

WAKA AMA HANDBOOK

acknowledgements

Thanks to:

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INTRODUCTION

Waka Ama simply keeps growing, with more and more paddlers keen to start either their first sprint distance race, or progress to the long distance courses. The training for all distances - sprint, long or relay - is the same, you need to plan your race in order to give your body a successful chance to finish.

If you either want to take part in Waka Ama, or simply improve upon your current performances, the following notes will hopefully help you.

THE BASICS...

Waka Ama has 2-3 disciplines, combining on the water (techniques/specifics etc) and off the water (strength base for long distances) and power (for sprints).

By setting goals and training programmes, this will enable you to train harder and wiser than if you were to not have a plan. By training you will develop both all round muscle toning and high levels of CV (cardio vascular – heart and lung capabilities).

This is achieved by breaking down training sessions to enable you to have a good workout, but not to be training overtired or sore muscles, as this will simply result in injury and poor performance.

With three different distances in waka ama, you will need to decide which event you wish to train for.

- **SPRINT DISTANCE:** suitable for beginners wishing to experience their first hoe (paddle).
- **LONG DISTANCE:** the next stage up, the more common race distance, certainly among elite athletes.
- **RELAY DISTANCE:** for those that like to push their bodies and minds to the limit.

Distance			
Sprints	250m	500m	1000-1500m
Long	6-8km	10-15km	25km
Relay	40km	60km	100km

Once you have decided to take part in Waka Ama, the first thing you will need to do is enter a suitable race, this will help motivate you and give yourself a goal to aim for. Join a local club - you can find details of clubs at www.wakaama.co.nz.

SOME BASIC TIPS WHEN PLANNING YOUR TRAINING SESSIONS:

SPECIFICITY: Ensure that all your training is specific to the event you are training for. Ensure that each session has an aim, ie. Endurance, power and strength sessions.

PROGRESSION: The body is a marvellous piece of engineering design, as you train it it becomes stronger. However if you maintain the same training level, your body will maintain the same level of improvement. In simple terms, avoid allowing your body to become used to its workouts.

OVERLOAD: This must be done carefully to avoid causing stress on any of your body systems. Listen to your body, if it feels tired let it rest, remember fit bodies are not built in the gym, they are built whilst resting.

REVERSIBILITY: Keep your training regular, if you stop for two weeks, then a lot of the previous work will be lost. Make time for training but avoid letting it take over your life.

PUTTING IN THE MILES

Waka Ama is best performed with fellow paddlers, as it is more fun and motivational. The distance you paddle will greatly depend on both your fitness levels and also your race distance.

You should aim to go out on a waka 2-3 times per week, varying your distances and route. Aim for a long steady hoe on the weekend, taking in a few kms more to help develop muscle strength, paddle the approximate distance of your race twice per week, with at least one of these sessions followed by a suitable distance half the distance of your race.

Group cycling sessions (spinning/cycle reebok) and turbo training are good, especially during the cold wet winter months, however nothing beats paddling. It's here that you are forced to work against the wind, varied water conditions and learn the correct techniques that best suit you for paddling.

If you can find a suitable race in your area, most members are keen to offer help and advice, especially to novices in the sport. Waka Ama culture is all about whanau and embracing a healthy and active kaupapa (lifestyle).

**Work with your
crew – one
crew of six is
stronger than six
individuals**

SEATS, TECHNIQUES & CALLS

SEAT SIX (STEERER'S) CALLS

“Ready”

Pay attention to the steerer, focus in the boat, make sure your blade is on the correct side of waka and get ready for the next call which will be...

“Set”

(See Setup in paddling technique)

Assume the Set-up position: Hips are rotated, torso is inclined forward, there is a slight angle in the blade, you are ready to surprise the water with the first stroke.

“Go” Hoesa

It's not a trick, it means start paddling! All blades should hit the water together. In a race situation, the steerer will take the cue for the start from the drop of a flag or a hooter.

“Hold”

Plunge your blade deep into the water and brace it to bring the waka to a stop.

“Back Paddle”

Take your timing from seat one, and paddle backwards.

