**Importance of a VSC**

A VSC safety discussion will make your paddling safer and more fun.

Ensure compliance with federal, state, local requirements.

**Life Jacket**

Is your life jacket well suited for your vessel, paddling location, venue, and conditions?

Does it fit properly and is it serviceable?

Do you wear it at all times?

**Vessel Condition**

Do you have the appropriate paddlecraft for your activity, location, venue and training?

Does it have appropriate flotation/buoyancy?

**Location & Venue**

Are you familiar with weather, tides, current and traffic in the area you plan to paddle?

What are the local hazards?

**Weather Conditions**

What are current and forecast conditions?

Do you consider water temperature and wind?

Are you familiar with local weather patterns?

Be flexible: reschedule if not suitable.

**Training & Experience**

Have you trained for the conditions & venue?

Do you know how to self-rescue?

Can you assist others?

**Clothing**

High visibility to be seen.

Sun protection and hydration are essential, particularly on hot sunny days.

Layer with synthetics.

**Immersion**

Dress for water temp, not air temp.

What is the current water temp?

What is cold water shock?

What is hypothermia?

**Alcohol & Other Illegal Drugs**

Don't drink and paddle.

Drinking affects judgement, reaction time and provides a false sense of confidence.

Makes paddlers more susceptible to cold.

**Trip Planning**

Do you paddle with a friend?

Do you plan the route and bailout options if conditions change?

Have you told someone:

where you plan to paddle?

how long will you be out?

what to do if you do not return on time?

**Mandatory Required Safety Equipment**

Are you aware of federal, state and local requirements?

Does your PFD meet USCG requirements?

Do you have a whistle and know how to use it?

White light if paddling after dark?

**Recommended Additional Equipment**

Do you have a dewatering device?

Dry bags for extra clothes, phone, etc.?

Ankle leash for SUPs - Pros and Cons

**Communication**

Needs vary by venue.

Phone in an easily accessible dry bag.

VHF radio: know channels and protocol?

Visual Signals: paddle, hand, flares, other.

Audio Signals: whistle, horn.

**Emergencies**

Do you know how to self-rescue?

Do you bring the right comms gear?

Do you keep your phone/radio/light charged?

Do you main Situational Awareness for self and group?

**Rules to Navigation**

Paddlecraft are not given priority.

Like all vessel operators, paddlers must take action to avoid collision.

Stay out of channel - Rule of gross tonnage.

About 40 percent of recreational boaters are paddlers. This discussion guide is designed to help Vessel Examiners engage in a safety dialogue with them. Such dialogue is essential for any Vessel Exam, but particularly for paddlers. They encounter numerous safety hazards, but few paddlers have had any specialized paddling education or skills training to help them assess and mitigate risk.

The front page of this Discussion Guide identifies the vital topics which should be discussed. Many of these topics are similar to those for sailboat and motorboat operators (checking the weather, and wearing a PFD), but others may need greater emphasis (paddlecraft buoyancy, and self-rescue skills). Vessel Examiners should allow the discussion to follow its natural progression, focusing on those topics that are most relevant to the particular paddler, location, venue, and conditions. In general, the examiner should:

* encourage the paddler to wear a life jacket,
* evaluate the type of craft for the venue and conditions,
* discuss whether the individual has the right skills for the venue and conditions, and
* encourage additional training and education.

Comprehensive resource materials are available for How to Perform a Paddlecraft Vessel Safety Check:

[VSC Resources](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YKiCpNCsfuwYUvFkvlT7555yMXYfsArS/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=114539363143555139068&rtpof=true&sd=true)

This site includes:

* Video on How to Perform a Vessel ExamGeneral Resources for Paddlecraft Vessel Exams
* Helpful Brochures and Pamphlets
* Additional information about resources and Auxiliarists who can provide training