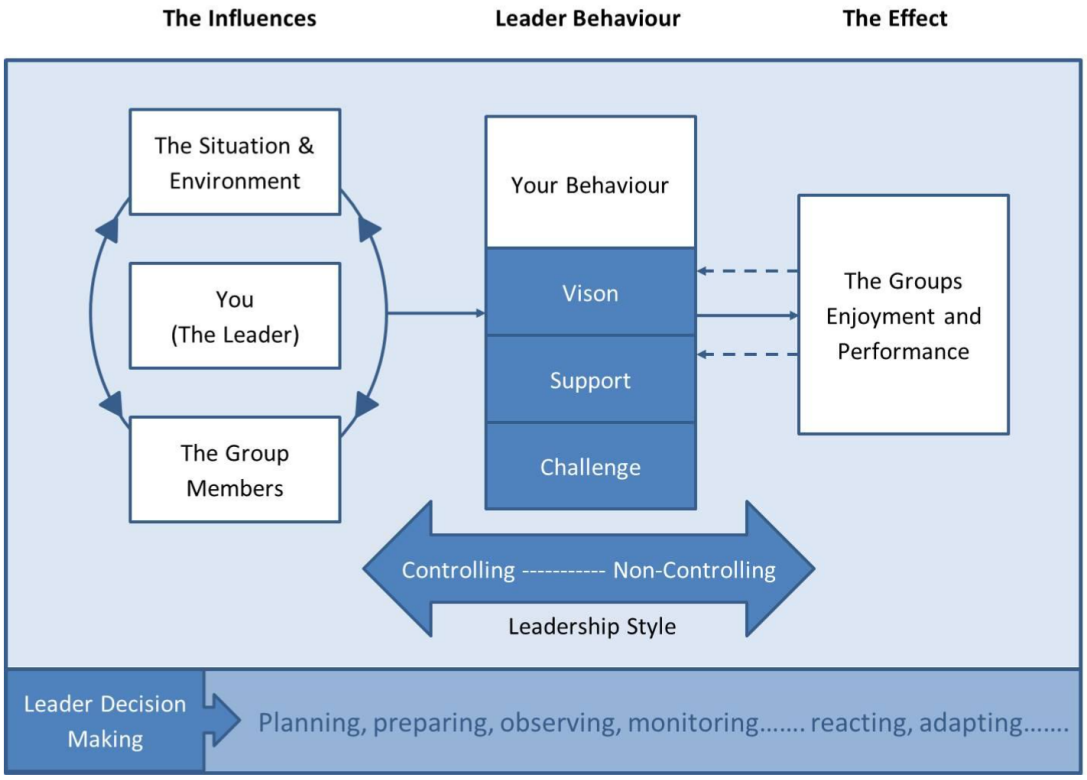
BC Sea Kayak Leader Award (moderate / advanced water) - course resources

British Canoeing Leadership Model



This model is derived from academic studies into transformation leadership by a number of British Canoeing paddlesport coaches. Information into this areas of study is widely available online - there is also a specific available resource at the British Canoeing Awarding website:

www.britishcanoeingawarding.org.uk/resource/leadership-in-the-challenging-world-of-paddlesports/

It is also influenced by the multi-dimensional leadership model.

http://psychology.iresearchnet.com/sports-psychology/sport-leadership/multidimensional-model-of-sport-leadership/

The leadership model above recognises that there are several influences on our leadership situation afloat, including our own ability / experience / attitude, those of the group, and the specific challenges of the environment.

These factors combine to influence our decisions, communication and leadership style - which will in turn influence the group members' experience. The leadership model also recognises that there are a range of more- or less-controlling styles available to leaders.

Group members may be more or less well-aligned in their vision for the experience, and may need differing amounts of support or challenge from leaders and other group members.

A 'Safer Sea Kayaking' Model of Leadership

This model is an alternative to the 'CLAP' leadership model, as a more sea kayaking-orientated overview of the relevant influences on leadership decision-making.