“Draw Left” or “Draw Right”

Reach out and plunge your blade deep into the water and pull in so that you push water under (not against) the waka. You should be able to see bubbles come up on the opposite side of the waka. This instruction is usually given to seats one and two to change the direction of the waka but may also be given to the whole crew to move the position of the waka. (also called Kahi)

“Uni”

Seat one plunges their blade deep as far forward as possible, held close to the right hand side of the waka and rotates the near-side of the blade away of the waka, forcing the bow (nose) to veer to the left. When the pressure falls off the blade, seat one and two will change sides to draw left and complete the turn.



Treat every stroke as equally important and the one that will make the difference.

CALLS MADE BY OTHER SEATS

“Object at X O’clock”

Alerts steerers of other craft or object on the water. Usually called by seat one.

“Clear”, “Block”

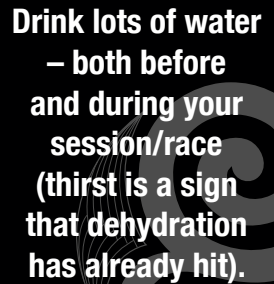
It is difficult for the steerer to judge whether the front of the boat is clear of another waka when approaching from behind. For this reason seat one calls out “Clear” or “Block” as appropriate to indicate whether it is safe for the steerer to move the boat to the left/right or not.

“Hut!”

You have one more stroke before you change sides. Usually called by seat three or seat four every 12-15 strokes (it is better to go less strokes than more). The Hut is called to keep arms fresh, and can mean the difference between catching a runner or not. Use the Hut to maximise water conditions eg. Hut coming up to the crest of a wave so you have full power down the back of the wave.

“Ho!” “Push!”

Paddlers may respond to a “Hut” with a “Ho” on the following stroke. This focuses attention in the boat to ensure a strong last stroke is made before initiating a quick changeover, keeping the next three strokes on the new side strong as well. Keep the Ho powerful and crisp – not Haaaoooo-oooohhhhh..... but Ho!



**Drink lots of water
– both before
and during your
session/race
(thirst is a sign
that dehydration
has already hit).**

WAKA AMA PADDLER HAND POSITIONS

SET UP

Summary: Comfortable and stable seating position allowing maximum power transfer to the blade.

- Assume a seated position on the front half of the seat, with back straight
- Outside foot is placed firmly in the centre of the waka floor, with lower leg forming a 45 degree angle
- Inboard foot is tucked under the seat with weight on the front of the foot
- Hips are rotated (cocked), facing away from the paddling side with outside hip forward
- Shoulders are in the same alignment as torso. Chest is open, shoulders are being pulled back and down
- Torso is inclined forward, from the hips
- Head is up and is aligned along the centreline of the waka with eyes forward
- Grasp the paddle with bottom hand 1 to 1.5 hand widths above the blade. Grip firmly with top two fingertips and thumb, but relax other fingers to allow full extension of the blade
- Inboard arm is bent, with fist in front of and approximately 20cm from forehead, elbow at shoulder level



THE CATCH

Summary: Clean blade entry, positive blade angle and full body engagement.

- Rotate torso forward using abdominal and lower back muscles with outside shoulder following the gunnel
- Head position should remain in the centre of the waka
- Outside arm fully extended along the side of the waka



- Blade face angled forward to meet the water
- Enter the blade cleanly by dropping the outside shoulder combined with downward pressure from the top arm.
- Bury the blade as quick as possible with little or no splash. The paddle is 'anchored' once fully submerged.
- Engage outside leg, abdominals and lats in preparation for the pull phase

THE PULL (POWER PHASE)

Summary: Coordinated engagement of all muscle groups and smooth acceleration through the stroke. Lever the waka past the blade.

- Pull the waka up to the blade in an explosive manner (surprise the water) engaging leg drive, hips, lats, abdominals and biceps.
- Top hand is directly above bottom hand with paddle shaft vertical with respect to the waka.
- Accelerate from the catch through the stroke pulling the blade parallel and close to the hull.
- Keep the spine straight while unwinding from the initial rotation. Avoid any lateral movement and collapsing of the spine.
- Leg drive should match the acceleration of the blade and be engaged throughout the power phase.
- Allow the outside arm to bend naturally as the stroke proceeds.
- Top hand should remain high in view at all times.
- Maintain a firm wrist, maintain a bent top arm and engage the inboard shoulder muscles to provide a strong fulcrum for the blade.
- Keep head high, chest open and back straight throughout the pull phase.



