



ROLLING CLINIC



USING THIS VIDEO

SIMON

The aim of this video is to introduce you to rolling a sea kayak. It works very differently to other rolling films you may have seen, because although it's based around a rolling clinic, you will have to put in a lot of the hard work yourself. You'll need to work with a friend, possibly two, and you'll want a video camera so you can record what you're doing and watch it back. Gordon will give you the knowledge to be able to coach yourselves.

Gordon will demonstrate the most common reasons a roll fails. You'll compare your attempts with these. Spotting the reason a roll isn't working is difficult but we'll help you to do it. Then Gordon will suggest two different "fixes" for each mistake - techniques you can use to correct what's going wrong and hopefully learn to roll.

You don't have to learn in a swimming pool. We're here because the underwater pictures are clearer. You do have to work with other people and you should use a video camera. A phone camera will be just fine. No video can teach you to roll, you have to do that yourself. But Gordon will help you to get started.

INTRODUCTIONS

GORDON

So thanks for coming along tonight and giving up your time, learning how to roll. Because that really is what this is all about. It would be great if I could know just wee bit about your kayaking background, and have you tried to roll before, has it ever been successful? If you haven't tried, that's absolutely fine. And if you've tried, and that's been unsuccessful, then that's what this is about.



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VANESSA

Before we came to Skye, I did a little bit of kayaking, guiding trips that kind of thing. Since being on Skye I've joined the club up here and I've started to learn how to roll. I've got as far as getting into the water but I haven't been able to come out again.

JENNY

I've done lots of kayaking bits and pieces, but I've not had that much coaching. Only done one session of rolling before so I really need to improve that. *GORDON Was that successful?* I didn't manage to do a full roll by myself

GAVIN

I've done bits of kayaking from time to time over the years, since I was quite young actually, but I've never tried to roll.

KARREN

I've done a bit of paddling. I've had one pool session trying to learn how to roll, but that was really hanging onto the side and just trying to use your hips, feeling the weight of the boat. So I'd say you're taking me from scratch to hopefully rolling.

LISA

I've kayaked a bit and I've attempted to roll but have not been successful.



FINLAY

I have absolutely no kayaking experience whatsoever. Total novice. And I'm very looking forward to it, learning how to roll.

SIMON

So that's the class. Six pupils, none of whom can roll. But by the end of these sessions, two will roll their kayaks. Now, move on to our first session in the rolling clinic.

ROLLING CLINIC 1

GORDON

For me, rolling is about being upright and breathing air. How we get there isn't that important but there's a lot of things we can do to make it easier. So what I want to do is run through some exercises on the pool-side to start with, just with our hands and our bodies, just so we've got an idea. And then we'll start introducing things like paddles and boats and then we'll get into the water and do some other exercises.

Body movement



GORDON

I'm sure you'll have seen kids walking. They give a wee bum wiggle. So what we want to do is just that idea of keeping our shoulders nice and level, and we're lifting one bum cheek, then lifting the other bum cheek. It's that idea of lifting one bum cheek, then lifting the other one.



The next thing we're going to do is lying over to the side. So we're going to lie on the side, put our hands out to the side, we're going to be pushing down on our hands and trying to put our bum back on the ground before we do anything else. So we're going from that position there, putting the bum onto the ground, and then sitting up. Do you want to see that again? So what we're trying to do is to get our bum back onto the... both bum cheeks on the ground and our body still out to the side before we sit up. The problem is if we try to sit up too early we're using all shoulders and when we're using the paddle in the water that means the paddle sinks to the bottom because the water is not nearly as solid as the ground is here. So it's that idea of going over, pushing down on our hands, but trying to rotate our hips up to sit flat on the ground.

Try to keep your shoulders as still as possible and if you want another model, if you use either Lisa or Karren as your model. Their shoulders aren't really moving much and it's all just their hips that are doing the work.

Try the other one where you're lying over with your hands down on the ground and see if you can come up from there. Finlay – see if you can... go back over onto your side there... see if you can roll your bum onto the ground first before you lift your shoulders or your head or anything. So use your right hand a bit more than your left.

SIMON

They may feel they're doing this correctly, but on video you can see what's really happening. Soon we'll ask you to video yourself doing these exercises. When you watch it back, you will know whether you're doing what Gordon demonstrated. If your roll isn't working on the water, you might need to return to this session in the rolling clinic.

