

# The Complete Guide to Stand-Up Paddle (SUP) Racing

## Beginner to Winner!

Welcome to the world of stand-up paddle racing (also known as SUP'ing). You're going to love it, and the mirror's going to thank you! Many people like to SUP in and around New Zealand's beautiful coast lines and lakes, but where the fun really begins is SUP racing.



For those keen to get started in this awesome sport, we've prepared our top 10 tips on how to get involved in stand-up paddle racing. For the weathered ones that have been SUP racing since everyone else was in their swimming nappies, this will give you a few tips and tricks for getting faster and being more efficient on the water. Here we go!

The shape of the Racing boards; narrower and longer, is key to making them faster through the water. They're also extremely light-weight, meaning you'll be able to throw them around the tight turns a little easier. The downside: they're a lot tipper at slower speeds, definitely making them for the intermediate-advanced paddler.

give you greater reach at the top of your stroke; when putting the blade in the water and also come straight out of the water at the end of your stroke. It definitely beats lifting a big mass of water out each stroke.

### 1 The right board for SUP racing.

Below are the six types of SUP boards you'll find on the market. For SUP racing you're going to want to start off with a 'All-round' board and work your way towards a Racing board, as your skills improve.

### 2 Your paddle.

Firstly, buying a paddle. The key is getting the right length. A paddle that is too long will tire your arms as you'll be holding it up too high. A paddle that is too short will stress your back as you'll be forced to bend forward to reach into the water.

In order to not go around and around in circles you're going to need to paddle on both sides of your board. If you're paddling on the left side of your board you'll have your right hand on the handle at the top of the paddle. Your left hand will be on the paddle shaft, in line with your hips. Vice versa if you're paddling on the right side.

Your paddle should be 25-30cm above your head for racing and 20-25cm above your head for cruising on flat water.

### 3 Where's your leash?

A leash keeps your board attached to you via a velcro strap around your ankle or calf. Leashes come in a variety of sizes. The general rule is to use a leash around the same size or slightly smaller than your board length.

The blade of a paddle is angled. The blade should always be pointing to the front of the board, as shown in the below image. I know I know, it seems odd and counter intuitive. Held correctly, the paddle will

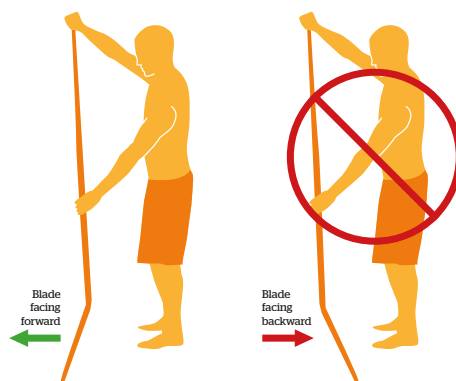
When you come off your board (trust us, no matter how experienced you are, it will happen!), currents, winds and waves can quickly sweep your board away from you. This is dangerous and a little embarrassing in a race with onlookers. In surf conditions (which are often found at the Orewa Beach Series) your board becomes a lethal weapon when carried with the force of a wave and can cause someone else serious injury.

**Remember;** always use a leash!



All-round boards are much wider, longer and have a greater volume. This provides more stability, and will still get you around the race course in a respectable time.

We'd recommend spending your first season on an all-round board. When you're comfortable, demo a 'Racing' board to see if you're ready for the big league! At the Beach Series, Starboard and The SUP Shed offer demo boards to try out.



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**4 Warming-up for a race.**  
Like any exercise you're going to want to warm-up first. It's especially true for SUP racing as you're going to go from 0% to 100% once that start hooter goes off. Feel free to add any of your own favs, but below are five exercises specific to stand-up paddling. Just make sure you don't knock off someone's head when you're swinging your paddle about.

**2. Overhead Stretch**  
Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, hold your paddle with your hands a bit wider than shoulder width. Keep a little bend in your elbows. Start with the paddle in front of you. Bring it over your head, and slowly down towards your backside. Don't force the movement, only allow your hands to go behind you as far as they want to. Repeat back and forth a number of times.

**4. Upper Body Twist**  
Position your paddle behind your neck, over your shoulders, resting your arms along the paddle. With feet shoulder width apart, rotate the upper back slowly, back and forth. #4 is the one you're likely to slap someone in the face with your paddle.