This is not a model rooted in academic study, but is based on experience and reflection of many practical sea kayak leadership days - in formal training courses, guided weeks, and personal paddling experiences.

Nick Cunliffe: Sea Kayaker Magazine (2011)

Plan, Anticipate & Review

Planning skills help to build a picture of likely conditions on a sea kayak journey; which we can compare against the abilities and aims of the group.

Fixed plans can increase the likelihood of a group sticking to a route choice in the face of deteriorating conditions; launching with a range of options and a flexible approach will allow us to compare the reality of the situation with the expected outcomes.

A constant process of reviewing paddlers and conditions will help us to make good decisions at appropriate moments in the trip. An end-of-trip review will draw out any leaning moments.

Some Tips

- Get a weather forecast. Check tide times and establish the tidal picture for your paddling area. Get a swell forecast and check conditions for a few days before your planned trip. You can't have too much information.
- Create a picture of the likely conditions in your chosen paddling area. Compare the expected conditions with the ability of you and your group. Be realistic.
- Upon arrival at a chosen launch point, check conditions before committing to the trip. Check wind direction, strength, sea state, tidal picture – do the conditions match those expected for the day? Do you need to consider an alternative plan?
- Consider the technical challenge of the conditions and also the seriousness of the planned paddling area. Avoid high technical challenge (for you and the group) combined with serious situations, or at least fully recognise the implications of combining these two elements.
- Consider the people in the group – aims and objectives; experience, ability and attitudes; fitness and health: is everyone on the same page, regarding the plan for the day?
- Group dynamics: are you a team of friends, sharing decisions and responsibilities through the day, a formal group with a designated 'leader' - or somewhere between the two?
  If the latter, how much do you know about your 'followers'? Are they a compatible team, willing to contribute to the principles of safe group sea kayaking?
- Equipment: does the group have seaworthy kayaks and sufficient safety equipment?
  Are you the only paddler with first aid kit, tow line, radio/flares, repair kit, map/compass etc?
  Are you willing to go afloat in such company?

Communication & Group Dynamics

Sea conditions can be predictable for the experienced sea kayaker; group members, however, can bring different attitudes, and may have unknown strengths and weaknesses. It can be tricky to figure out everyone's comfort / challenge zones. Open communication between group members is vital, and begins before going afloat.

Sea kayak incidents often involve communication breakdown within groups, misunderstanding and separation of group members. Good communication tactics can reduce the likelihood of problems arising.

Some Tips

- Meet at a 'neutral' rendezvous, from where a variety of kayaking venues are available.
  A cafe, a short drive from a number of different launch sites, could be a good choice.

- If you agree to meet at the beach, the '*Law of Early Arrival*' states that someone will be there already and will be ready to launch – regardless of the conditions afloat.
- Share info within the group – forecasts, tidal info, expected conditions, options for the day. Encourage discussion, share decision making. Knowledge is power, don't keep it to yourself.
- Beach briefings are the last chance to discuss plans before the sea has its say - group management will only be more difficult afloat.
- Compare the expected conditions with the realistic abilities of all group members. If everyone is in their comfort zone, we can afford a more relaxed approach – if paddlers are more challenged, we will need to be more disciplined in our group management.
- How many group members? A team of 4-6 is plenty in open sea conditions. In a larger group, consider dividing into smaller teams - there is no such thing as 'safety in numbers'.
- If there are not enough 'leaders' or more experienced paddlers for independent teams of 4-6, recognise that your group safety will be compromised in more challenging conditions.
- If the least experienced group member cannot paddle effectively in conditions, the safety of the whole group is compromised. Plan trips to match the needs of the weakest member.
- Every group member needs to accept their responsibilities to each other. Great planning will not help if one group member decides to paddle away from the team.
- Discuss plans / options throughout the day – look ahead: e.g. 10 minutes, 30 minutes, 1 hour, 2 hours, end of day. Anticipate changing conditions and consider the later consequences of earlier decisions. Be flexible.
- At the end of the day, review the trip together. Discuss key moments, issues arising, what worked well, what needs to change next time. Be open, share, accept constructive criticism. Aim to become a stronger team with every trip.

