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A Free Learn To Surf Ebook

We've put together this book on beginner level surfing from the *how to surf* pages on the website.

We hope you enjoy this book. Please feel free to share it with your friends.

By

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Table of Contents

Learning to Surf – The Basics.....	3
Observing the Waves & Choosing a Good Location.....	4
Wave Types.....	5
Shorebreaks:.....	5
Point Breaks.....	5
Reef Breaks.....	5
Surfing Safety.....	6
Safety Tips.....	7
Information on Rip Currents.....	8
Choosing the Best Beginner Surfboard	10
Longboards.....	10
Funboards.....	11
Which Surfboard is Best for the Beginning Surfer?.....	11
But I Want to Surf on a Shortboard!.....	11
Paddling – One of the Keys to Awesome Surfing.....	12
Fitness Plays a Huge Role in Paddling.....	12
How to Position Yourself on the Surfboard.....	12
How To Paddle:.....	13
Goofy or Normal?.....	14
Determining Your Surf Stance:.....	14
Which Foot to Attach the Leash:.....	14
How to Attach the Leash:.....	14
The Pop Up	15
How to do the Pop Up.....	15
The Surf Stance.....	16
You're Surfing!.....	16
Further Resources:.....	16

Learning to Surf – The Basics

Whether you are young or old you can learn how to surf. Surfing is such a pure and amazing experience. I hope the information and surfing tips in this book encourages you to get out and surf.

Here are the most important things to help you have a great time as you learn how to surf:

- Choose a good surf location.
- Find a good surf instructor or trusted friend who surfs to help you in the beginning.
- Choose a good beginners surfboard.
- Try to get into the best shape you can.

You'll have a better time if you're in good shape, but you can learn to surf if you are in reasonable shape. To start with, you're likely going to be learning in the whitewater, in the inside, so it's not too big of a deal for your enjoyment in the beginning. Being in better shape will let you stay out longer and have much more fun if you aren't out there sucking wind.

You should learn to surf on a funboard (also known as a mini mal) or longboard, at least 7 feet in length, if you're an adult 8 feet or longer is better. If you are learning to surf with an instructor they may have a soft top surfboard which is you guessed it, softer than fiberglass or epoxy boards. They're great at the beginning.

I would only recommend people consider softboards for purchase if safety is the number one concern and you don't plan to surf more than once a month. The reason I say this, is that if you plan to surf regularly throughout the year I believe you will quickly find yourself wanting a traditional fiberglass or epoxy surfboard. However, for younger children these softboards are an excellent surfboard to purchase.



Observing the Waves & Choosing a Good Location

Always spend a few minutes observing the waves in the location you will be surfing before paddling out. Take note of where you can safely be on the inside. You'll want to choose an area that is clear of surfers on the outside and doesn't have swimmers nearby. The more room the better. You don't want to have to worry about dodging other surfers or avoiding colliding with swimmers. A good location should have fairly predictable inside wave conditions.

Avoid beaches where you can see rocks in the breaking portion of the waves. If you see one rock, chances are there are plenty more just out of sight under the water.

If you can find an uncrowded beach where there are no rocks and safe whitewater to ride in on, go out as often as you can. It doesn't matter if the outer surf break isn't happening, you are just concerned with practicing paddling and standing up at this point. The more time you spend out in the water, the more you will build up your surfing fitness and surf knowledge. By safe whitewater, I mean an area where there are no [sandbusters](#). Please do not go out into the surf when there are sandbusters crashing onto the shore.

Going out into conditions where the whitewater is really churning is discouraging as well as dangerous. When the surf looks too rough and makes you uneasy, listen to your instincts. As you go out more and more, you will get a feel for what conditions are safe.

Wave Types

Shorebreaks:

Shorebreaks, also known as beach breaks, are the best surf location for beginners to *learn to surf*. (Note: Only in the whitewater, not out where the waves are breaking.) You want to see a location where the waves are breaking far enough out that there is sufficient whitewater to practice paddling and standing up. Some shorebreak beaches produce very consistent whitewater and are excellent locations to learn to surf because you can go out and practice every day. This is a great thing if you are learning to surf while on vacation. It can be very frustrating if you have chosen a surfing location with inconsistent surf and there are no waves and you don't have many days left. It is very important to understand the difference between good shorebreak and dangerous sandbusters. Many surfing injuries occur when beginner surfers try to ride waves that are breaking in very shallow water close to shore.

Point Breaks

The *best surf break for beginners* wanting to learn to ride the face of waves is point break surf. Even if the swells are small, most point breaks will produce good surf. The great thing about point breaks are that the surf breaks only so far offshore, which allows surfers to paddle out without having to go through the impact zone. When you are at the point where you are **surfing wave** faces and not just the whitewater you will appreciate this advantage.

