



Packrafter Self-Assessment Questionnaire

The American Packrafting Association's Education & Safety Committee has created this self-assessment tool to promote a culture of safety. It is not an official assessment of your skills by the American Packrafting Association.

While our community is wildly welcoming and inclusive, decisions about group formation for paddling whitewater must balance inclusivity with safety. Whitewater boating is a team sport, and understanding the skills and abilities of each member in your group is essential for safety. Ensuring that the overall strength and skill level of the group is appropriate for the run is crucial.

Answer these questions to the best of your ability and own your level with pride!

Preliminary Questions:

1. **Gear Appropriateness:** Is your gear whitewater appropriate? Can you explain the difference between flatwater and whitewater gear?
2. **PFD Check:** Do you have a whitewater appropriate personal floatation device with a strap under your ribs to keep it from rising above your head?
3. **Safety Knowledge:** Do you know what a "safety talk" is and the river safety signals?
4. **Swimming:** Can you describe the "defensive" swimming position?

If you answer 'No' to any of these questions, please prioritize learning this information before you boat next, and paddle with more experienced boaters in Class I or II- rivers. Take pride in being a beginner, so the community can take care of you and answer your questions.

If you answer 'Yes' to all, proceed to the next section.

Progression from Beginner to Novice

- **Experience in Class II:** Have you packrafted more than 6 times in up to Class II/II+ water at both high and low water levels?
- **Self-Rescue:** Can you usually self-rescue without losing your paddle?
- **Edging:** Can you usually catch eddies when you need to?
- **Paddling Clothing:** Are you dressed to handle prolonged immersion in cold water?
- **Safety Gear:** Are you carrying a whistle, throw bag, and river knife?
- **Rescue Training:** Have you taken your first swiftwater safety or river rescue course?
- **Skills Training:** Have you taken a packrafting course and learned the basic paddle strokes and self-rescue/safety skills?

If you answer 'Yes' to all of these questions, proceed to the next section. If not, please continue to identify as a beginner and consider sticking to Class II and below, letting partners know you may not be able to help them if they swim.

Progression from Novice to Intermediate

- **Boat Control:** Can you execute a must-make ferry above a rapid?

- **Edging:** Can you consistently catch small eddies in swift water?
- **Self-Rescue:** Can you consistently self-rescue with your paddle in hand, in swift water, without assistance?
- **Teamwork:** Can you help rescue others and their gear in swift water without flipping?
- **Confidence:** Are you comfortable giving the safety talk before the run?
- **Group Management:** Are you able to keep track of the paddler behind you, and the group as a whole, through the difficult sections of the river?

If you answer 'Yes' to all of these questions, you are in intermediate territory! Proceed to the next section. If not, please identify as a novice and carefully consider group makeup if you decide to paddle Class III.

Progression from Intermediate to Advanced

- **Rescue Skills in Class III+/IV:** Can you help rescue other people and their gear, in up to Class III+ or even Class IV without flipping?
- **Advanced Swiftwater Training:** Have you taken numerous swiftwater rescue courses?
- **Paddle Skills:** Can you surf bigger waves, and can you exit a hole you have gotten side-surfed in without flipping?
- **Boof Stroke:** Can you consistently execute a proper boof stroke that lifts the bow of your boat over the lip of a pour-over?

If you answer 'Yes' to all of these questions, notice whether or not you feel comfortable owning the identification advanced packrafter, and proceed to the next section. If not, please continue to identify as an intermediate boater. Remember it can take many years to progress beyond intermediate level, and you may regularly be the most skilled member of your paddling group already.

Progression from Advanced to Expert

- **Complex Rescues:** Can you perform complex rescues in Class IV/V water?
- **Expert Swiftwater Training:** Have you taken multiple advanced swiftwater rescue skills courses?
- **Leadership:** Are you comfortable leading groups through difficult stretches and making critical safety decisions?
- **Mentorship:** Are you able and willing to mentor less experienced paddlers?

If you have made it this far, congratulations on the thousands of hours you have put into the sport and the levels of competence you have achieved, and thanks for looking out for the rest of us!

Please feel free to share any feedback about this tool in email to education@packraft.org