EXIT

Summary: Exit the blade quickly and cleanly allowing the waka to run.

- Exit phase should commence when the blade face reaches the knee.
- Lead the Exit with the outside elbow, relaxing the wrist as the blade enters to leave the water.
- Top hand should remain in front of the face rotating the grip to 'feather' the blade (imagine turning a tap off)
- Watch the blade exiting of the person you are following
- Timing will be more consistent watching exit rather than entry



CHANGING SIDES

Summary: Ensure paddle changes are timely and quick.

- Minimal body movement in the waka
- Heads and eyes up looking forward
- Team movement of arms and legs should be done together
- Changing of paddles from one side to the other should be quick and in time with each other



RECOVERY

Summary: Ensure recovery of all muscles before the next stroke.

- Relax the shoulders, lats and upper torso
- Engage lower back and abs muscles, transferring to a controlled lean and rotation forward, ready for the set-up phase
- Blade face should remain feathered travelling parallel with the surface of the water.
- Imagine a waltz (1, 2, 3) where 2, 3 is your recovery.

Not only is good technique energy saving and fast, it is easy to learn because it is so simple. Part of the learning process requires that you have a clear picture in your mind of how a paddler moves the waka through the water.

The waka is being pulled forward through the water up to the paddle, which acts as an anchor in the water (akin to a mountaineer climbing upward with their ice axe). The waka is being pulled forward not pushed. Reach forward as far as you can without bending or hinging at the waist, at the beginning of the stroke.

Remember this principle and you overcome one of the major technical problems most wakaists have, that is, trying to move the waka forward by pushing through entering the paddle too far back and continuing the stroke too far behind.

To pull rather than push the waka through the water, reach forward as far as you can (without bending or hinging at the waist) at the beginning of the stroke and end the stroke just before your lower hand reaches your hip.

Use your body in the stroke. Most paddlers are all arms, attempting to generate all the power with the relatively small bicep and tricep muscles of the arms rather than using, in combination, the muscles of the torso which are far larger and more capable.

**Eat 120 minutes
before your
training sessions
– give your body
the fuel it needs
to work.**

SEATING POSITIONS



The tables below split the role of each seat in a waka into two parts:

Tasks – these are the things anyone sitting in this position will need to do as part of the crew.

Desirable skills/attributes – these were based in part on a Steve West Outrigging Course. They list some of the qualities which are desirable for people sitting in those positions to have. They are a guide only but may help you decide which position you would like to aim for or may be best suited to.

In training we encourage everyone to gain experience in all positions in the boat. If for some reason you haven't had the opportunity to try a particular position please let your coach know.

SEAT ONE - STROKE

Tasks:

- Sets the rhythm and pace
- Draws or bow rudders to turn the front of waka
- Warns the steerer of approaching boats/objects
- When approaching another waka from behind, informs the steerer as to whether the front is 'clear' for passing
- When approaching shore, catch the boat to prevent it running aground

DESIRABLE SKILLS/ATTRIBUTES

Relatively experienced. Mentally strong with a good, positive attitude at all times. Good rhythm. Able to maintain a steady stroke rate for one to two hours, especially during rough conditions when they may be paddling through the air at times. A fluid paddler who can read the water, feel the water and call lifts. Cool and calm in any situation (never panics), with the ability to think and act on own accord. Not heavy (less than average weight of the crew).



SEAT TWO - SECONDARY STROKE

Tasks:

- Works together with Seat One
- Sets pace for opposite side of waka mirroring Seat One to distribute power equally down the waka
- Calls changes if not being called by Seat Three – ie. 'Hut' ensuring Seat One doesn't burn out
- Keeps ama down if waka tries to capsize
- Keeps Seat One motivated



DESIRABLE SKILLS/ATTRIBUTES

Must have perfect anticipation of Seat One. Good rhythm. Needs to be able to read the water and be responsive to lifts in rating. Must work well with Seat One, giving them feedback on stroke rate as well as keeping them motivated and feeling part of the crew (it is lonely in Seat One). Seat Two needs to be able to quickly get the spare paddle if needed. Can be called upon to call huts.