Point Breaks are formed when approaching wave swells are refracted by a land mass, in this case a point. Depending upon the shape of the bottom and depth of water, you can end up with a surf break with very consistent breaking waves producing consistent rights or lefts. Surfers will travel to great lengths to find a perfect point break.



Reef Breaks

Reef breaks produce exhilarating surfing conditions, but are not the place for beginners. Reef breaks are produced by a wave breaking over rocks or coral, enough said. Pipeline in Hawaii and Cloudbreak in Fiji are two well know excellent reef break locations.



Surfing Safety

Wait! Don't go skipping ahead of this chapter, wave safety is important. In my experience, the majority of beach incidents occur when people with limited knowledge of the ocean go out swimming or surfing without fully understanding and respecting the power of the ocean.

The ocean is an incredibly beautiful part of nature. It's also incredibly powerful, which creates those beautiful waves that give so many people the pleasure of surfing. Understanding the signs of dangerous surf will give you the confidence that you are going out in the water only when it is safe to do so

If you are at a popular surf break and there are waves but nobody is out surfing, there must be a reason. It's not that nobody wants to surf! So take a look at the conditions, what are the waves doing? Are they [closing out](#)? Are they sandbusters? If you can't figure it out, look around for a surfer on shore and don't be afraid to ask questions. You'll be surprised what people will share with you if you approach them with the right attitude. Here's a chance for you to learn a few things from a fellow surfer about wave conditions.

Let's assume that you have arrived at the beach and there are lots of people surfing. You should still spend several minutes on shore observing the conditions. You will want to consider where you plan to paddle out to. If you are still riding the whitewater, you will be surfing close to shore, so you're going to need to look for an area where you can safely paddle out to and ride in without worrying about hitting swimmers or other beginner surfers while you learn [how to surf](#).

If you're going to be riding the faces of waves, you will be paddling out to the outside. Watch other surfers for a few minutes. Where are they paddling out? Is there a channel which will make your paddle much easier? Are there big sets coming in that you will want to time your paddle out to avoid getting hammered on the way out? Look for signs of rip currents and use them to your advantage. What? That's right, they can actually make your paddle out easier. Hitch a ride on the outflowing water. This might seem scary at first, but remember you are on a floatation device. A rip current is going to get you to the outside the quickest and the safest. It's safer because the rip channel will have lower breaking waves. If you time your paddle out for after a big wave set has just passed and hit the rip you'll be outside on your surfboard with much less energy expended.

This probably goes without saying, but riding the rip out works great, but it doesn't work the other way around. When you're coming in, rip currents won't help you. For more information on rip currents scroll down a page where there is an illustration on what to do in the event you are caught in a rip current.

Safety Tips

Be a strong swimmer:

You should be able to swim at least half a mile without getting too tired. Do not rely on your surfboard to keep you afloat. Ask yourself if you would be able to swim in on your own if your surfboard leash came off your leg. Too many times I have seen a panicked look on a surfers eyes when their surfboard leash has separated from their leg. If you can't swim well enough to get back into shore on your own without a surfboard then you are crazy to be out there.

Know your limits:

Stay out of big surf if you are not a good swimmer or experienced surfer. Until you can swim well and paddle well stay in smaller surf. DO NOT rely on your surfboard and leash to keep you afloat. They can and often do come undone. You need to know you would be able to swim into shore without your surfboard.

Know the local conditions:

If you are not familiar with the beach, ask the local surfers or lifeguards about any hazards. Many hazards can be spotted from shore, so spend some time to have a look before going out.

Understand the dangers:

Learn about rip currents and how to spot them. Watch for close out waves, be aware of underwater hazards like rocks and reefs.

Recognize danger before it happens:

Plan ahead before paddling out. Look for rips, rocks, floating logs and other hazards.

Observe the Wave Sets:

Take the time before going out to observe the timing of big wave sets so you won't be caught in dangerously big closeout surf.

Be Aware of Changing Conditions:

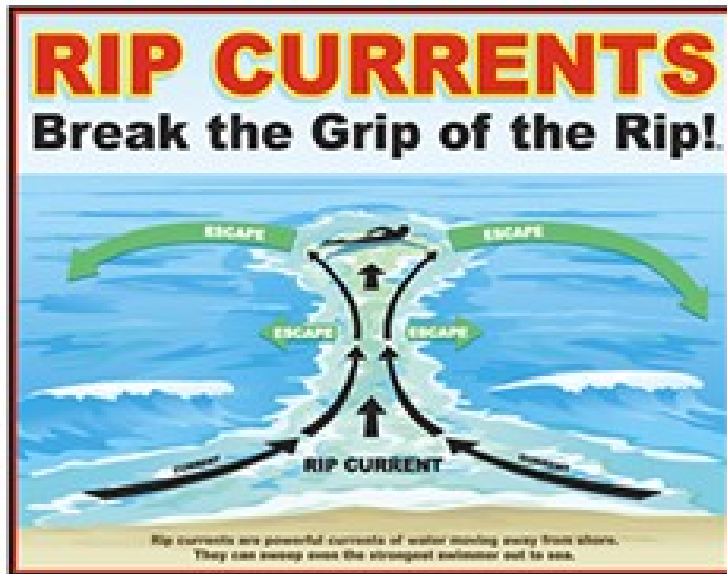
As the tide and weather change the ocean conditions will change. Swell size and direction can change rapidly.

