comfort:** Water, snacks, dry clothing, and weather-appropriate layers help paddlers stay focused and make better decisions.
- **Communication and visibility:** Signaling tools and lights make it easier to get attention or stay visible if something goes wrong. Make sure to use pea-less whistles, attached to your life jacket.



# 1 Some More Additional Equipment...



- **Cutting tools:** Useful in emergencies if a paddler or boat becomes tangled in rope, fishing line, or other gear. They are rescue tools, not convenience items.
- **Dry bags:** Help protect essential items like extra clothing, food, medication, and communication devices from water. They support comfort and emergency readiness.
- **Lights:** Improve visibility in low light, changing weather, or emergencies. They can help paddlers see, be seen, and signal for help.
- **Electric flares or other visual distress signals:** Can help attract attention in a serious emergency, especially where paddlers may be hard to spot.
- **De-watering devices:** Sponges, bilge pumps, or buckets help remove water from a boat after splashing, rain, rescue practice, or a capsized. That can improve stability, comfort, and control.





*Next Section: Paddling Clothing*

# 1 *Dress for Immersion: Always Expect to Get Wet*



Dress for the water temperature, not just the air temperature.

Cold water can create serious risk, even on a mild day.

Safe paddlers plan for capsizes, splash, wind, and changing conditions.

Avoid cotton clothing; choose materials that insulate when wet and that dry more quickly.

When choosing what to wear, ask yourself:

- How cold is the water?
- How long might I be exposed if I capsize?
- How quickly could I get back in my boat or get to shore?
- Do I have an extra set of dry clothes (in a dry bag) to bring with me?



# 1 Layering for Comfort and Safety

A good clothing system for paddlers includes:

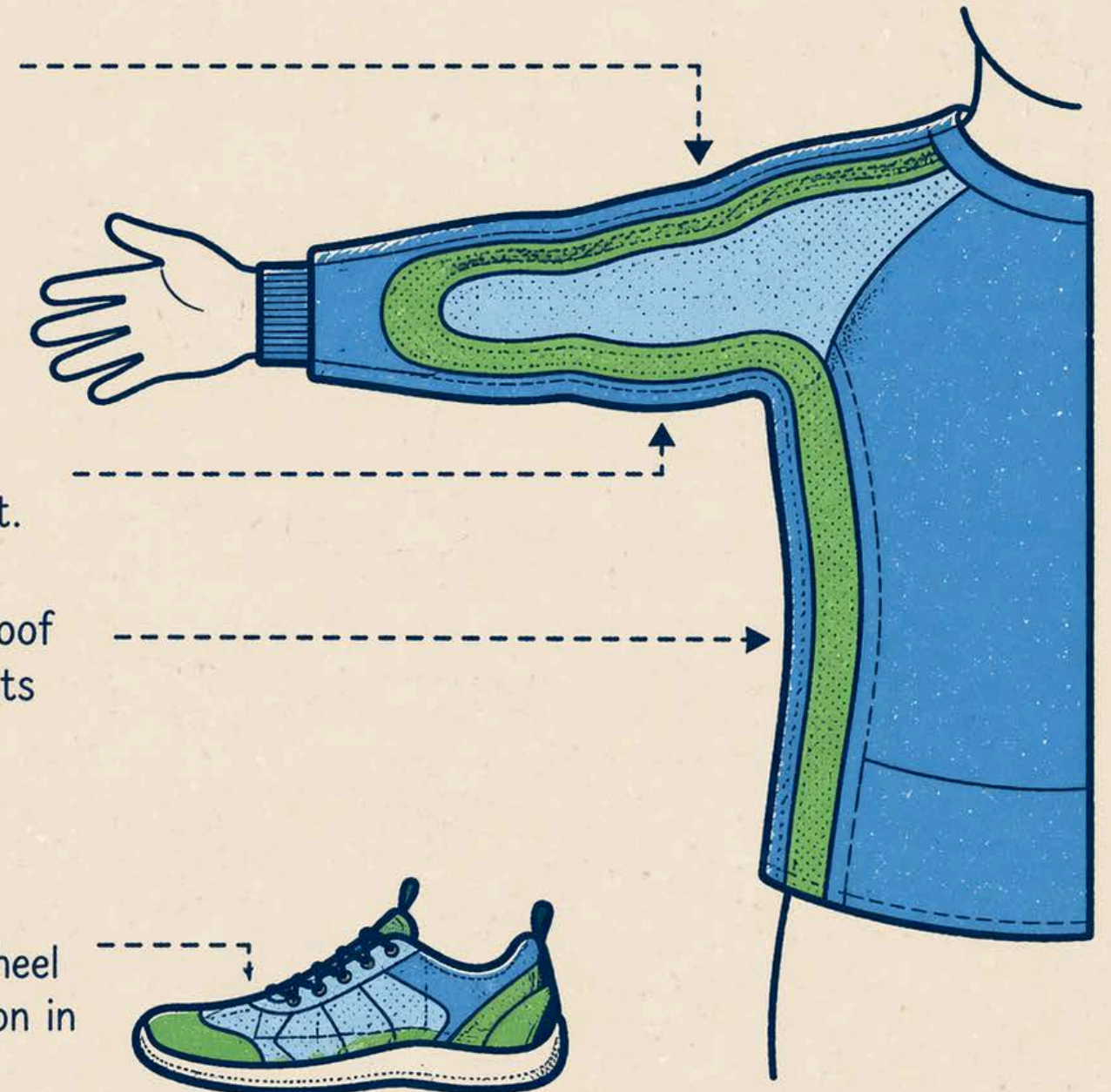
- A base layer to move moisture away from the skin
- An insulating layer to help retain warmth
- An outer layer to protect against wind and water
- Also think about footwear, headwear, sun protection, and the need to adjust clothing as conditions change

