

Technical Syllabus

The 3 Star Freestyle Award provides an introduction to the fundamental skills of freestyle paddlesport, from which it is possible to build more advanced skills.

The BCU Freestyle Star Awards have been designed in a way that allows them to develop in-line with the sport. They encompass a wide view of what freestyle is, having both a recreational and competitive emphasis.

A successful paddler will not be expected to perform all elements perfectly but will need a basic understanding of how using the core elements will allow further progression.

Part A1 – Core Elements

The following core elements are integral to the execution of the core skills. Although the paddler needs to work towards evidencing the following core elements (A1) within the core skills (A2), it is also realised that the core elements can also be developed and demonstrated in isolation. Below includes examples of how this may be done.

A1.1 Warm up and warm down

Warm-up is about the ability to prepare both body and mind for the activity to be undertaken. This may take place a number of times during the session.

Warm-down is about the ability to effectively aid muscle recovery and reduce sport-related injuries.

During training paddlers will be provided with advice on the current best practice for performing warm-ups and warm-downs. At this level of the award paddlers will learn the fundamentals of an integrated warm-up and warm-down to enhance session learning, performance and minimise injuries. Training will include the corrective benefits of dynamic and static stretching.

A1.2 Posture and connectivity

Posture refers to the ability to adopt a sitting position that allows a greater and more powerful range of movement. This also helps prevent sports injuries and fatigue.

Connectivity is about the ability to efficiently transfer the paddler's energy to and from the boat in order to perform freestyle manoeuvres.

During training the coach should provide a mixture of land and water-based activities that allow the paddler to improve posture, shape and form, to efficiently channel energy to and from the boat. For example training should include a short session detailing boat outfitting before progressing to simulating fundamental movements to support the core skills (this should cover methods for maintaining good shape and form).

BCU 3 Star Freestyle Training Notes

A1.3 Rotation and synchronicity

Rotation refers to the ability to wind up and unwind the torso to generate rotational momentum and torque through a pivot point.

Synchronicity refers to the ability to move the upper and lower body independently yet co-operatively to perform freestyle manoeuvres.

During training paddlers will be introduced to a series of concepts and exercises specifically designed to improve movement timing, co-ordination and awareness. Paddlers will gain a firm understanding of the three stage rotational model (wind up, place/pivot, unwind) and how this effects movement in freestyle. The importance of head rotation should also be discussed.

A1.4 Intensity and relaxation

Intensity is about the amount of energy being transmitted. Maximum intensity is not necessarily the optimal level for performance.

Relaxation is not necessarily the opposite of intensity; relaxation and intensity work together in complementary ways to bring out the best in the paddler and their performance.

Together they are about the ability to free the body to perform in a powerful yet flowing way.

During training the coach will provide paddlers with a firm understanding of the fundamentals of efficient paddling. For example during forward paddling (on flat water), paddlers will work on developing the ability to accelerate from a stationary position to near maximum speed within 4 strokes, and then minimising the applied force whilst maintaining near maximum speed. This forward paddling technique can then be applied at the appropriate moments when leaving the eddy to enter (or maintain) a wave or stopper. The intensity and relaxing principle should also be applied to other skills.

A1.5 Control, balance and dexterity

Control refers to the ability to use the core muscles to control the boat's edge and trim.

Balance refers to the ability to maintain static and dynamic stability both proactively and reactively.

Dexterity refers to the ability to adapt the use of the paddle to meet the demands of the environment whether proactively or during reactive measures.

During training paddlers will further develop their core stability and effective paddle dexterity through a series of edge and trim control exercises on flat water. Paddlers will be shown how to carve and skid the boat, which helps with understanding of how to loosen the hull for manoeuvres covered in core skills. Training should explore the concept of using the four quarters of the boat.

Paddlers will also work towards achieving efficient paddle strokes (cross bow and non-cross bow strokes on both sides) and maintaining upright body posture without relying on the paddle for total support. Training should help paddlers to develop spatial awareness.

A1.6 Methods of position and set-up

Position refers to the ability to manoeuvre to a pre-determined point on the feature.

Set-up refers to the ability to set-up with the correct position and angle required to initiate the desired manoeuvre.

During training paddlers will be introduced to the clock concept. They will begin working towards understanding how positioning and set-up interact to achieve the performance of a desired manoeuvre. The difference in position and set-up required in different features will be discussed and where possible demonstrated.

Part A2 – Core Skills

A2.1 Rolling

The ability to roll is of key importance at 3 Star. However, it is appreciated that this skill may be new, or have been learnt in a swimming pool and rarely done outside. Therefore helping paddlers transfer this skill into an open water setting is important. Paddlers are not expected to learn to roll during the initial 2-day training course. However, at the end of the training course they should be clear on what needs to be done to achieve a consistent roll.

A2.2 Supporting

During training paddlers will work towards developing a support stroke that is part of their overall paddling, with a view to being proactive rather than reactive. This means they should work from the back of the blade and take support from power strokes. The training aim is that support stroke usage is reduced and an active paddle becomes more pronounced, so that the paddler's overall balance around the blade improves.

A2.3 Flat-water manoeuvres

During training paddlers will develop the ability to access vertical manoeuvres efficiently through a greater understanding of the core elements. This part of the training explores and puts into context a selection of freestyle moves that can be applied to flat water e.g. pivot turns, shuvits, stern dips, lean cleans and double pumps. Flat water sessions should follow a skill progression format that allows the paddler to develop an understanding of how best to explore and learn new skills.