Route Choice: Macro & Micro

Consider route choice in two ways: the overall paddling trip (macro) and the course followed from beach to headland to bay (micro).

Good route choice should match the expected conditions and the ability of the group. If we 'shape a good course' from 'safe zone' to 'safe zone', we can find the conditions that the group are seeking. This does not necessarily mean avoiding more challenging water, but does involve good timing, selection of suitable waypoints and correct paddling speed/direction.

Bad route choices are often a cause of sea kayaking incidents, e.g.

- launching into rapidly-increasing sea conditions that are too demanding for group members
- a group swept into a tide race due to poor route choice upstream of the race
- kayakers in steeper breaking waves caused by shallow water and / or reflected waves

Good route choices help to achieve trouble-free paddling days and reinforce good communication within sea kayak groups.

Some Tips

- Be realistic about the overall paddling area before committing to the journey. Does the launch point allow the group to safely experience the conditions that will be encountered, or is there an immediate commitment to the journey?

  Lower commitment: for example, a bay with gradually more exposed conditions offshore, allowing warm up and preparation for the demands of the journey.

  Higher commitment: for example, a downwind journey with immediate exposure to more challenging conditions and few landing zones.

- Discuss and agree a series of shorter legs, linking locations where the group can stop and consider the next section of the journey. Decide what course to shape between waypoints, taking into account specific hazards en route.

  For example, if approaching a zone of rougher water off a headland, shape a course to a 'safe zone' before committing to more challenging conditions.

- Identify key moments in the day when, e.g. weather factors / tidal conditions are expected to change. Use these 'decision points' to discuss tactics for the next section of the trip.

- Remember that there is often a number of different routes to link two waypoints. Consider the group's abilities vs. the expected conditions when shaping a course.

Positioning & Line of Sight

In a group of paddlers with equal skills and experience, 'leadership' is often shared throughout the day. In groups of differing abilities, more experienced team members often provide guidance and support to less able paddlers. This can include positioning - in relation to group members / relevant hazards - to reduce risk and to manage the demands of the conditions.

If a formal leader is responsible for a group of less-experienced paddlers, good positioning is an important element of safer sea kayaking. Again, we need to consider the abilities of group members vs. the paddling conditions (people and places).

If group members are comfortable and aware, we can be more relaxed about leader positioning; if team members are more stretched, good leader positioning is an essential component of risk management, route choice and communication.

Some tips

- Remember the principle of remaining between the group and the relevant hazard. In some locations the decision is simple, e.g. when crossing the mouth of a bay in offshore winds; in more complex situations good positioning is less obvious and may require a compromise between competing demands.
- Take a dynamic approach to positioning – it's often easier to move to a new place in the group than to ask other group members to change their position.
- It is often a good idea to be on one side of the group or another, with all group members within easy communication. Line of sight is easily maintained; it's also easier to make course changes and to check that the paddling speed is appropriate for all group members.
- Positioning on the down-tide or downwind side of the group can make it much easier for a 'leader' or 'navigator' to make a course change up-tide or upwind, 'squeezing' the group onto a new heading simply by making the desired course change. In wind against tide conditions, you'll have to decide which is the most important concern.
- If group members are to the left or right of a 'leader', you can simply brief the group to respond to the leader's course changes. An instruction for example, to paddle 'on my left, within 50m of me' gives the rest of the group all the information they need at that moment.
- When rock hopping take up positions that maintain line of sight, in a position of usefulness in case of capsizes. Try to find places that achieve both these aims – and work together as a team to maintain communication among the rocks. We face similar challenges when launching/landing and when dealing with surf zones.
- There may be times when a 'leader' must move to the front or the back of the group, for example if approaching a surf beach or if entering a calmer bay from more challenging sea conditions.

  If we can anticipate these occasions, it is much easier to adopt a dynamic approach to positioning, moving to a new place in the group in good time to take appropriate action.

