

Paddle Length Selection

By Gordon Dayton, *Changing Tides PaddleCraft* – 5/05.

Sea kayak paddles: Sea kayak paddles vary depending mainly on paddling style, width of boat and size of paddler in that order. Many novice paddlers have a very low paddling style and wider boat that requires a longer paddle. The size of your frame has a minor influence since taller people also have longer arms (it is mainly difference in shoulder width that contributes to length choice). Generally, the shorter the paddle the higher and more efficient will be the stroke. Racers and endurance paddlers will subtract another 5-10 cm from the lengths given below.

High Angle Paddlers			
Paddler Size	Narrow Boats	Wide Boats	Very Wide Boats
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hard shells • race boats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rec boat • Sit-on-top 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doubles • Inflatables
Small: 5'0" – 5'5"	213 – 217 cm	218 – 220 cm	223 – 230 cm
Medium: 5'5" – 6' 2"	218 – 220 cm	220 – 230 cm	225 – 235 cm
Tall: 6"2" plus	221 – 224 cm	225 – 235 cm	220 – 240 cm
Low Angle Paddlers			
Small: 5'0" – 5'5"	215 – 220 cm	225 – 230 cm	225 – 230 cm
Medium: 5'5" – 6' 2"	220 – 225 cm	230 – 235 cm	235 – 240 cm
Tall: 6"2" plus	230 – 235 cm	235 – 240 cm	240 – 245 cm

Whitewater paddles: In general, whitewater paddlers are less interested in an efficient forward stroke and more interested in maneuvering. They use the paddle in a near vertical position much more of the time. Thus, they typically need a much shorter paddle than sea kayakers. More aggressive paddlers can subtract as much as 5 cm or more from the lengths below.

White Water Paddles			
Paddler Size	Typical Width (Closed Cockpit)	Wider (Sit-on-tops)	Very wide (Inflatables)
Small: 5'0" – 5'5"	190 - 197 cm	205 – 210 cm	215 – 225 cm
Medium: 5'5" – 6' 2"	198 – 204 cm	210 – 215 cm	220 – 230 cm
Tall: 6"2" plus	205 - 216 cm	215 – 220 cm	230 – 235 cm

Canoe Paddles: Canoe paddles are single blade versions of the above, and vary in length depending on application, seat height and paddler size. Again, the higher performance application will utilize the shorter paddle shaft that sets one up for a faster stroke rate.

Canoe Paddles			
Paddler Size	Marathon Competition	Touring/Cruising & Whitewater	Slalom Competition
Small: 5'0" – 5'5"	190 - 197 cm	205 – 210 cm	215 – 225 cm
Medium: 5'5" – 6' 2"	198 – 204 cm	210 – 215 cm	220 – 230 cm
Tall: 6"2" plus	205 - 216 cm	215 – 220 cm	230 – 235 cm

An excellent article on selection of paddles for canoe touring is one by Charles Burchill. It may be found at http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~burchil/pm_canoe/paddle_size.html