A2.4 Entering and exiting play features

During training paddlers will explore the effects of angle, acceleration and edge to cross eddy lines and simple flows to enter wave and hole features. Paddlers will concentrate on using effectively timed key power strokes to ensure the whole boat clears the eddy line. Training will cover ferry gliding towards the feature whilst keeping the boat under control, entering the feature effectively and exiting the feature to regain an eddy.

A2.5 Wave surfing

During training paddlers will develop the fundamentals of front surfing in order to access freestyle manoeuvres contained in the award. This may include carving and cutbacks in control, using both edges of the boat. Paddlers will be shown how to avoid the bow of the boat burying and how to use the appropriate methods to correct this if it occurs.

A2.6 Hole surfing

During training paddlers will work towards manoeuvring around the hole and building confidence. The paddler will initially work on balancing their weight on the downstream buttock whilst keeping their weight off the paddle. Further refinement will allow the paddler to edge efficiently with the boat stable whilst applying dynamic and static strokes to manoeuvre the boat around the feature.

A2.7 Shuvits

Shuvit is a manoeuvre that allows the boat to go from a front surf position to back surf position (through 180°), returning along the same path, to the front surf position using the same active blade throughout the movement. The movement should be continuous.

During training paddlers will be introduced to shuvits so as to allow them to better understand surfing and loose hull concepts (such as flat spins). The shuvit is mostly used to maintain waves or create opportunities to initiate other freestyle manoeuvres.

A2.8 Flat spins

The flat spin involves performing a 360° rotation through a front and back surf, finishing back in a front surf position whilst on the wave or hole.

During training paddlers will be introduced to the flat spin. This is a core skill that opens the door to many more advanced freestyle manoeuvres.

A2.9 Stern dips on moving water

The stern dip involves slicing the stern of the boat underwater and elevating the bow into the air whilst rotating around the stern.

During training paddlers will work on developing a reliable stern dip, making good use of river flow, eddy lines and any other features on the river on which they can perform this move.

A2.10 Bow ender and pirouettes

The bow ender is a near vertical manoeuvre where the boat's stern reaches an elevation of more than 45°. This can be combined with a 180° rotation that is completed whilst on the bow.

During training paddlers will work on establishing a reliable bow ender; focusing on initially placing the bow of the boat into a small feature (wave or stopper) and allowing the stern of the kayak to rise up into the air to develop vertical balance and build confidence. Once this is achieved paddlers will further explore pirouettes with the following methods of generating rotation; back sweep, cross bow draw, and head and body rotation.

A2.11 The beginning of a routine

During training paddlers will partake in a 45 second ride to explore their new skills. This starts to introduce the ability to link moves into a routine and provide a taste of competition paddling. The emphasis here will be on fun and effectively utilising time within rides.

Part B - Rescue Skills

The emphasis for the paddler is that they can work towards becoming an effective member of a team. Paddlers to act as both rescuee and rescuer, including taking responsibility for the rescues.

B.1 Deep-water rescue

During training paddlers will work on developing an efficient and safe means of approaching a capsized paddler to perform a simple and effective boat-based rescue. A range of techniques will be explored so that paddlers can select the most appropriate rescue technique for use at the time. Boats should always be fitted with appropriate buoyancy.

B.2 Throwline

During training paddlers will learn how to safely and effectively use throwlines to rescue a swimmer in moving water. Training should include; choosing where to stand to provide throwline support, reasons for a dynamic stance, methods of reducing shock-load on the line and effective re-packing of the line.

B.3 Capsize, swim and self-rescue

During training paddlers will learn to swim down a small section of moving water using safe defensive and aggressive swimming techniques to reach the bank.

Part C - Safety & Group Skills

It is important that paddlers learn how to add to the group dynamic, which enables swift decision-making, clear communications and positive outcomes.

C.1 Personal risk management

During training paddlers will develop good judgement and observational skills to identify potential risks to themselves and others. Paddlers will practice identifying play features and making decisions on whether they are safe and appropriate for their skill level.

C.2 Awareness of others

During training paddlers will develop the skills necessary to be aware of what is going on around them and know that, whilst not responsible for others, they still have a duty of care and must work together to help each other if a situation arises. Through this paddlers should gain an appreciation of safe practice in freestyle.

Part D – Theory / Knowledge

Throughout the training course the coach will provide a broad range of information that covers all aspects appropriate to the level of the award.

Topics that may be covered include:

D.1 Equipment

Paddlers should develop knowledge and experience of using a range of equipment. They should know how and why equipment has evolved and how best to use it.

D.2 Safety

Paddlers should develop a sound safety framework with use of practical, dynamic risk assessments.

D.3 Weather

Paddlers should learn how to understand and interpret weather forecast information from a variety of sources.

D.4 Wellbeing, health and first aid

Paddlers should develop an understanding of the factors that contribute to hypothermia/hyperthermia and have suitable strategies to avoid these. The paddler should also learn how to deal with the most likely paddlesport injuries.

D.5 Freestyle environment

An appreciation of the environment we paddle in should be a key underpinning principle for paddlers. Paddlers should gain an awareness of their environmental impact and be proactive in minimising this impact.

D.6 Competition

Paddlers should develop an understanding the basics of UK competition structure and rules.

D.7 General

Paddlers should gain a wide general knowledge of all aspects of the sport.

D.8 Etiquette

Paddlers should gain an understanding of and promote a positive image for paddlesports with other river users and local residents.