A 'CLAPS' Model of Sea Kayak Leadership

C	COMMUNICATION
L	LINE OF SIGHT
A	AVOIDANCE
P	POSITION OF MAX USEFULNESS
S	SHAPING A COURSE

Modified from the original 'CLAP' model of white water kayaking leadership, CLAPS is a simple mnemonic to assist sea kayak leaders in applying useful group management principles.

All five elements can be of equal importance, and may each be prioritised in different situations.

Good communication underpins other principles, without which mutual understanding and shared decision-making is difficult. Line of sight tactics are dependent on effective communication.

Avoidance is rooted in situation awareness - an appreciation of the balance between environmental challenges and the capacity of group members. It demands attention to relevant factors, recognition of their importance, and prediction of possible outcomes.

Positioning and Shaping a Course are closely related - having decided on a specific route choice between two waypoints, it is then possible to choose a suitable position to safeguard group members from relevant hazards.

The CLAP leadership model is well-established in outdoor activity settings, with many available online resources. Examples may be found in the links below:

www.leatherman.com/blog/outdoor/clap-an-acronym-that-can-save-you-in-the-outdoors

http://frontierbushcraft.com/2013/01/02/clap-outdoor-safety/

Communication

An important element that links all group members, communication has a variety of roles:

- GIVE INSTRUCTIONS
- ASK QUESTIONS
- SHARE INFORMATION
- CHECK UNDERSTANDING
- CONFIRM UNDERSTANDING

Times when communication can be exchanged:

- BEFORE THE TRIP - email, phone, meeting
- AT THE START OF THE DAY - neutral venue, review options
- AT THE LAUNCH - compare expectations / reality
- AFLOAT - decision points, waypoints, changes in conditions
- DURING KEY MOMENTS - events, situations, incidents
- LUNCH, END OF DAY - review, identify key information

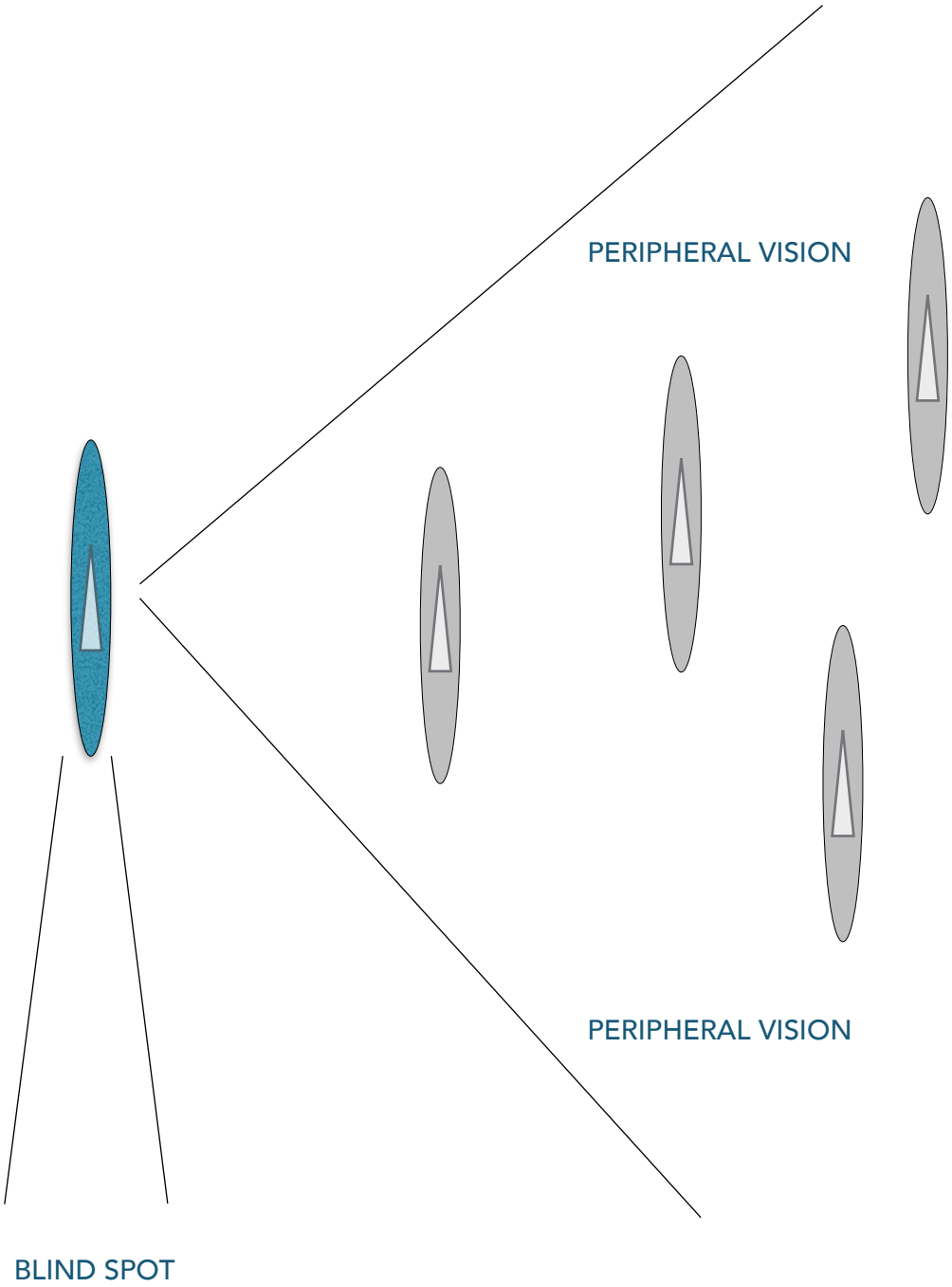
Verbal / visual communication:

