



📌 The star system for sea kayaking

Conditions Grading

NPF's grading system, based on British Canoeing's star system, adapted for Norwegian conditions. Learn to assess waters and conditions for safe paddling.

SHELTERED

EXPOSED



★ ★ ★ ★ ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

UNDERSTAND THE SYSTEM

Conditions and waters

Two concepts that together determine the grade. To assess correctly, you need to understand the difference.

Conditions

Waves and current right now

Conditions describe the dynamic factors that change with weather and wind. It is what is happening on the sea at the moment you are paddling.



Wind



Waves



Breaking waves /
topography



Current



Swell



Other traffic

Waters

How exposed is the area?

Waters describe the exposure level of the area itself. How much protection do islands, islets and skerries provide? How far is it to shore? This does not change with the weather.



Air and water temperature

Cold shock risk and hypothermia time upon capsize



Daylight

Visibility and time available during incidents



Fog

Reduced visibility and navigation challenges



Key principle

The most challenging single factor determines the grade. Even if most factors indicate grade 2, if the waves indicate grade 3, the overall grade is 3.

Five grades from sheltered to very exposed

Each level builds on the previous one. Conditions become progressively more demanding, requiring correspondingly more experience and skill.

Sheltered

Exposed

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

GRADE 1

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

[Intro Course](#)

Very sheltered waters

Small harbour basin or small bay

WIND

Beaufort 1 — Light air

1–3 knots (0.5–1.5 m/s)

SEA STATE

Sea state 1

Waves: Up to 0.1 m

WATERS

Very sheltered

exposure

No current, no traffic. Calm and protected waters with barely any waves. Ideal for beginners.

GRADE 2

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

[Foundation Course](#)

Sheltered waters

Inner archipelago

WIND

Beaufort 2 — Light breeze

4–6 knots (2–3 m/s)

SEA STATE

Sea state 2

Waves: Up to 0.5 m

WATERS

Sheltered

exposure

Small ripples around rocks and skerries. Very little current, little traffic. Protected by islands and islets.

GRADE 3



📖 Technique / Activity Leader Course

Somewhat exposed waters

Waters near land with small islands and skerries beyond

🌬️ WIND

Beaufort 4 — Moderate breeze

11–16 knots (5.5–8 m/s)

🌊 SEA STATE

Sea state 3

Waves: 0.5–1.25 m

@ WATERS

Somewhat exposed

exposure

Small breaking waves over shallows. Current and sea may cause some drift. Other traffic expected. Requires good technique and judgement.

GRADE 4



📖 Advanced / Instructor Course

Exposed waters

Waters near land without small islands and skerries beyond

🌬️ WIND

Beaufort 5 — Fresh breeze

17–21 knots (8.5–10.5 m/s)

🌊 SEA STATE

Sea state 4

Waves: 1.25–2.5 m

@ WATERS

Exposed

exposure

Breaking waves over shallows. Current and sea cause drift and irregular formations. Weather can change quickly. Traffic expected.

GRADE 5



⚠️ Expert level only

Very exposed waters

Long crossings in open sea, or exposed waters along coast

🌬️ WIND

Beaufort 6 — Strong breeze

22–27 knots (11–14 m/s)

🌊 SEA STATE

Sea state 5

Waves: 2.5–4 m

@ WATERS

Very exposed

exposure

Strong breaking waves. Strong irregular formations. Weather can change very quickly. Traffic expected. Only for very experienced paddlers.

How to assess the conditions?

Three steps to determine whether it is safe to head out.



STEP 1

Gather the right data

Check wave height, wind strength, current conditions and other factors from reliable sources such as Yr, BarentsWatch and tide tables.



STEP 2

Combine the factors

How do the elements interact? Could it get worse? How exposed are you? The most challenging factor determines the grade.



STEP 3

Assess your competence

Are you equipped for these conditions? Do you have the right equipment, experience and rescue skills for the grade you are considering?

Want to learn to assess conditions?

Start with a course and build your skills step by step. From basic paddle technique to advanced weather and conditions assessment.

[View all courses →](#)

[Read about safety](#)

kajakkguiden.no

post@kajakkguiden.no

[+47 468 09 065](tel:+4746809065)

The grading system is based on the Norwegian Paddling Federation's (NPF) adaptation of British Canoeing's star system for sea kayaking. The content has been adapted and presented by Kajakkguiden for informational purposes.



QUICK REFERENCE

The whole scale at a glance

Bring this sheet along. The single most demanding factor decides the grade.

Sheltered						Exposed					
★★★★★						★★★★★					
GRADE	WATERS	WIND	SEA STATE	WAVES	COURSE						
1 ★★★★★	Very sheltered	1–3 knots (0.5–1.5 m/s) Beaufort 1 — Light air	Sea state 1	Up to 0.1 m	Intro Course						
2 ★★★★★	Sheltered	4–6 knots (2–3 m/s) Beaufort 2 — Light breeze	Sea state 2	Up to 0.5 m	Foundation Course						
3 ★★★★★	Somewhat exposed	11–16 knots (5.5–8 m/s) Beaufort 4 — Moderate breeze	Sea state 3	0.5–1.25 m	Technique / Activity Leader Course						
4 ★★★★★	Exposed	17–21 knots (8.5–10.5 m/s) Beaufort 5 — Fresh breeze	Sea state 4	1.25–2.5 m	Advanced / Instructor Course						
5 ★★★★★	Very exposed	22–27 knots (11–14 m/s) Beaufort 6 — Strong breeze	Sea state 5	2.5–4 m	Expert level only						



Key principle: The most challenging single factor determines the grade. Even if most factors indicate grade 2, if the waves indicate grade 3, the overall grade is 3.



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