



OPERATING A BOAT - Fast Facts

Pre-departure Checklist

To prepare for a safe day on the water, you should always run through a pre-departure checklist.

Personal and environmental planning: Are you aware of the weather and water conditions and any hazards that may affect your trip? Select a route that matches your abilities.

Preparation: The operator and all passengers should be well prepared. Work together and share the duties necessary to prepare.

Equipment: Try to think of multiple uses for your gear. Pack lightly, but consider the extras required for emergencies.

Loading Equipment and People

When loading your boat, ensure: everyone is wearing a properly fitted approved PFD or lifejacket; equipment is loaded carefully and stored properly or tied down to prevent shifting while traveling on the water; equipment and people do not exceed the "recommended gross load capacity" of your craft--this information can be found on the vessel's capacity plate; the operator boards first and then assists each passenger one at a time; each passenger is seated so their weight properly balances the boat, before the next person boards; the capacity plate information is reviewed concerning weight limits and the "equivalent number of adult persons" the vessel is capable of safely carrying; and, the operator instructs passengers to keep their weight low and hang onto something solid when moving around.

Casting Off

To cast off: (1) Make sure all passengers are seated, with their hands and feet inside the boat. (2) Start the engine. (3) Untie all ropes and gently push yourself away from the dock. (4) If necessary, keep your weight low and use a paddle or oar to push yourself further out. (5) Pay close attention to what is happening around you, driving slowly until it is safe to increase your speed.

Safety While Underway

Preventing incidents from happening while you are enjoying your pleasure craft means following the boating laws and behaving appropriately while out on the water. This includes knowing how to navigate your craft safely, understanding local hazards, learning the use of all safety equipment and being aware of all the other activities taking place.



Wake and Wash

Wake is the wave caused by a boat moving through water. Wash is the broken water behind a boat caused mostly by the motion of the propeller. All operators are responsible for the effects of their wake and wash.

Crossing a Wake

When encountering wake from other boats, reduce speed, turn and cross the wake at a slight angle, about 45 degrees. This is called quartering the wake. Once you pass safely over the wake, resume your speed and direction. If you are operating a personal watercraft, reduce your speed and head directly into the wake, crossing it at 90 degrees.

Operating Around Non-Powerboats

When operating around non-powered craft like sailboats, canoes, paddleboats, rowboats or sailboards, always take early action to stay well clear. If you must operate your boat in the same area, remember they have the right-of-way. You must reduce your speed and pass so your wake does not disturb them.

Exiting from a Boat into the Water

There are many different ways to enter the water from your craft. You can dive, slip or jump into the water depending on the site, situation and your abilities. First, shut your engine off and set the anchor if no one is operating the pleasure craft. Before exiting your boat, you should be aware of all possible hazards, like rocks or tree branches that are beneath the water. In unknown waters, you should always enter by slipping in feet first. Avoid headfirst entries unless you are completely certain that there are NO hazards and the water is very deep.