

Swimming in whitewater



If you are paddling whitewater, it is crucial you understand and practise swimming in this environment. There are a number of methods required.

Defensive swimming:

Defensive swimming is the first method that should be used after a capsize. This involves laying on your back with your feet facing downstream. You can control your speed and direction using your arms in a backstroke technique. You should point your head at the destination you are aiming at. When in this position, it is important to keep your feet on the surface and never try to stand up in the flow. This can lead to foot entrapments which are very dangerous. When in this position you are well protected and can assess what is coming up. You can see hazards approaching and plan your next options.

Aggressive swimming:

When you require more power, you should roll onto your front and use a front crawl technique. This method should only be used in short, powerful bursts as it is tiring and makes you vulnerable to obstacles. This is primarily used for making an eddy.

Rolling across an eddy line:

Another method to break into an eddy is by rolling across the eddy line. This allows you to break through the eddy line which can push you back out into the flow.

Vertical drops and stoppers:

Swimming over a drop or through a stopper requires a different technique. You should roll up into a ball to give you the greatest chance of passing through it without injury or being held.



Strainers:

Strainers should be avoided whenever possible but there are times when this is not possible. If you find yourself getting washed towards a strainer, switch to aggressive swimming and aim to launch yourself over the top of it. If you use defensive swimming onto a strainer, there is a high chance of getting pinned or held underwater.



Equipment:

If it is safe to do so, you should aim to keep hold of your boat and paddle. If it is not safe, throwing your paddle onto the bank is a good way to make sure you don't lose it.