

INFO FOR FIRST TIME SURFERS:

(This information can be found under surfology 101 at Surfline.com)

Traditional paddle: A general rule of thumb for body positioning when you're paddling is that you want to see your board flat on the water. You don't want to be so far forward that you see water coming over the nose, and you don't want to be too far back so that the nose is sticking straight up in the air. Have your chin about three-quarters of the way up on the board, but keep your head up so that you have total awareness of everything that's going on around you.

When you paddle, make sure your body is perfectly aligned with the center of the board. Don't keep both legs to one side of the board and don't lay your legs out on either side of the board. Extend your legs and rest them directly over the tail. With each stroke, hit the water with your hands cupped and elbows bent while reaching all the way forward. Go elbow deep in the water and then follow through as you would if you were swimming freestyle. Take fluid, relaxed strokes. Minimize unnecessary body movements. Your arms should be the only things moving. If you move your hips too much, your board wobbles back and forth and creates drag.

There are other paddle options. If you're on the verge of catching a wave, a butterfly stroke might be the extra push you need to get you over the hump. Use both arms and pull simultaneously with equal force as if you were doing a butterfly stroke. Or if you want to spin the board around quickly to catch the wave, sit up on your board, grab a rail and use a modified egg-beater kick to turn the board around. If your board's long enough, knee-paddling also helps break up the monotony. As with the traditional paddle, center yourself so that the board is flat. Kneel so that your calves and feet are tucked under your butt, and pull simultaneously with both arms.

Getting Out into the Line-up: As you paddle out, the first thing you'll have to deal with is the breaking surf. Avoid the initial impact of the lip since it's generally the most powerful part of the wave. Even if you're good at dodging the bullet, you will still have to deal with broken waves. If you have no push-through technique, white water can be a frustrating obstacle. You're likely to spend more time making up for lost ground than riding waves. There are a number of different push-through techniques that you should have in your repertoire:

1. Push-up. In smaller waves, the push-up method is best. Get a lot of paddling momentum, and as you approach the breaking wave, push up so the wave rolls over your board and underneath your chest. Make sure you're headed directly into the wave; if you're angled or sideways, the whitewater will probably knock you off your board.

2. Duck-dive. When the surf is more powerful, it's best to go under the breaking wave. The duck-dive is the most common technique, and it can be a major asset in surf from 2 to 10 feet and beyond. In order to duck-dive properly, paddle toward the breaking wave with maximum speed. Just before impact, grab the rails of your surfboard with both hands, push the nose of your board underwater, press on the tail of your board with your dominant foot and guide the board under the turbulence. The pushing motion combined with the weight on the tail should allow you to pop back up after the wave passes over you. Unfortunately, a good beginner board is usually too buoyant for a proper duck-dive. Even with a small, sinkable board, duck-dives take awhile to learn.

3. Turtle-roll. If your board is too big and buoyant to push underwater, the turtle-roll is a better option. As you approach the oncoming wave, grab the rails of your surfboard well ahead of your shoulders. Just before impact, turn over with your board so that it sits on the surface, fins up. While you're underneath the board, a frog kick will help propel you and your board through the breaking wave. When the wave passes, roll right side up. The turtle- or Eskimo-roll also is an effective defense against an oncoming loose surfboard or an out-of-control surfer. When you see either one headed your way, assume the turtle position and roll away from the oncoming hazard.

Whatever method works best for you, remember this: unless you're facing a Waimea Bay closeout, it's bad etiquette to let go of your surfboard when other surfers are around you. Also, *the surfer up and riding always has the right of way. If he or she establishes a direction, you're obligated to move in the opposite direction, even if it means paddling into the breaking part of the wave and getting pummeled by the whitewater.* In order to avoid any violations of surf-traffic etiquette, perfect one of these push-through techniques before surfing in crowds.

Surf Etiquette

1. Don't drop in on or snake your fellow surfer. In other words, do not catch a wave once another surfer has claimed it by being in a deeper or more effective position at takeoff. Dropping in and snaking are the two most common ways in which we blow each other's fun in the surf. Both are usually caused by greed, and involve a ride-crippling interference by one surfer on another. The drop-in happens like this: Surfer A is closest to the curl, paddles into and catches the wave, only to find that Surfer B -- the dropper-in -- has also caught the wave, from further out on the shoulder. Surfer A is then blocked from making a successful ride. The two surfers may collide, accidentally or deliberately, but it's unlikely that either will enjoy the wave to its fullest. At some critical surf spots, surfers A and/or B may even be placed in physical danger as a result.

Drop-ins can and do happen by accident, as well as through frustration and confusion in a crowded lineup. To avoid dropping in, practice the three Ls: *Look, Listen, and Learn.* Always *Look* to your inside toward the curl before committing to the wave, just to make sure nobody's already in there. *Listen* for the common warning - a hoot or whistle from the surfer in position. *Learn* from your errors - if you drop in, make sure you're off the wave as soon as possible, say sorry, and make sure the other rider's OK before going on with your session.

