

Portaging for beginners.

Portaging is when you must get the boat out of the water and around an obstacle like a lock, weir or man-made false portage, occasionally low bridges. They come in all shapes, lengths and types from beaches, concrete edges, grass banks, to landing stages and ladders.

Five simple rules to think about.

Rule 1: Be safe, don't get injured or break the boat, slow and steady as you start learning

Rule 2: Don't fall in! You are faster **above** the water! Both paddling and running.

Rule 3: Protecting the rudder is massively important.

Rule 4: Do not run so hard you can't paddle afterwards.

Rule 5: Never carry a boat full of water, empty first or if you're more experienced, as you run.

The following is a guide only, each athlete/crew and portage situation is unique, with different skills, strengths, experience and different scenarios. Please read and decide what applies to you.

Let's assume you are on your own and not in a race group. There are things to think about before you even get out:

1. **Select where you are going to get out.** It seems obvious but think about the height of the get out (for both of you if you're in K2) or obstacles, i.e. lock bollards, lock furniture, tree's, reeds, stinging nettles & brambles etc. This is also true on getting in at the other end.
If it's a beach, can you run the boat straight up the beach? (never step out if you don't know how deep it is) Remember the back paddler might be in a lot deeper water than the front paddler.
Rollers on the Thames can be very, very slippery.
2. **Steer into your chosen spot.** Entry angles vary but avoid coming in at an angle that is too steep as you'll have to steer violently away or stop the boat with a big back stroke; it can look impressive but costs lots of energy.
Do not take an angle that is too shallow either; it becomes increasingly hard to slow the boat down, you may not have space to use the offside paddle to slow the boat, you can't steer away, and you can end up gliding along the bank using your hand to slow your approach.
3. **Never reach for the bank!** Lot's of people lean over to reach the bank, you could fall short and fall in.
4. **Don't throw your paddles away.** When you do get to the edge keep them close. You don't want to break them as you won't be able to finish – remember you paid a lot

of money for them so why launch them across a path, lock etc. Place them on the bank close at hand.

5. **GETTING OUT.** Place one hand on the bank/edge and **don't let go!** The other on the front of the cockpit. Bring your legs back towards your seat and pull on the cockpit and push with the legs and hand holding the bank. Stand up and step (not roll) out. Beach portages are common in Hasler races, once the boat has touched the bottom, brace your paddle on the waters surface and hold the paddle and cockpit together and bring your leg back, and stand as before. Try not to do this on the move or step into the water until you are more experienced at portages. **Exit on the shallow side!!!**
6. **In K2, do not tip your partner in!** Get out swiftly but not rushed. Make sure you have hold of the bank and if it's a high get out, possibly take turns but never step on the side of the boat.
7. **Never pick the boat up whilst the back paddler is still in!**
8. For small or inexperienced crews: **Pick the back of the boat up first** – protecting the rudder- it's tempting for the driver to lift the front and run but this can drag the bag over a concrete edge and knock rudders off. The opposite is true of bigger, stronger and more experienced crews.
9. **Empty if needed** – do this first but do it over land in case anything falls out!
10. **Make sure both paddlers are ready.** Both have picked up their paddles and are good to run (walk).
11. **Carrying the boat** – depending on the length of the portage carrying the boat can be done in several ways.
 - **By the cockpit** – simple and effective. Issues arise if it's a heavy boat e.g. dead arms, so you can't paddle when you get back in, different height paddlers so boat runs unevenly.
 - **On the shoulder** – longer portage and for those wanting to empty on the run. Firstly, you must get it up and down safely. Do you do this at the cockpit or front and back if you have handles? Discuss later.
 - Upside down or on its side or right side up. Discuss later.

All these methods are suitable for different stages or certain speeds of paddlers

12. **Running speed.** Run at a pace you can maintain if it's a long run. Breathe! In K2 don't go so fast your partner can't keep up or you are pushing/pulling them – they'll be slower back in the boat and you as a crew will lose more time. This might turn into a waddle later, followed by a shuffle, just keep moving, stopping cools you down and costs time. **Don't run so hard you can't paddle when you get back in!**
13. **Protect the rudder against obstacles.** Lock arms, bridges etc. and watch out for other support crews (or yours) walking in your way, also bags, drinks and coats on the water's edge.
14. **Slow down.** Do not run off the bank or landing stage, slow before the water's edge.
15. **Place the back/rudder in first.** Make sure it is deep enough, that there are no underwater obstacles, careful on beach portages – what is deep enough without two paddlers may be too shallow when you get in.