GORDON

If you can just turn and watch Vanessa just now and what she's doing. You see how she's lying back there, then she's lying onto her back and then sitting up. That's not very good. Because what that means is – although we can roll onto our back really easy without a lot of effort, we can't do that in the water. Because we've got a boat comes up here. If you want to make it feel a bit less like a sit-up, try going even further forward. So keep your knees the same so that you're still in that same position, but going forward to there, so that everything you do is in that forwards position. So you're here, then buttock onto the ground, and up.

As you're coming up, put your head down onto your shoulder, on the side you're pressing down on, and just tell me if that feels any different. So as you're pressing down on your hands and rolling your bum up, put your head down onto that side – onto the shoulder on that side. That feel any different? It keeps your head down for longer, yes. I know that my head is very big so that when I'm rolling, if my head comes up early it's a lot of weight out of the water. It sort of stops a lot of other things happening.

Paddles

GORDON

So everything the same. So I'm going over onto that side, paddle's here, it's out to the side. I'm pushing down on the paddle, putting my bum onto the ground, and then sitting up. I'll let you see this side.



SIMON

You don't need a pool to practice this. Any open space will do.

GORDON

If you feel like you're still having to do it all with your tummy, then you're not pushing down on the paddle enough. The paddles are fine to push them down onto the poolside. It's not going to damage either.

SIMON

Notice those of our group whose movements are closest to Gordon's demonstration and those whose movements are not. These are the stages at which the foundations of a roll are laid.

GORDON

OK, so if you know which side is your more favoured side, then we'll stick with that. IN an ideal world, we would coach both sides equally, because then it means you can roll on both sides rather than it just being a one sided thing. So that's the ideal world. An awful lot of people have got one roll that they can do and as I said at the start, the important thing is about getting up and breathing air again. It's not necessarily about being able to do it both sides twenty-seven different ways.

Dry kayaks

GORDON

So what we're going to do now – you can see how it has changed my position, and the boat sort of rocks about a bit. So from there, paddle out to the side and rotate the boat up the right way, and then sit up.



SIMON

To avoid damage to your kayak you might prefer to practice this exercise on soft grass. Video your attempts; watch it back and compare what you're doing to what you've seen so far. Are you getting the exercises right? When you are, it's time to move onto the water. Either watch Gordon's demonstration rolls or the second session in the rolling clinic.

ROLLING CLINIC 2

SIMON

Now the rolling clinic moves onto the water. You can practice in a swimming pool or in a safe natural body of water. Simply adapt the exercises to suit the environment. Video your practice sessions so you can later analyse what is going right and wrong.

Poolside paddle bar

GORDON

If you just move out a wee bit Jenny. I'm holding onto the paddle with two hands, so you hold onto the paddle with two hands, and I can use my feet against the side of the boat here to stop it hitting against the side. So if you just come all the way over towards me, keeping your head out of the water. All the way over. And then put the boat up the right way. That's it. Everyone seeing that OK? So my feet are here just to stop the boat hitting against the sides, I've got both hands cradling the paddle, and then... come over. And back up. Make sure you're doing that on your favoured side.



Let's have another go. What we're looking at – remember what we did on the side. Putting your bum down and sitting upright first, and then everything else comes up after that. Keep

your elbows a wee bit bent as well, it'll just keep you a bit closer to the side. It's a good bit easier – yeah. Good. Are you using your knees at all, your thighs? You might need to try it again to see.

Vanessa – think about the exercise we did back up on the side where we were going from over and putting our bum cheeks down first. Think about doing that as a two stage movement. So our bum goes flat first and then our body follows.

Poolside paddle across kayak

GORDON

What we're going to do is hold on to the paddle with it across the boat now. So again two hands, one between the hands and one out the side, maybe even with the paddle resting out on the poolside. And then do exactly the same exercise that you have been doing but holding the paddle more in the paddling position. So give that a go Vanessa. That's it.

I think it might be easier in the shallower water with you standing in the water beside Finlay.