A more subtle, yet potentially more offensive form of ride interference is the snake. This move is very bad etiquette, a greedy exploitation of the generally understood drop-in rule, and is usually practiced by competent and aggressive surfers. Snaking works like this: Surfer A, in position and having waited his or her turn, begins to paddle for the wave. Surfer B (the snake) waits until A's focus is purely on catching the wave, then makes a quick move to the inside and takes off, claiming the wave. If both surfers end up riding, it appears A has dropped in and is in the wrong, yet both surfers, and usually most onlookers, know otherwise.

Snaking can be distinguished from dropping in, in that it's rarely accidental. The result, however, is less predictable, and if A is also a competent surfer, bad feelings and even arguments may occur. If you're being snaked repeatedly by a single surfer, don't react -- it's unlikely to be personal. Simply move to another area of the break, putting yourself and the snake out of each other's wave-catching rhythm. If you find yourself being persistently snaked by a range of surfers, you may be sitting too wide of the takeoff to fully claim the wave; paddle deeper and make your intention clearer.

Special note to beginners: You may occasionally note surfers breaking these drop-in codes, riding around each other, and grinning away in the process -- obviously enjoying the wave share. Very likely they're friends or acquaintances who've taken off on the same wave deliberately, or who're making the best of an accidental drop-in. This should NOT be a signal to you that dropping in is just fine at that particular spot.

2. Thou Shalt learn to take turns. Hey, let's face it: Surfers are greedy creatures. We all want it for ourselves. But we're not alone on this planet, which means sharing the wave-catching opportunities during any given surf session.

The etiquette of break-sharing can be seen at almost any surf spot ridden by two or more people at a time, and depends very much on the nature of the spot and the skills and attitude of the riders.

At a reef-break with a consistent set-wave takeoff zone, the ideal situation is for everyone to simply take turns. This is most easily accomplished when the lineup is largely composed of surfers who know each other, but can be achieved at any spot under reasonable crowd conditions. In the classic turn-taking model, an informal "line" of surfers springs into being, with the surfer whose turn it is sitting deepest and in the logical takeoff spot for the wave he or she wants to ride.

Etiquette permits some leeway here. For instance, the best surfer's skills may earn him or her an occasional extra wave, or a wider opportunity to choose the precise wave he or she wants. If surfers are taking turns with set waves and Surfer A drifts down the line out of the primary takeoff zone, the other surfers may choose to allow A to catch some of the smaller waves, but in doing so A will lose rights to really good set waves that break further outside. Remember, in a taking-turns surf environment, it's your responsibility to be in a good position to catch the wave when it's your turn.

At a point-break with two or three sections, groups will form at the beginning of each section and take turns as at a reef, with one proviso: if a surfer is riding down from a section up the line and looks likely to make the wave, other surfers should make every effort to permit him or her a clean shot. The most common breach of etiquette here is pre-emptive paddling: Surfer A is hurtling down the line from a long way back, and Surfer B - figuring A won't make the section - begins to paddle into the wave. As A approaches, B pulls back, but his paddling efforts cause the wave to crumble and break down in front of A. Result: A wipes out or is caught behind, and the wave peels off unridden. Bad move, B.

Point and reef break etiquette can begin to break down if one or more surfers are taking off too deep and out of position, thus wasting the sections and forcing other surfers who are waiting in line to watch wave go unridden. This almost always leads to dropping in, and at the least it'll lead to pre-emptive paddling, as surfers begin to anticipate each other's failures and chase each other's waves from the shoulder.

Beach breaks tend to feature a shifting wave environment. The takeoff zones - plural, not singular - are spread out, with more waves for everyone. This can break a beach up into several different mini-spots, each with its own turn-taking routine in place. If you're surfing one mini-spot at a beach break, keep in mind that if you move to another mini-spot on the same beach, you're entering another mini-society, and should be prepared to go to the end of the wave-sharing line.

Beach breaks, along with some reef breaks, also lead to the need for peak etiquette. If you are in position for a really good two-way peak with another surfer, you should choose to split the peak - that is, you go one way off the peak, he or she goes the other. In splitting the peak, communication is the key. You might both prefer to go the opposite way, or one of you might want to be sure he or she isn't about to commit a drop-in. The only way you'll find out is to ask each other- and then make the choice quickly!

Backdoor entry: Surf spots of all three types can sometimes feature a method of lineup entry - jumping off rocks, perhaps, or paddling from behind a point - that provides immediate access to the inside takeoff position. In such cases, you should NOT use that artificial inside positioning to jump the turn-taking rotation. Doing this is bad etiquette and will lead to bad feeling among your fellow surfers. Instead, either let the surfers already sitting and waiting to take the waves they want until the lineup's clear, or paddle wide to the outside and move into position along with everyone else.