**Base Layer:** Wicking synthetics that pull moisture away from the skin.

**Insulation Layer:** Wool or neoprene to trap body heat even when soaking wet.

**Outer Shell:** Waterproof and windproof garments to stop convective heat loss.

**Footwear:** Non-snog, closed-toe and closed-heel shoes for foot protection in rocky shallows.



*Next Section:*

*Additional Thermal Protection*

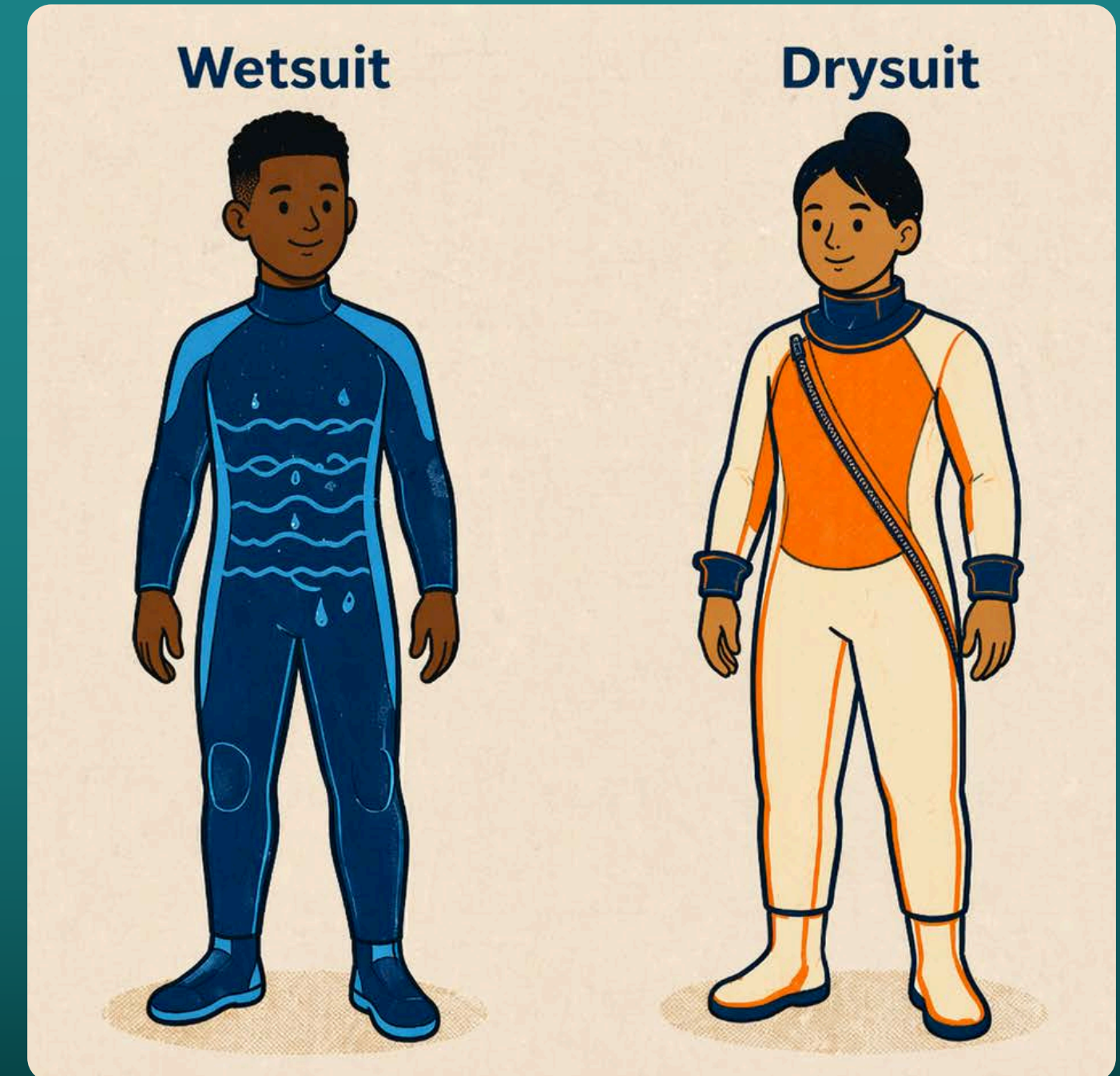
# 1 Wet Suits and Dry Suits

## Wet suits:

- Made of stretchy neoprene
- Traps a thin layer of water against your skin which stays warm from your body heat
- Pros: Provides some buoyancy, impact protection, and less expensive than dry suits

## Dry suits:

- Provides a waterproof shell similar to a thick raincoat and has seals on the neck, wrists, and sometimes ankles
- Keeps water out entirely; your warmth comes from your dry base layers
- Pros: can adapt to a wide range of conditions by changing insulation, many paddlers feel drysuits are more comfortable









*\*Your life jacket goes on top of these*

# 1

## Wet Suits and Dry Suits: Comparison



	WETSUIT	DRYSUIT
 <b>MECHANISM</b>	Traps a thin layer of water warmed by the body.	Keeps water completely off the body via latex seals.
 <b>MODULARITY</b>	Single weight, cannot easily add/remove insulation.	Highly modular; allows varied layering underneath.
 <b>INHERENT BUOYANCY</b>	High (neoprene floats). ✓	None. ✗
 <b>IMPACT PADDING</b>	Thick neoprene provides padding against rocks. ✓	Minimal to none. ✗
 <b>VULNERABILITY</b>	Functions well even with small tears.	Small tears can compromise the entire thermal system.
 <b>COST PROFILE</b>	Generally lower cost.	Premium investment.



*Next Section:  
Chapter Summary*

# 1 Chapter Summary



This chapter explored the paddling experience as four critical parts:

- The paddler: life jacket, clothing, and thermal protection
- The vessel: the boat or board itself, including fit and capacity