Paddle across kayak

GORDON

That's it. That's better. So you can feel the difference between that – I can certainly feel the difference in pressure on the blade here. It's starting with your hips and this knee, on this side. So the knee is pressing against the boat and you're driving the boat upright. It's using your hips, but really it's a knee drive. So we're driving the knee up against the boat as much as anything else.



That's OK. When Lisa is pulling down there shouldn't be a great pressure.

Come this way just a touch. Just come over this way. So that paddle has to be like that behind you Jenny so that it's flat that way. So that changes this and how it reacts in relation to the boat.

Because what you've been doing until now, you've been pulling it that way, so that when you're pulling it actually goes against the side of the boat and it works quite well. Now it's going to be at that sort of angle so it's going to feel different.

Just try that a few times, see what it feels like. That's OK.



This one being bent, and then putting the boat upright without lifting your... that's it. That's really good. There was hardly any pressure on my hand so the boat came up quite easily. Not quite effortlessly. And it's that thing – you can feel when it's easy. And if it's easy then it's got to be more right. Not necessarily right, but more right.

Assisted rolling

GORDON

So all we want to do now is go all the way upside down. And from being all the way upside down we have to get that paddle into that same position.

So for me the easy way to think about that is – if I start off with the paddle beside me as I capsize, the hand which is closest to my bum, I want to take the thumb on that hand and put it round, under the boat beneath my knees.

Then the other paddle blade will sort itself out. If you don't believe me, have your buddy hold onto the paddle, and go back over, and think about where your thumb is. So it should come round, under the kayak. And then we know the paddle is in the right position.



So I'm resting the boat against my hip, if you think about where your paddle comes to now. Without putting it down to the bottom – it's alright you won't fall out, just relax – hold the paddle again.

This blade here comes round under there so that blade can get up onto the surface. And from there, do everything that you have been doing. A really hard pull down. Bring it back to the surface again.

Hard pull down, drive your knees and put the boat upright.



It's just that idea of a hard pull down, driving your knee up, and doing the hip thing.

SIMON

You'll need to work in groups of at least three - one to shoot the video, one in the kayak, and one in the water alongside kayaker for safety. Initially they support the kayak but they're there to turn it upright when the roll fails. In introductory clinics Gordon coaches this half-roll, in which the kayakers try to come up on the same side they go down. Turning this into a full roll is outside the scope of this clinic, but if you want to see what full rolls look like, go to the Demonstration Rolls chapter.

In the next chapter you'll be asked to compare your rolling attempts with the most common mistakes people make. By comparing your video with ours, you'll be able to diagnose what you are doing wrong. Then, Gordon will show you how to fix it.

ROLLING DEMONSTRATIONS

SIMON

Gordon will demonstrate full rolls, capsizing on one side, coming up on the other. However, the process of righting yourself is the same whether you do a full or half roll. Gordon will demonstrate just two rolls - one with a forward finish and one with a backward leaning finish. However, we shot both rolls simultaneously on multiple cameras, and we've slowed them down slightly. There's even a camera and light mounted under the deck to reveal his knee movement. We'll let you watch without commentary.

COMMON MISTAKES

SIMON

You should now have watched your video of your attempts to roll with assistance. To help you diagnose any faults, Gordon will demonstrate the most common mistakes. It's never as simple as just one mistake, but this is the best place to start.

Angle of blade on water

In this example, the blade of the paddle slices into the water. The drive face of the blade gets no support and cuts straight down.



Angle of shaft to kayak - front

Here the blade is the correct angle to the water, but the whole paddle shaft is the wrong angle to the kayak. In this example the blade drive face is too close to the front of the kayak when it is pulled down against the water.



Angle of shaft to kayak - rear

In this example, the paddle is coming around too far to the rear of the kayak before the blade drive face is pulled down against the water.



Angle of shaft to water

Here the shaft of the paddle is at the wrong angle to the surface of the water. The shaft should be in a similar plane to the surface. In this example the shaft is almost at ninety degrees to the water surface.

**Head coming up – forward finish**

The head coming up too early seems like an easy mistake to spot. But frequently it's the consequence of a different mistake. If you're doing a forward finishing roll, this is what head up looks like.

**Head coming up – backward lean finish**

It may be you're attempting a roll with a backward leaning finish. If you are doing a back leaning roll, this is what head up looks like.