Sometimes there are just too many people in the lineup, without enough waves for everyone. In such cases, even with all the goodwill in the world, turn-taking can fall apart, the lineup tends to become a free-for-all, and the drop-in rule is just about the last thing left standing. In that situation, be prepared to adjust your attitude to what's happening. If you can't, it might be best to find another spot.

3. Always aid another surfer in trouble. But don't put yourself in a situation over your head. Two surfers in need of help are in a much worse a state than one. Unlike most other sports, surfing is often practiced in places where, and at times when, medical or paramedical assistance may not be instantly available. It's also practiced in a medium - the ocean - where a human, if rendered helpless, can be literally out of his or her depth, fast. This means we have only one real safety net in times of danger: each other. The physical safety of your fellow surfer should be a paramount concern, overriding any disputes or bad feelings that may already have occurred between you.

In the ocean, there is not the luxury available to land-dwellers of standing by and waiting for a doctor or other trained person to come leaping out of the crowd. The nature of any lineup - turbulent, shifty, always moving - means that other surfers may not see a surfer in trouble right away. As a result, it's very important to react quickly as soon as you see a fellow surfer is in trouble. As you go to the surfer's aid, recruit others and work as a team, using boards and wave energy, to help the injured surfer to shore as soon as possible. Teamwork doesn't just ensure a quicker result in almost all situations: it's also a way of making sure you don't get into the same trouble as the already endangered surfer.

**If you're a beginner, always try to surf in front of a manned lifeguard tower - and never surf alone. Remember, it could be you...*

4. Thou shalt not use your surfing advantages to abuse your fellow surfers. This includes advantages such as surfboard length, surfing fitness and skill, local knowledge and authority, and (lamest of all) physical aggression and strength.

Getting your head around this profound and quite complex piece of etiquette involves a willingness to acknowledge the advantage itself. Not every longboard rider, for instance, knows he or she has an extraordinary paddling advantage over almost every shortboard rider in any lineup, anywhere. But he or she DOES; as does every experienced local surfer surrounded by familiar faces and waves at his or her local break; as does every pro surfer at almost every Joe Average break on the planet; as does every large muscle-bound martial arts expert or violent felon loose in the waves of Hawaii, So Cal or southern Australia, for that matter.

Since we're all in the habit of chasing waves for personal gain, it's only natural that during the chase, we'd wish to use whatever advantages we possess. Here's the big, indeed, the insurmountable problem with that kind of thinking: There's always someone who's got a bigger advantage than you. There's always someone bigger, better, with a longer board, with more authority, with more inherent violence in his soul. Do you really want to live in a world where that person can come along and take all your waves? Of course you don't.

The whole idea of such mad social Darwinism is exactly the opposite of what makes surfing fun in the first place. We're trying to escape the rat-race, not become part of it!

Therefore, surfing etiquette requires that you be fully aware of your advantages in the water, and conduct yourself appropriately. Here is a short list of such advantages, and appropriate actions:

The Core Local should at all times understand that other surfers have a right to ride at the spot he knows so well, and that his enhanced knowledge of the break gives him a responsibility as much as a reward. His responsibility involves leading the wave-sharing rhythm, keeping an eye on surfers who look like they might get into trouble, putting a lid on any bullying of kids by older surfers, and providing an example to the grommets and beginners of how to behave in a wide range of surfing circumstances. Taking care of these responsibilities will guarantee the reward (uninterrupted choice of the best set waves). Ignoring them and taking the reward anyway will guarantee ongoing ill-feeling in the lineup.

The Longboard Rider should be absolutely clear that his or her craft provides an unfair paddling advantage which, if abused, will quickly lead to resentment and hostility from surfers who choose to ride shorter, more high-performance equipment. He or she should therefore be highly aware of the wave-sharing rhythm, and be careful not to misuse paddling speed in a way that breaks down that rhythm. Using the longboard to paddle in early from the shoulder, or to 'lap' other surfers by racing to the takeoff zone, is bad etiquette.

The Highly Skilled Pro holds a natural advantage over almost everyone else in any lineup, thanks to his or her greater paddling speed and wave judgement, and ability to take off deeper with relative ease. The Pro should remember at all times that not everybody in the water is engaged in a competitive surfing career, and that this does not rule out others' right to a fair share of waves. He or she should also be aware that fellow surfers may feel uncertain, shy, or even humiliated by a pro's skill level and presence in the lineup, and where possible, should break the ice with a smile, a hello, and/or an offer of a wave or two.

The Bigger, Older Surfer should be aware that whether he intends it or not, his physical presence may intimidate younger smaller surfers, and should thus avoid any behavior that may - unintentionally or otherwise - create fear in the hearts of his fellow surfers. Instead, he should adopt the approach suggested for the Pro, above: deliberate friendliness designed to foster a good example.