**1. Shoulder Dips**  
With your knees bent, place your paddle across your thighs. Rest your hands on the paddle on the outside of your knees. Slowly dip one shoulder down towards the middle of your knees, then come back up again. Repeat with your other shoulder.

**3. Overhead Rotations**  
With feet and hand grip shoulder width apart, hold your paddle above your head. Move the paddle in a circular motion above your head, moving the shoulders and upper back in the circular direction as well.

**5. Side Stretch**  
Stand with your feet together and grip your hands on the paddle about shoulder width apart. Reach up and bend slowly to the side as you exhale. Move back to the centre, exhale to the other side. Move from side to side in a slow and smooth fashion.



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## 5 Falling off & getting back on.

Falling off and getting back on a SUP board is something that many paddlers fear. If you hear someone saying (or maybe hear the words coming out of your own mouth) "I haven't fallen off yet!", they'll be holding back and improving at a slower rate.

You'll be a better paddler once you know you can fall off and get back on your board by yourself.

### **How to get back on your board;**

1. If you fall off, hang on to your paddle!
2. If your board gets away from you, reach down to your leash and pull your board back to you.
3. If upside down (fin up) grab the opposite side of your board and pull it towards you to roll it back over.
4. Move to the middle of the board.
5. Grab hold of the carry handle in the middle of the board, or if you have longer arms the opposite side of the board.
6. Facing the front of the board, kick your feet to bring your body up and pull yourself back onto the board.
7. Don't forget to give it a good grunt, maybe a 'rahhhh!' when you're getting back on - helps every time.

Before a race we recommend going into the shallows and having a go at falling off your board and getting back on again. Take a friend or fellow participant if you're not comfortable.

If you're still not 100% comfortable after practicing falling off we'd recommend wearing a light-weight buoyancy aid during a race - just for a bit of peace of mind!

## 6 Paddling in a cross-wind.

In a stand-up paddle race the course will usually have the two longest legs directly with the wind. This is done to make it easier for paddlers to go in a straight line and go faster, as you can just concentrate on your stroke rather than your heading.

But, there's going to be legs that are across the wind (wind and normally chop are hitting you and your board from the side), as well as days when the wind changes direction so the upwind and downwinds are no longer directly with the wind.

### **Here are a few tips on how to paddle straight in a cross wind;**

1. Put in more paddle strokes on the opposite (leeward) side to the side that the wind's hitting you.
2. More paddle angle on the leeward side of the board when putting the blade into the water ie. Put the blade further away from the board on the leeward side, and close to the board on the windward side.
3. When paddling on the windward side of your board, twist the paddle blade so the face is pointing more towards you, rather than perpendicular to the board. This will help steer the board into the wind. Have a play with different paddle angles.
4. When paddling on the windward side of your board, at the top of your stroke place your blade further away from the board and bringing your stroke on the angle towards you/the back of your board; rather than parallel to the board.
5. Move your weight more to your windward side foot. This will help to turn the board towards the wind.
6. If you're still having trouble keeping the board straight in crosswinds, get in touch with an expert like Starboard

or the SUP Shed. They'll help identify which is the best fin, and best fin position on your board to allow for crosswind conditions.

## 7 Stance & paddle technique.

Most beginners learn to stand-up paddle with their feet parallel and shoulder width apart. This is the easiest stance to learn, but it isn't necessarily the best. When you keep the feet parallel on the board, you have good stability from side to side, but can easily be knocked off balance on your front-back axis.

We recommend standing on the board with their feet shoulder width apart, with one foot slightly in front of the other. If you're paddling on the right you'll have your left foot slightly forward, and vice versa. Keep your knees bent to take the pressure off your back and look towards the horizon, not down at the board (which most people tend to do).