- BODY LANGUAGE
- EYE CONTACT
- PADDLING STYLE
- ROUTE CHOICE
- CHECKING WITH INDIVIDUALS
- SIGNALS

Effective communication is the most important group management tool for sea kayak leaders. It's important to establish good lines of communication between all group members.
In challenging situations, effective communication will maintain mutual understanding, and can improve outcomes when dealing with incidents.

Line of Sight

On open water, line of sight is often simple to maintain, notwithstanding occasional loss of visual contact behind larger waves. On open water, maintaining line of sight is often dependent on position and proximity - if group members remain in a leader's peripheral vision, and stay relatively close, line of sight can be maintained.



Line of Sight & Positioning

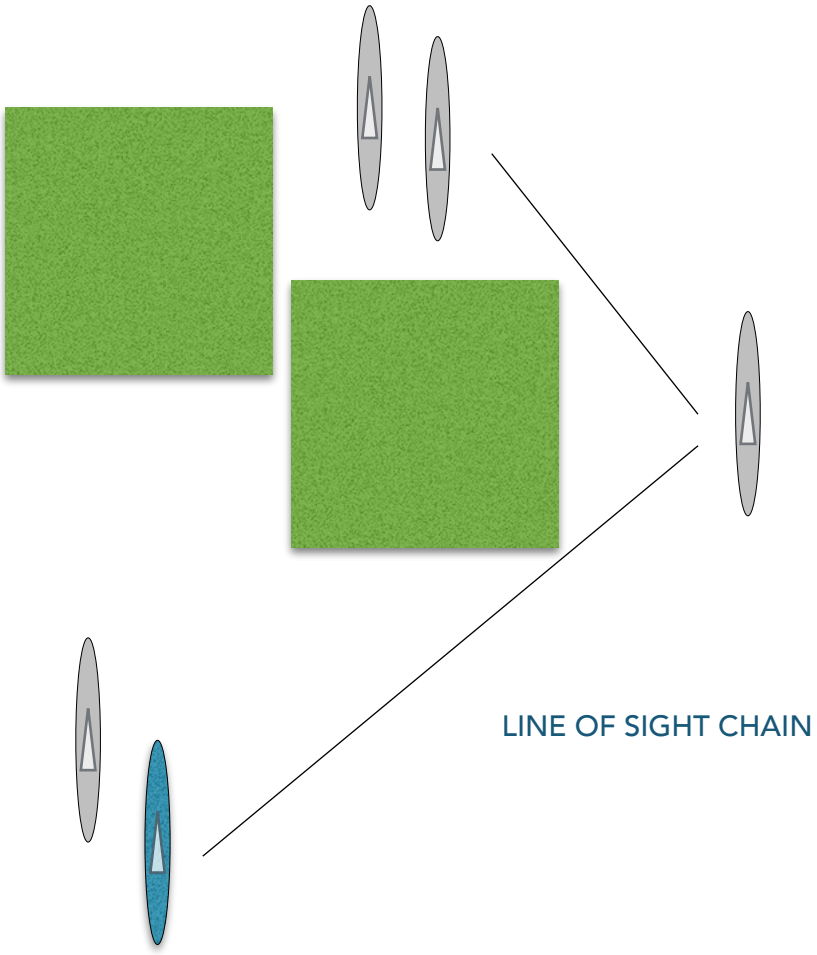
In more complex environments - among rocks, in tide races - it can be more challenging to maintain line of sight. The answer is often linked to the positioning decisions that a leader makes.