**No knee drive**

Our final common mistake is the lack of knee drive. We can show the consequences of this, but it's hard to show something not happening. However, the under-deck camera shows Gordon has taken his feet off the foot pegs and this is where his knee would normally be in contact with the underside of the deck.



These are the seven most common mistakes people make when trying to roll a sea kayak. Compare these to your video of your rolling attempts and try to diagnose what you're doing wrong. Head now to the Fixes menu and make sure you start with the fixes introduction.

FIXES INTRODUCTION

SIMON

There is no substitute for working in a small group with a good coach. Someone who can identify all the problems you're having, isolate the central issues, and then suggest approaches that suit your style of learning. We can't offer this personalized approach in a video. That's why we've asked you and your friends to use your own video cameras to try to coach each other based on the information and examples we're giving you. During your practice, you may have found you were naturally doing a forward finishing roll or a backward leaning roll. If you're not sure which is which, watch the Rolling demonstration again.

GORDON

When you're getting yourself videoed, and you're trying to pick out what the key mistake is that you're making, it's really hard to find the one that's going to make the difference. Because you'll be able to see them all happening, probably at once. And it's picking out the key one that makes the difference, and that's where a good coach is going to come in to help you as well. If there was one key area I would look at for anyone rolling it's the head. And if you can keep the head down it means that other things can come into play easier. So if you can concentrate on keeping the head down then other things you can work on. If the head's coming up then it tends to throw up other faults as well.

SIMON

Some of the fixes for common problems with the backward leaning roll are the same as for the forward leaning roll. But three are different. So take time to understand which common mistake you are making, and then watch the appropriate Fix from the fixes menu.

GORDON

I wish learning to roll was as easy as it looks on a film. In reality, it's not anything like that. I took three years to learn to roll, I made lots and lots of mistakes, and I had to work through an awful lot of them myself. You have to be fairly committed to wanting to do it, and then put the time in. Because it's time that makes the difference.

SIMON

Gordon will suggest two different fixes for each common mistake. So now choose which you need from the fixes menu.

FORWARD FINISH ROLL FIXES**FIXES F1 & F2****Angle of blade on water****F1. Feel for water with blade**

When you're upside down Calum, and the blade is vertical and slices, I want you just to play about with that angle and feel for when it's flat on the surface. So if it slices, it feels wrong, and feel for it being flat on the surface when you're getting resistance and then you'll know that that's right.

F2. Look at blade on surface

What we'll do this time Calum is, I have a mask you can put over your face. And rather than feeling for it I want you to look for the blade being flat on the surface.

FIXES F3 & F4**Angle of shaft to kayak - front****F3. Thumb to keel**

What I'd like you to do this time Calum is, before you do anything with the paddle out to the side, try to get your left thumb around to the centre of the keel, under your knees, behind the back of your legs.

F4. Move front blade away from kayak (aim for float on surface)

Very much the same exercise again Calum, this time with your right blade, I want you be sweeping towards the paddle float when you're upside down.

FIXES F5 & F6**Angle of shaft to kayak - rear****F5. Look towards non drive knee**

What I'd like you to do this time is turn your head and look towards this knee as you come up. So as the blade comes around, turn and look towards your left knee to limit how far back this arm comes.

F6. Limit body rotation

For this exercise you can start wound up as normal, but just when you're unwinding and doing everything else that you normally do, try not to let your shoulders go back any more than ninety degrees to the line of the kayak.

FIXES F7 & F8**Angle of shaft to water****F7. 'On' hand does the work**

For this one I want you to do most of the work with your right hand, and your left hand is just an open fulcrum.

F8. Keep ball in armpit

What we're going to try this time to stop the shaft angle going too high is, you're going to try to hold that ball under your left armpit throughout.

FIXES F9 & F10**Head coming up****F9. Move ear to working shoulder**

What I'd like you to do this time Calum is, when you're upside down and you start coming up, so you've started to pull down and driving your knee, I want you to put your right ear down towards your right shoulder.

F10. Head last using paddle float for support

What we've done this time is put a paddle float on to the end of the blade you're working

with which means you have more time to think about keeping your head down. It's probably easier if you come this way rather than trying to capsize and force the buoyancy underneath the boat.