### **Let's master the forward stroke!**

1. If you're paddling on the right side of your board, your right hand is lower on the paddle shaft and your left hand is on the top of the grip.
2. We've already looked at the angled paddle face, make sure it's pointing towards the front of the board. I know it seems odd but there's a method to the madness.
3. Keep your arms straight and twist from your torso/core as you paddle. Think of using your core to paddle rather than your arms. You have more strength in your abdominal muscles than in your arms.
4. Push down on the paddle grip with your top hand.
5. Plant the paddle by placing it as far forward as you can stretch and push it all the way under the surface. Then pull it back to just behind your ankles and out of the water.
6. Keep your strokes short and close the board at first. No need to overpower your stroke and use up energy.
7. When moving your paddle from the back to the front to take another stroke, it's a good idea to get in the habit of twisting the blade (turning your top hand) face 90° so it's slicing through the air. Then twist it back again before putting it back in the water for another stroke. This will reduce energy having to 'push' the blade through the air.
8. To go in a reasonably straight line, paddle about 4 or 5 strokes on one side, then switch to the other.



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## 8 Turning.

During a race you're going to have to make turns around marker buoys, man-made features or natural features. For beginners:

### 1. Side-stroke

The most common way is to simply paddle on one side until the nose of your board turns in the direction you want to go. To turn to the right, paddle on the left side, and vice versa.

### 2. Back-paddle

If you're wanting to turn your board quickly, drag your paddle backwards on the side of the board you wanting to turn towards. This isn't the best option during a SUP race as you're going to lose all of your forward speed.

### 3. Sweep-stroke

Plant your paddle at the front of your board and take a long sweeping stroke away from the board and towards the back. Your board will turn to the opposite side you're making the stroke on. It's basically an exaggerated version of the side-stroke.

Looking over your shoulder in the direction of your turn also helps in making a turn.

For intermediate-advanced paddlers you can turn a board by lifting one foot, planting it further back on the board, shifting your weight by putting pressure on that rear foot. This lifts the nose out of the water. With a deliberate, sweeping, shallow stroke, the board will turn quickly. KABOOM! - as we said, for the advanced paddlers!



## 9 Race starts - 'Take your marks'.

Starts in a stand-up race will either be an in-water start or beach starts; where you run a short way down the beach with your board.

The Beach Series events SUP races are all in-water starts. You'll be in below-knee water with your board and paddle, ready to go. There will be a marker or start marshal that everyone will need to keep behind until their flag lowers, and the race starts.

1. Stand to one side of your board (whichever feels the most comfortable), both hands on the sides (or rails) of the board, holding your paddle in one hand along the length of your board.
2. Once the starter horn toots you'll hop a few times on the sand, pushing your board along and then jump straight onto your feet on the board.
3. For beginners, or if it's a choppy day, we recommend climbing onto your knees first, then after a few strokes (or once you're through the waves) stand up onto your feet.

You can control how large of a pack you want to race in by either moving to the back or the outside of the pack. The outside of the pack is best for beginners so you avoid being sandwiched when participants turn and bunch to go around a marker buoy.

For the finish, you will have to dismount your board, carry it up onto the beach, and run up the finish line WITH your paddle in hand. It's so you can cross the finish line and give a big triumphant Gladiator sword-like pose with your paddle. VICTORY!

## 10 Drafting like a pro.

Drafting, in basic terms, is following the paddler in front of you and using the wave their board creates, 'the wash', to propel or pull you forward. You'll also have reduced wind by sitting behind another paddler.

The best place to draft another paddler is between their 4-5 o'clock or their 7-8 o'clock. This is where the wave from their board is created. Don't follow directly behind them. Once you manage to get on their wave, move slightly towards the front of your board, this will help you catch and stay on their wave.



Drafting can help you conserve energy during a race, saving it for the final push to the finish line where you can unashamedly pass the person you've been drafting off.

### Our additional, bonus-round, hidden tip #11.

To really make it in the SUP world you're going to have to learn to Shaka. Sha-what? 'Shaka' - it's not a typo.

The Shaka is a mix between a wave and a thumbs-up, except it's actually cool. It's made by extending the thumb and smallest finger while holding the three middle fingers curled into the palm of the hand. Think of it as the key to cool! Get practicing in front of the mirror.



### Final words

As we said earlier, the mirror is going to thank you. SUPing is an absolutely awesome way to get some rock hard chiselled abs. It's a full body workout, it's great fun in good weather and even more fun in bad weather. And you'll meet some awesome, chilled people who love to keep fit and have fun as well.

### Mahalo!

Your Beach Series Team

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