

Sea Kayak Clothing



The Mountaineers Sea Kayaking



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Basic Clothing

If there is one sure way to recognize sea kayakers, it would have to be by their clothing. No well-dressed kayaker will ever win a fashion show, but color coordination aside' the clothing choices made for this sport are for comfort and safety considerations, not for show. Contained in this section you will find some general guidelines for clothing selection.

Materials

Arguably the most important factor of the clothing you select to wear kayaking will be the material of which it is constructed. Below are listed some of the fabrics to consider and avoid.

- **Cotton:** This is definitely a fabric to avoid on the water. Cotton absorbs moisture and releases it slowly. Garments constructed of this material may be quite comfortable on land, but on the water will cause you no end of frustration and discomfort and possibly contribute to hypothermia. The kayaker mantra has long been "Cotton Kills!" This includes items such as t-shirts and jeans.
- **Wool:** Wool will retain moisture somewhat similar to cotton, but it stays warm even when wet. However, wool is bulky when packed so is not the best choice for trips. And since it does stay wet longer than more modern synthetics, it can be difficult to carry along.
- **Polyester:** As a synthetic fiber, polyester dries relatively quickly when wet, but when worn next to the body can get somewhat odiferous and make you the bane of your paddling companions. Still it does pack tightly and may be worn in the form of fleece outer garments.
- **Polypropylene:** Similar to polyester in that it wicks moisture away from the body when worn next to the skin but it also gets very smelly.
- **Nylon:** With its relatively tight weave, nylon protects well against the wind. When combined with a fleece outer garment used for warmth, the nylon layer forms a good wind protection adding to your comfort. Nylon dries very quickly and can be a cool protection layer when worn alone. Nylon shorts are very comfortable for paddling. Although nylon can pick up odors it washes very easily. It also packs very well.

Articles of clothing

Temperatures change often on the water, depending on time of day and conditions that may change suddenly. Most kayakers include the following articles in their on-the-water wardrobe for a day trip:

- Synthetic T-shirt (usually at least one short-sleeve and one long-sleeve)
- Nylon shorts (Typically, Northwest waters are too cold for shorts to be worn alone, but they are often worn over wetsuit to provide wear resistance and pockets.)
- Nylon shirt (for sun protection and easy drying in hot weather)
- Synthetic or nylon pull-on pants (often just some synthetic long underwear)
- Synthetic top (pullover, zip-tee, fleece etc, for layering in colder weather)
- Synthetic or wool socks
- Neoprene booties (most paddlers advise against Teva-style sandals)
- Nylon windbreaker
- Wetsuit or drysuit (many leaders insist on at least a wetsuit)
- Hat, with broad visor for sunny or rainy days. Water proof is a good idea.





- Gloves or pogies (watch for slipperiness of material that can make it difficult to paddle)
- Paddle jacket or dry top (A waterproof jacket kept close at hand in case conditions worsen. Paddle jackets are cut shorter to not conflict with spray skirts and have neoprene or Velcro closures at the wrists and neck. Dry tops have water-tight latex seals at the wrists and neck and seal tightly to a spray skirt.)

How to dress

Kayakers always dress in layers and for the water temperature more than the surface temperature. Even when water conditions are glassy calm, a wet exit may become necessary due to boat wake, or even just inattention. While it is advised that you dress for that eventuality (wear a wetsuit or drysuit) many paddlers do not always wear immersion protection. By dressing in layers, you can add or remove clothing as conditions dictate.

No matter what clothes are worn, the final outer garment will always be the PFD.

During this class, your instructor can best advise you what you should wear. But bear in mind that you will almost always get wet paddling a kayak. After all, as George Gronseth of the Kayak Academy is so fond of saying, "It is a water sport." Therefore, it is always suggested that you bring spare clothes with you on the paddle in a dry bag in order to provide some additional warmth and a change of clothing should you need it.

Listed below are the basic items one might wear with either a wetsuit or drysuit. These lists might change due to weather, venue or probability of immersion.

Wetsuit
Wetsuit-bib style, ("Farmer John or Jane")
Shoes, neoprene/water resistant, soft-soled
Socks, neoprene/Fleece
Undershirt, fleece/polypro
Jacket, windproof
Jacket, fleece
Pants, wind/rain proof
Gloves, neoprene/latex
Hat, sun and/or cold
Swimsuit
Paddle jacket

Drysuit
Drysuit
Shoes, neoprene/water resistant, soft-soled
Socks, wool or fleece (to be worn inside suit)
Underwear, fleece (that provides sufficient insulation)
Jacket, fleece top, etc.
Gloves, neoprene/latex
Hat, sun and/or cold



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In addition to these items, please bring and/or suggest substitutions for some of these items. Also bring extra clothing that you might carry with you for emergencies or when you stop for lunch such as warm hat, gloves, neck gaiter, scarf, large jacket, extra underwear, closed-cell foam pad, etc.