Examples

In a tide race environment, a leader position close to an eddy line some distance down the tide race can offer the best chance of maintaining line of sight on group members. Compromise is sometimes needed - for example, the number of paddlers in the tide race at any time. We may also sometimes need to move downstream to keep visual contact with group members, compromising our view of paddlers further upstream.

In rock gardens it's often challenging to maintain line of sight - again, careful positioning can create useful line of sight angles on safe zones and routes between rocks.

We may also need to to create line of sight 'chains', with visual contact maintained through the tactical positioning of one or more group members. we may not be able to see all group members, but can often communicate with a well-positioned group member who has a better visual angle.



Safety Information - Decision-making

What information do we want to share with our groups before a sea kayaking trip?
It's often helpful to divide the relevant information into three categories:

PEOPLE

- EXPERIENCE / BACKGROUND
- CURRENT / RECENT KAYAKING EXPERIENCE
- COMFORT ZONE / PREFERRED CONDITIONS
- CHALLENGE ZONE / AIMS & OBJECTIVES
- MOTIVATIONS FOR SEA KAYAKING
- MEDICAL ISSUES

CONDITIONS

- WEATHER HISTORY / FORECAST
- TIDAL PICTURE / SWELL FORECAST
- TEMPERATURE / VISIBILITY / RAINFALL / OTHER FACTORS
- EXPECTED LOCAL CONDITIONS - RELIABILITY / CHANGEABILITY
- VENUE OPTIONS - TECHNICAL DEMANDS / COMMITMENT
- ALTERNATIVES / LOGISTICAL ISSUES / OTHER FACTORS

EQUIPMENT

- SEA KAYAK DESIGNS - FAMILIARITY / SUITABILITY
- CLOTHING / BUOYANCY - IMMERSION ISSUES / PROTECTION FROM ELEMENTS
- HELMETS - AVAILABILITY / NEED
- SAFETY KIT - SPLITS / TOWLINES / NAV / IST AID / REPAIR / COLD PROTECTION
- COMMS - RADIOS / PHONES / SIGNAL DEVICES
- OTHER KIT ISSUES

It's a good idea to meet at a neutral venue away from any specific launch point, to discuss and agree all relevant planning issues. An open discussion can encourage group involvement, aid good decision-making, and can reduce the quantity of safety information at a venue briefing…

Venue Safety Briefings

SAFETY BRIEFINGS - WHAT'S THE POINT?