- The paddle: the tool that powers and controls the craft
- The support gear: rescue tools, signaling devices, and communication equipment

It covered the basic gear every paddler should know, use, and understand before heading onto the water. It covered the main parts of common paddlecraft and paddles, explains how clothing and safety equipment support comfort and risk management, and highlighted the purpose of additional gear such as dry bags, communication tools, lights, de-watering devices, and rescue items. Overall, the chapter helps beginners understand not just what gear to bring, but why it matters and where it should be carried.

## ON THE BODY



Life jacket (PFD) worn and fitted



Whistle attached to the PFD



White light for low visibility



Clothing for the water temperature

## IN THE BOAT



Communication device in a waterproof case



Water and snacks



Dry bag with extra layers



Dewatering device (pump, sponge, or bailer)

## FOR THE GROUP



First aid kit



Emergency supplies



Float plan shared with a trusted contact



Repair kit and group rescue gear



# Up Next: Chapter 2



This concludes the Smart Start for Safe Paddling Chapter 1: Smart Gear.

Be sure to check out Chapter 2: Smart Skills for even more great information!

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2



3

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Smart Gear

Smart Skills

Smart Plan

Smart Decisions



## Connect With ACA



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The American Canoe Association's (ACA) vision is to engage millions of paddlers with safe and healthy opportunities for challenge, learning, service, and enjoyment. ACA's Smart Start for Safe Paddling is a holistic program which features comprehensive books, student activity workbooks, free online coursework, instructor's guide with presentation slides, and a wide collection of complementary resources.

Find all this and more:

<https://americancanoe.org/smart-start>