SEAT THREE - ENGINE ROOM

Tasks:

- Keeps in time with Seat One
- Calls the changes – ie 'Hut'
- Uses tipping rope to keep ama down if waka tried to capsize
- Passes on calls forward and backward
- Keeps Seat Two motivated



DESIRABLE SKILLS/ATTRIBUTES

Powerful. Good technique. This where your heaviest paddler generally goes. They are the messenger for the steerer and as such are required to pass up messages to the front. Watches Seat One and follows carefully. Needs to be focused, and have a good team attitude. Watches the ama and stops the boat tipping by using the tipping rope in really rough seas. May be needed to bail.

SEAT FOUR - ENGINE ROOM

Tasks:

- Keeps in time with Seat Two
- Used tipping rope/kiato to keep ama down if waka tries to capsize (even when stopped)
- Generally responsible for bailing the waka
- Keeps Seat Three motivated



DESIRABLE SKILLS/ATTRIBUTES

Powerful. Good technique. This is where your second heaviest paddler generally goes. Watches Seat Two and follows carefully. Needs to be focused and have a good team attitude. Watches the ama and stops the boat tipping by using the tipping rope or kiato. Fast and efficient at bailing.

SEAT FIVE - ASSISTANT TACTICIAN & KEEPER OF THE AMA

Tasks:

- Keeps in time with Seats One and Three
- Has best view of the ama – calls check if required
- Unties spare paddle and passes up or back if someone loses/breaks a paddle
- Bails excess water under steerer's command
- May have to steer if Seat Six can't
- Keeps Seat Four motivated
- During night training sessions is required to shine the torch on instruction from the steerer to signal encroaching vessels of our presence



DESIRABLE SKILLS/ATTRIBUTES

Powerful. Good technique and rhythm. Must be able to assist the steerer with good anticipation. As a driver and power seat, this paddler must understand boat run and water conditions and be strong enough to push the waka on top of a wave with a couple of strokes (catch a runner). This paddler needs to be able to judge when to change to the left and back to keep the waka stable and the ama down, and work in well with the steerer. Must be able to do most of what Seat Six can do if Seat Six is unable to steer. Must be able to react quickly and get his paddle to the steerer and then recover the spare paddle. Follows Seat Three.

SEAT SIX - STEERER

Tasks:

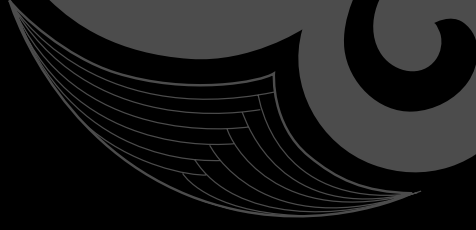
- Thoroughly check waka before departure (eg. Rigging, bailers, spare paddles, bungs, etc)
- Steers waka direction (while paddling)
- Watch crew timing and technique
- Directs crews as required (eg. During turns or capsize recovery)
- Manage health of waka and crew
- Communicates and motivates crew
- While racing, if another waka flips nearby you must stop and check all paddlers are okay before continuing
- In legal terms, the steerer is the captain of the waka and must take responsibility for all aspects of safe handling and management of the waka/crew



DESIRABLE SKILLS/ATTRIBUTES

Light and strong (you do not want to carry a heavy steerer) or put your most powerful paddler here if they have to poke all day in the wind). Confident and comfortable in any condition and calls the shots and tactics. Should have a race plan which all the crew are aware of. Must be positive, a motivator and communicate well with the crew. Must be responsible and know the strength of the crew and have the crew's confidence. Must be aware of safety issues. Needs to be able to cop abuse (it is always the steerer's fault when something goes wrong and the whole crew's efforts when things go well). This person must be experienced and a key attribute is being able to anticipate. Ideally should have spent their time paddling and racing in other positions in the boat and know what the crew are going through. This paddler needs to be able to judge when to call lifts for runners and get the most out of the conditions, eg. Currents, eddies, know the effects of the wind and how to set up the crew for the conditions. They must be comfortable changing the crew around and know how the crew changes will affect the waka run. In flat water this paddler should be able to paddle 95% of the strokes and keep the boat straight, but priority is always to steer the crew well first, and add power to the boat second. Generally follows Seat Four but will paddle different sides as needed in conditions. Must be able to paddle left all day (or at least 80% of the day) if conditions demand.