TRANSMISSION ISSUES
leader tells group all required information - group switches off, information is lost

EMOTION BARRIERS
excitement / anxiety can hinder group members' ability to retain / recall information

PROCESSING CAPACITY
too much transmitted information - none retained

LEARNING THEORY ISSUES
some group members may not process verbal information

Sea kayak groups can struggle to absorb a lengthy list of safety points before launching. This can be a dilemma for the leader - important safety points that may not be retained…

SAFETY BRIEFINGS - SOME POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

DISCUSS - AGREE - SHARE
leader questions group, establishes what the group thinks is important, establishes 'buy-in'

CORE ESSENTIALS / PRINCIPLES
leader agrees with group members max.3 principles for group safety (see below)

PRIORITIES / LAYERING
agree what 'matters now' and what may be needed later - a continual sharing of safety info

SWIM PLAN
basic rescue plan for rescues - flexible according to conditions

This cooperative approach, with the leader facilitating the safety discussion, can establish lines of communication, establish mutual agreement, and reduce uncertainty when problems arise.

GROUP SAFETY - 3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

STICK TOGETHER!
group members maintain lien of sight, communication distance, consider positioning

TALK TO EACH OTHER!
2-way communication between all group members - share info - ask questions, give answers

WHERE NEXT?
break down trip into short legs - waypoints where groups discuss conditions, route options - use a layering process to agree new info / tactics

M Y - A B C D E *a simple safety exchange*

M	Me	*introduction - my role / responsibilities as group leader*
Y	You	*group members - aims for the day, experience, skills, confidence*
A	Area	*planned paddling area, likely / possible journey / route choices*
B	Boats	*all equipment / clothing concerns - checks etc*
C	Comms	*methods of communications / positioning / signals etc*
D	Doctor	*all relevant medical info*
E	Emergency	*swim plan, action by swimmer / group members - other likely issues*

This example safety briefing is a simple, easily remembered mnemonic that cover much of the essential information sea kayak groups could share before launching.

Much of this information can be covered in a discussion at the start of a day, before committing to a venue / journey. Topics can be covered in a Q&A session, rather than a directly-delivered safety 'briefing'.

Problem-Solving Skills

Simple problem-solving models suggest ways in which decision-making can be organised, via 'checklists' of sequences, priorities, actions etc. Examples are listed below:

SELF
TEAM
SWIMMER / CASUALTY
EQUIPMENT

STOP
THINK
PLAN
AGREE
DO
REVIEW

These models offer a simple checklist of 'things' to remember when problem-solving - we must remember to look after ourselves, our group members, swimmers and their equipment.
Or, we must remember to think and plan before 'doing' in problem-solving situations.

One limitation of these models is that they don't offer much help in making decisions - there has to be another level of decision-making beyond these simple reminders.

PREACH	*'swim to me!'*
REACH	*'grab my bow toggle!'*
THROW	*'clip this line!'*
ROW	*'hold my boat, I'll rescue you!'*
GO	*'I'm coming to get you!'*
HELO	*'help is on its way!'*

This model is often used in safety training courses, summarising some available choices.
This is the key to the model - we have choices. But how to make the right decisions?

Some people look for rules - e.g. when Swimmer is in position X, Rescuer A takes action Y and rescuer B takes action Z. A list of 'rules' can shortcut decision-making to a specific 'situation : response' set of commands.

People can struggle to remember the 'rules' - and many situations are complex, unclear, time sensitive and changing. 'Rules' that work in simpler situations can break down under pressure. This model ignores two key elements in many problem-solving situations: risk and complexity.

A deep water rescue, on open water in light winds, is a fairly simple, relatively low-risk situation. A multi-swimmer situation, in a swell-affected rock garden, is higher-risk and more complex.

Problem-Solving Principles

OBJECTIVE HAZARD vs SUBJECTIVE RISK

Consider a kayaker's technical skills and tactical awareness - if they are comfortable in specific conditions and are able to make good decisions, their exposure to subjective risk is lower than that of another less able / less experienced kayaker - if they make good decisions!

In both cases, the objective hazards - e.g. wind, waves, rocks, tidal streams - remain the same.

When problem-solving, it's a good idea for rescuers to aim to find lower-risk, lower-complexity solutions to problems. These choices can require less time and fewer people.

