

Fixed Cadence Work - Building the base

With kayaking not all movements are created equal. When paddling, the strain on your shoulders, arms and back is obvious but what you do with your feet, bum and head also makes a difference to how fast you go. Your task is to convert muscle power, body movement and the leverage on the paddle into forward movement of the kayak. So how can real time cadence feedback help make your body movements and stroke more efficient?

There is no substitute for individualized technique feedback from a good kayak coach but if you are out on the water and want to improve your technique the next best thing is to use real time cadence and speed feedback to power up your stroke.

Here is a sample session for you to try. Do one or two of these sessions each week along with your usual program.

Week one

Pick a comfortable cadence such as 30-35 double strokes per minute (dspm) and paddle 1km taking note of your speed.

Try not to increase your cadence just keep it steady.

Repeat this process over 10km with 1 minute active rest between each 1km of paddling.

Whatever speed you managed on the first 1km is the speed you are aiming for on each of the subsequent 1km efforts.

Try to maintain a steady speed over the 10 x 1km efforts while not increasing cadence. This will keep your technique consistent and prevent sloppy technique developing as you get tired.

Week two, three, four, five and six.

Repeat the week one session at the comfortable cadence you initially chose but gradually increase the speed of the 1km efforts. For example, if in week one you are managing 10x 1km at 11km/hr then by week three aim for 10x 1km at 11.5km/hr and by week six 10x 1km at 12km/hr.

By generating more speed without any increase in cadence you are converting more of your body movement into forward kayak motion, hence generating more power from each stroke.

The vaaka cadence sensor is the closest device we have to an affordable on water power meter. Using cadence and speed as described above will enable you to squeeze more power out of every stroke without specific focus on any one aspect of technique.

Remember your biggest gains will come from a powerful efficient stroke, your strength and fitness will go to waste if it can't be converted into forward kayak motion. So do the work on your base technique before moving on to higher cadence work.

Race Cadence Work - Developing quick arms:

Now that you have a solid efficient technique the next step is to work on an increased stroke rate. In elite level paddlers, who can maintain good technique, speed and cadence have an almost linear relationship, so as you increase cadence you increase speed.

An elite paddler racing over 10km will sustain a cadence of 40-45 dspm.

Over 1km he/she will maintain 55 dspm and over 200m will hit 80 dspm.

Every athlete has their own strengths and weaknesses. If you have a muscular build with long arms you may find you sustain higher speeds with a long paddle and slower cadence while those of you who are lean and fit may be better suited to a shorter paddle and a higher cadence.

Elite paddlers will use current world champions as a guide to paddle cadence and paddle length, but this will still need to be modified to suit the particular athlete.

For intermediate and advance level paddlers, cadence will be lower and paddle length shorter but these can be gradually increased as fitness and strength develop.

As a guide, when racing distances over 8km you should be aiming for a cadence of 40 dspm, and if you can't sustain this your paddle is probably too long for your strength and fitness level.

Over 1km you are aiming for a sustainable cadence of 50+ dspm and over 200m a cadence of 65+ dspm.

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