FIXES F11 & F12

Knee drive

F11. Drive UP with knee on 'on' side and DOWN on 'off' side

What I really want you to concentrate on this time Calum is your knees. So the knee on this side is driving up-the-way, and the knee on this side is driving down, so putting the rotation into the boat.

F12. Squeeze foam insert

What I'd like you to do is just pop the deck off at the front, and then put this under your right knee, so that when you're rolling you can feel that squeezing up against there. It might be easier to feel that than it is to feel the cockpit rim.

BACKWARD LEAN ROLL FIXES

FIXES B1 & B2

Angle of shaft to kayak - front

B1. Start with thumb on seam then move around to under kayak below knees

This time I want you to feel for the seam along the side of the kayak with your left thumb before you start doing anything else. So locate that seam, and then do your normal roll, lying back, from there.

B2. Move front blade away from kayak (aim for float on surface)

What I'd like you to do this time is, with the right blade, aim for the paddle float. I'm going to be moving it out at right angles to the boat.

FIXES B3 & B4

Angle of shaft to kayak – rear

B3. Look towards surface at start then sky

This time Calum, before you start to come up, turn your head and look to the surface of the water and the whole way through the stroke keep looking up to the sky.

B4. Limit body rotation

This time when you come up I want you try and keep your left hand close to your shoulder and not punch forwards.

FIXES B5 & B6

Head coming up

B5. Keep hair in water

What I'd like you to do this time Calum is think back twenty years to when you had some hair, and remember the Timotei advert, where the girl came out and she did that big spray? I want you to keep your head and your hair in the water until last and then as you come up, imagine that spray coming off your hair.

B6. Head last using paddle float support

What we're going to do this time Calum is, with the paddle float on the blade, it'll give you a lot more support. So, keeping your head down in the water as long as possible. We need to think about protecting your shoulder as you come this way, so don't just fall onto it, ease into it more than flopping onto it.

ROLLING CLINIC 3

SIMON

Our rolling clinic has been running for about three hours and Gordon's six pupils people are starting to get tired, but they're all improving. Remember, until this session not one of them had rolled a kayak.

GORDON

That'll be a roll. So what I suggest you do is get out of the boat just now, and sit on the step for two minutes with your eyes closed, and think about what was happening.



Yes! That was good. The first one just didn't feel right so you went back again and got the paddle higher and pulled down. I never touched you at all. Good one.

JENNY

I'm chuffed! It's a good feeling. You know when you're getting it right 'cos it just feels right. *Did you expect to be able to do that by the end of tonight – you just rolled?* I know! It's great! No I didn't expect... well, I did expect it because it's Gordon, but I thought it would take more effort. Really good.



SIMON

Two days later we invited two of the pupils back for one more hour of coaching.

GORDON

It's quite funny, having been in the pool for three hours on Sunday and then here we are back in again on Tuesday night and no kayaking and no rolling in between times.



It doesn't actually matter if you lean back or sit upright or forwards, yeah. What we're trying to do first of all is get you up first of all and then we can start moulding that to what we want it to be.

SIMON

A good roll is something that does not suddenly materialize. It has to be worked at. Most importantly, they're now starting to be able to diagnose the mistakes they are making.

GORDON

Gavin is really good self-coaching really. He's coming up with the answers which is really great. That's the position that we want to be in. And it's fairly consistent, considering that until Sunday night he'd never even tried to roll before. It's consistent; he's identifying all the things that he needs to be able to do.



Oh yeah! That's good. So that was most definitely a roll. What I'd like you to do is one without me banging so that you know you're in the right position. So again, when you're upside down, that good long pause to make sure everything is settled. Head forwards, hands round, and then go for it. Waheey!



GAVIN

I managed to do a roll twice. Yes I am pleased. How many years have you been kayaking before you learned to do that? Oh... I started kayaking when I was at school. I've just done it on and off over the years but I've never tried to roll until this week.

SIMON

Gavin and Jenny's successes are precisely what we hope you will be able to achieve. Work with other kayakers, video your attempts to roll, compare yourself against our video of common mistakes to diagnose what you're doing wrong, and use our fixes section to help put them right.

GORDON

It's very easy to get hung up on the fact you can't roll, or that you're struggling with learning to roll. But it will happen.

For expert coaching contact Gordon Brown at SkyakAdventures.com

