The American Canoe Association (ACA) is a member-based nonprofit organization (501(c)3) that promotes fun and responsible canoeing, kayaking, and rafting. Founded in 1880, the ACA actively advocates recreational access and stewardship of America’s water trails. For more information and to become a member, visit www.americancanoe.org.

American Canoe Association
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All Paddlers Need To Be Prepared For:

- Low Light Conditions
- Ways to Contact Help
- Minor Medical Emergencies
- Outings which extend past the estimated return time
- Weather Pattern Changes
- Other Traffic

Boat Safe - Boat Smart - Wear It!
Be A Leader!

Pre-Trip Planning
Know the waters to be paddled. River guide booklets and topography maps are valuable references in trip planning. Plan alternate routes.
Set-up locations for put-ins and take-outs along with possible lunch break stops. Consider time and distance. Arrange for the shuttle.
Equipment - What you take with you on a trip is all that you have to survive and rescue yourself. This includes water, food, maps and charts, rescue equipment and extra clothes.
File a Float Plan with someone who will notify others if you don’t return on time.
Paddle within your, and your group’s, limits.

On Water Behavior and Etiquette
Be a competent swimmer with the ability to handle oneself underwater, moving water, surf or current.
Have a properly fitted lifejacket (Personal Flotation Device - PFD), and WEAR IT!
Keep the craft under control. Do not enter a rapid unless reasonably sure you can navigate it or swim the entire rapid in case you capsize.
Keep a lookout for hazards and avoid them.
Watch for fog, especially on coastal waters.
Know your emotional and physical limitations.
Group members need to constantly assess the behavior of others in their group.
Respect the rights of anglers and land owners when paddling.

Know the Conditions
For Flatwater
Remember to watch for water and weather changes - beware of fog

For Whitewater and Rivers
Stay on the inside of bends - Beware of strainers! Strainers are Fallen trees; bridge pilings, undercut rocks or anything else that allows the current to flow through it while holding you. Strainers are deadly.
Walk around low-head dams
Watch for hydraulics - Looking downstream, if a hole is “smiling” it is probably friendly. If it’s “frowning”, it is probably unfriendly.
If in doubt, get out and scout!

For Coastal Areas
Stay close to shore
As you travel away from shelter, make sure you have the necessary skills to travel back.
Watch conditions for winds and fog
Understand wave height, wind speed (Beaufort Scale), fetch and how it will impact your travel
Stay aware of all boat traffic and traffic patterns
Learn re-entry techniques BEFORE you need them, know how to re-enter your boat and how to assist others back into their craft
Stay apprised of tidal currents and their affects on you and your boat
Watch for landing in surf or passing through the surf zone to shore

Be A Swimmer
File A Float Plan
Wear Your Lifejacket
Assess Your Boat’s Flotation Needs
Carry A Spare Paddle
Always Dress For The Unexpected Flip
Wear a Hat or Helmet
Carry A Compass and Chart or Map
Carry a Whistle or Sound Signaling Device
Carry Throw Bags And Other Rescue Gear
Carry a “River” Knife
Have A Bilge Pump And/Or Bailer
Self-Rescue Devices (Paddle Float / Sling / Tow Rope)
SunScreen
Drinking Water & Snacks
Light / Signal (for low light conditions)
Wear Proper Footwear
UV Eye Protection
Drybag with extra clothing
Wear Appropriate Clothing
First Aid Kit with Matches
Small Repairs kit with Duct Tape
VHS Radio and GPS Locator