It's a useful guidance to help people avoid unnecessarily-risky actions that could expose rescuers, group members and casualties to excessive danger. Another useful comparison is the balance between:

TECHNICAL DEMANDS vs CONSEQUENCE

If a rescue is technically challenging (i.e. clipping a tow line to a swimmer's kayak in a tide race), the situation might be high-consequence if the rescuer's technical / tactical skills are insufficient.

Equally, if the rescuer's skills are strong, but the swimmer is in heavily-breaking waves, the potential consequence of contacting the swimmer's kayak is high - with broken boats and damaged people a possible / likely outcome.

Alternatively, there may be technically demanding situations with a relatively low consequence - for example, rough water at the mouth of a bay, with calm protected water directly downwind.

Balancing technical demands / consequence is a useful approach to group management decisions, as a means of problem avoidance. Leaders can ask the following questions:

'How likely is it that a group member / members will capsize in the next few minutes?'
'What would be the consequences of a capsize in the next few minutes?'

This balance of technical demands / consequence can influence our application of CLAPS principles - especially communication, line of sight, route choice and positioning.

Problem Solving - Anticipation

Sea kayaking takes place in environments where we may be faced with complex problems, incomplete information, time pressures and changing priorities. The following models can help with anticipating problems, and finding possible solutions:

ANTICIPATION QUESTIONS

WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN?	*likelihood / severity*
TIME AVAILABLE?	*proximity to hazards*
RESOURCES	*people / equipment*

What might happen? - is useful to consider when responsible for groups on the sea.

The decisions we make about route choice, venues, time spent in specific zones, all combine to alter the likelihood and severity of specific situations arising. Anticipating the possible effect of our decisions can buy us valuable time when things go wrong.

Time available? - is a critical concern for leaders. We cannot simply practise avoidance at all times. We can recognise the impact on available time - from, for example, the moment a paddler becomes a swimmer, to the moment that swimmer makes contact with the relevant hazard - that our decisions can have.

Recognition of available time can influence our problem-solving decisions and can direct our attention towards priorities in rescue situations.

Resources? - awareness of the available resources in a group will help our decision-making greatly. Physical resources - towlines, radios, first aid / repair kits - can all be checked before committing to more challenging water.

Human resources can be checked, tested and developed, forming a team approach to problem-solving. Knowing our group members can also assist our decision-making: it is vital to be able to recognise conditions in which group members will be more or less willing or able to help.

Swimmer Scenarios

If a group member swims, it's important to ask 'why?' - e.g. was the swimmer playing in conditions - are they 'happy' in the water, able to be rescued and ready to resume paddling?

Or, were they anxious in conditions, concerned about capsize, 'unhappy' in the water? If so, required actions to resolve the problem will be different to those suited to the first swimmer.

Problem Solving - Priorities

When faced with problem-solving situations, we can get overwhelmed, or 'task saturated' by a variety of seemingly-competing demands.

'Team - Task - Individual' all potentially need attention…

'Self - Team - Swimmer - Equipment' all need consideration…

It is helpful to think of priorities - decisions can be focused on order / sequence of actions, delegation (if appropriate), communication and mutual understanding.
We can ask these questions:

What needs to be done:	NOW?
What needs to be done during:	FIRST 1-2 MINUTES?
What needs to be done - but:	CAN WAIT *(more than 2 minutes)?*

The answers to these questions can change as a situation develops, requiring a flexible approach from leaders. Priorities can also change and become more urgent as time passes - inaction almost never creates improvement… so, we need to get on with it!

Selecting priorities also requires communication between group members - mutual understanding will reduce the likelihood of people working against one another.

Thus, we can ask the questions:

Which OTHER GROUP MEMBERS can help?

What can be done at the SAME TIME?

What must WAIT until an initial step is complete?

As rescues develop, leaders can also review progress and ask the questions:

What changes can be made to FREE RESCUERS for other tasks?

What can be done NOW
- to improve the situation in 5 MINUTES, 10 MINUTES, 30 MINUTES time

Ultimately, identifying priorities is a dynamic process, demanding in-action reviewing skills to assess the effectiveness of the chosen solution and to make changes where necessary. It is a learnable skill, that can be developed through structured practice involving scenario training.