16. **Getting in.** Place paddles across the bank and cockpit, hold the bank/edge firmly and place one foot in the middle of the boat. Never step on the side of the boat. Hold the front of the cockpit and lower yourself down. **DO NOT LET GO!**
17. **DW Collect food/drink when you are in the boat** – not on the run (International races obviously differ) – races can be different, and you may place a bottle/bag in on the run to save time.
18. **Sitting comfortably?** When both people are in and comfortable (i.e. do you need to centre yourself on the seat? Hence why you shouldn't let go) and holding the paddles, the front paddler pushes the nose away from the edge, never the back person first as this pushes the nose into the bank you want to leave.
19. **On flowing parts.** Get out from the edge and into the current asap and get up to your cruising speed as efficiently as possible.
20. **Be aware:** In Hasler races think about faster crews coming through. They may be less patient, and they may be more "assertive" than other crews in your race. Don't get in the way. Be polite to other crews, lock keepers and the general public.

So, we said we'd discuss carrying the boat (depending on the length of the portage) in more depth.

- By the cockpit – simple and effective. Issues can arise if it's a heavy boat (see point 11). With different height paddlers the boat gets carried unevenly or drags and one person might have more weight to carry. Other issues arise if there are obstacles to get around then you must remember that you have lots of boat in front and behind you and lots of twisting forces if it is windy.
- On the shoulder – usually for longer portages and for those wanting to empty on the run. Firstly, you must get it up and down safely. You can do this at the cockpits by lifting the boat out of the water, onto your thigh, lift your thigh and lift the boat in one swift movement up onto the shoulder. Or from the front and back of the boat. If you have handles, you will need to get to both ends of the boat - either put the boat down (carefully) and walk to both ends or do it on the move (this is faster but more dangerous/likely to fall). You must make sure that if you run with the boat upside down (to empty out) that nothing is going to fall out. i.e. seats or safety gear.
- If your boat is on the shoulder, make sure your head isn't at an awkward angle for too long; swap sides by lifting the boat over your head.
- Once the boat is on your shoulder you should pull it down into your body to stop it bouncing as you run.
- Zipped Spray decks: Essential for the winter (in my humble opinion) – there is always an idiot cruiser going against the flow causing huge waves, or someone lifting water as they paddle; you do not want to get cold on a long winters race. Also, they can be used to regulate your heat by simply zipping up or down. A good idea is to roll and tape both edges up either side of the seat, this makes it easier to get in and out. Also, the actual zip should have a pull cord or something easy to pull on to undo in a rush. Depending on your position in a group try to undo the deck before the portage as it saves time – don't fall off the group though. Do the decks back up (if in a group

race) when you are back with the group, there is no point having zipped up the deck if you have been dropped.

Support crews are part of your portage:

Paddlers. Remember support crews are having a hard time too. They are suffering from stress and driving to strange locations, wondering if they've missed you. The satnav takes them to curious roads. They must be physically fit enough to make it safely to each portage.

Support Crews for DW/Watersides etc. Having spare clothing for both members of the boat is essential, as is a rudder, wingnuts, food and drink, especially when you have two support teams leapfrogging each other. With regards to clothing the same is true of the support crew -sitting in a misted-up car, in wet clothing can be miserable.

Don't take your phone to the water's edge unless it's zipped away, or you can survive dropping/losing it.

Do not shine lights at night time into oncoming paddlers -they've spent hours in the dark and you will effectively blind them. Point lights at the bank.

Your paddlers may be rude/angry/ungrateful/unresponsive or deliriously happy... or all of these at some point. Sometimes encouragement isn't always seen or taken as you intended, "come on you're doing well", "you can make it, only xx miles to go", "you're almost on schedule". Innocent enough encouragement but remember you have a lot less time to think than the paddlers from lock to lock, they might be brewing for a while!

Be aware of those support crews around you -you'll get used to their cars and know if you are in the right place at the right time.

Remember the parking may be a **LONG** way from the portage. Carry lots of change for pay & display.

Be aware of faster crews coming through. This can confuse support crews and make them think they've missed their crew. Also, they may be more "assertive" than other crews. Don't get in the way. Be polite to other crews, lock keepers and the general public.

Remember to eat and drink yourselves! You need to get to the end too.

AA/RAC/Greenflag or a back-up crew in case of emergencies are helpful – Think flat batteries because the lights were left on, punctures etc.

Make sure the crews know the distance from the bridges to the finish on the tideway. This can massively help crews as the paddlers can see the London skyline, but the river meanders and the finish seems to be getting no closer.

Keep information brief and to the point.