

The Scoop Rescue

In an assisted rescue situation, there are several possible strategies for getting a swimmer back into his kayak. The quickest re-entries require both coordination and a certain degree of athleticism—two ingredients that may be in short supply if the swimmer is exhausted, sick, injured, or compromised due to cold water immersion.

The concept behind the scoop rescue is to absolutely minimize the effort required from the swimmer. This is accomplished by literally floating the swimmer back into the flooded kayak and then relying on the rescuer to rotate the boat back upright.

It is imperative to recognize that this rescue is only suitable for kayaks that have full and adequate flotation both fore and aft. This usually takes the form of bulkheads and waterproof hatches, although float-bags securely anchored in the bow and stern also work. Any attempt to perform this rescue with a kayak without flotation leads to disaster: a kayak bobbing vertically in the water, or worse still, resting on the ocean floor.

As the rescuer, position yourself next to the swimmer's kayak, facing in the opposite direction from the overturned boat. Secure both paddles by tucking them under your arm or stashing them under a deck bungee. To establish a good grip on the kayak, commit your weight to the boat's foredeck while grasping its perimeter lines or cockpit rim. Even upside down, a sea kayak (with bulkheads) has plenty of flotation and will easily support your weight, so rather than straining away from the job, lean into it, and use the swimmer's kayak for stability.

For the scoop rescue, you don't start by emptying the kayak. Instead you flood it. This is accomplished by holding the empty boat on its side, and allowing as much water as possible to flood into the cockpit.

With the kayak held on its side, the swimmer re-enters the boat by floating in feet first while pulling himself in by the cockpit rim, and sliding as far as possible into the kayak. Ideally his feet will be far past the foot pedals and his butt well forward of the seat. Once deeply in the boat, the swimmer then leans as far back as possible onto the stern deck in order to lower his center of gravity. Now, the rescuer can pull up hard on the coaming to upright the swamped kayak.

While the boat continues to be stabilized by the rescuer, the swimmer can sit back up in the seat, and the process of getting the spraydeck back on and pumping the water out can commence.

While the scoop rescue is exceedingly difficult in really rough conditions, it's easy in calmer water, and may prove to be the only option with a swimmer who is otherwise incapable of re-entering his kayak from the water. Even a seriously injured paddler can be floated into his boat, the cockpit pumped out, and the kayak stabilized while it is towed to safety.



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