CAPSIZING DRILL



Capsizes are not something to be feared and should be practiced often to ensure all participants are comfortable when a capsize does occur.

One of the most common causes of a waka capsizing is hesitation and paddles out of the water. TIP: If you feel the ama lifting, make your next two strokes the strongest, most powerful strokes you can muster (keeping good technique).

If a waka does capsize, don't anticipate it, roll with it. Chances are you will be in the water before you know what has happened. Listen to your steerer's calls and directions. They are in command of righting the waka and ensuring everyone's safety.

- 1. Safety – check all paddlers have surfaced and are okay**
- 2. Right the waka as soon as possible**
- 3. Bail and keep the waka afloat**
- 4. Get in, and resume paddling**

1. SAFETY

Headcount. Buddy together (Seat 1+2, 3+4, 5+6). Check your partner has surfaced and is okay. Report headcount to steerer.

Collect paddles and any other equipment floating in the water. Seat 3+4 hand paddles to Seat 2+5 respectively, who hand them to seat 1+6 respectively.

2. RIGHT THE WAKA

Speed is of the essence in righting a waka. As seat 3+4 are normally your larger paddlers, they are better to do this task, however if for some reason they are not available, any of the seat positions can do this role.

Seat 3+4 climb up on the (ama side), climb over the hull of the waka first, holding onto the kiato's as they go. Place feet on the maku (kiato extension) ready to pull the waka over. Dependant on the weight of your paddlers, this action alone may stimulate the righting of the waka.

Seats 2+5 assist by pushing up on the ama or kiato's. Synchronise timing on a count of three or similar as given by the steerer.

Seats 3+4 should attempt to catch the kiato (where possible) as it flips over to avoid the ama 'crashing' down on the water.

Whatever you do, all enter and exit the water at the same time. Rhythm and timing is everything.

3. BAILING

Preferably, your two lightest paddlers should hop in and bail the waka first. Enter ama side between the kiato's (Seat 3+4). Bail as quickly as possible (like a madman) until fatigued. You may need to have relief paddlers bail (take turns) if there is a lot of water in the waka.

Paddlers in the water maintain the stability of the waka. Seats 1+6 should place paddles in the waka while the bailing process is taking place.

NB: Do not hang onto the waka whilst in the water. This will only pull it down further. Tread water close by, or lightly hold onto the gunnel in the centre of the waka.

4. START PADDLING

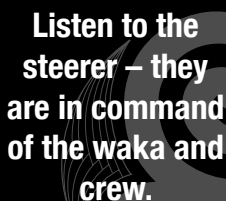
When the waka is quarter full or less, all paddlers can re-enter the waka. It is wise to try position the waka in the direction you want to go whilst the bailing is taking place. Pass paddles down to seats, and start paddling. Seat 4 continues bailing until all the water is out of the waka.

NB: 1 inch of water is equivalent to 100kgs extra weight in the boat.

WITH SKIRTS/WHILE RACING

If skirts are fitted you may initially find it difficult getting out of the waka. The important thing is to relax, undo the zipper and use your feet to push off the bottom of the boat sending yourself initially away from the surface. If you relax you'll find you have plenty of time to do this before needing another breath of air.

Important: When racing, if another crew tips next to you or in front of you, you **MUST** check that all six paddlers are above the water before continuing. If everyone hasn't surfaced, you **MUST** stop and assist. This is an AOCRA ruling. If you do not stop because you want to keep racing and not lose time, you will be disqualified anyway.



**Listen to the
steerer – they
are in command
of the waka and
crew.**



sportwaikato
out there and active

**HE ORANGA
POUTAMA**