Listen to Your Inner Voice:

If it's telling you to paddle in, paddle in. If you are on shore and it's telling you it's too big, I guarantee you that when you are out in the thick of it, conditions always seem bigger out in the water than they do when you're observing them from the safety of shore.

Information on Rip Currents

Spend a minute studying this image on rip currents if you are not familiar with rip currents, it could save your life.



IF CAUGHT IN A RIP CURRENT

- ◆ Don't fight the current
- ◆ Swim out of the current, then to shore
- ◆ If you can't escape, float or tread water
- ◆ If you need help, call or wave for assistance

SAFETY

- ◆ Know how to swim
- ◆ Never swim alone
- ◆ If in doubt, don't go out

More information about rip currents can be found at the following web sites:

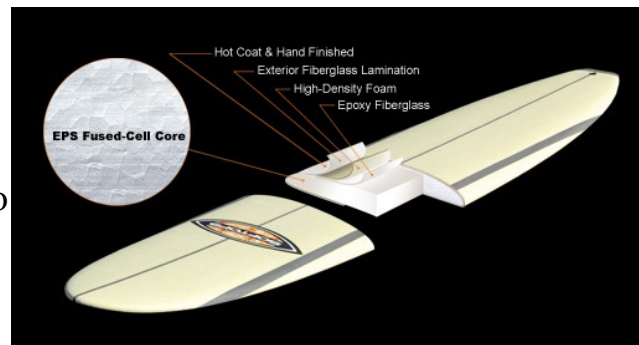
www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov
www.usia.org



Choosing the Best Beginner Surfboard

I know it seems the choice in surfboards is limitless. Here's the good news when you are just beginning. At this point, your choice in surfboards to learn on is easy. You're only concerned with catching a wave and standing up on the surfboard. The best choice for a surfboard as a beginner is a funboard or a longboard. Don't try to learn to surf on a shortboard (they are under 7 feet in length). You may think they're smaller and therefore easier to maneuver but shortboards are difficult for a beginner. They are slower to paddle and are less stable on the waves.

Before we go further, I need to say, for just your very first lesson, the best surfboard to learn how to surf on is a softboard. The use of safe softboards in many surf schools has become standard surfing equipment. Softboard technology has come a long way recently. Softboards consist of a strong, EPS core, that ride much like a traditional surfboard. In the past, softboards flexed and twisted too much to be responsive. The new materials in the modern softboard provide enough overall stiffness to be ridden on the face of a wave. These improved materials and construction give a much better surf feel to the softboard. These boards are safer and the [soft surf fins](#) make an excellent choice for a surfboard for younger children.



For teens or adults I would only recommend a softboard if you do not intend to surf more than a few times a year. If you intend to surf consistently and will be going out surfing at least once a month, I would suggest considering a funboard or a longboard as your first surfboard. You will be happier with the surfboard for a longer period of time.

So other than possibly your first lesson, you're going to learn how to surf on a funboard or a longboard. What is the difference between a longboard and a funboard?

Longboards

Longboards have a rounded nose, wide tail and straight mid-section. In the past, a longboard had only one fin, but now you will also see them with a tri-fin set-up. This allows for better turning and thrust. The size of a longboard primarily is from eight to twelve feet long.

Longboards offer the best performance when it comes to paddling ease and stability. You will catch more waves with a longboard than any other style of

surfboard. Longboards are less maneuverable than funboards.

Funboards

Known as mini mals in some parts of the world, funboards are a hybrid of shortboards and longboards. Their length is from seven to eight feet. They'll have a round nose and the tail is usually round as well. This is why some shapers call their funboards eggs, because they resemble an elongated egg. You will also see funboards with a squash tail design.

Funboards offer a blend of the paddling performance of a longboard and the maneuverability of a shortboard.

Which Surfboard is Best for the Beginning Surfer?

It depends on your situation. Here are points to consider so that you'll make the choice that is right for you.

Longboard - for beginners who want the easiest board to catch waves and to stand up on the surfboard, the longboard is the best choice. Longboards are the easiest boards to paddle and they provide the most stability.

Funboard - if your goal is to maneuver you should choose a funboard. They are almost as easy to paddle as a longboard. You will learn to turn while riding a wave sooner on a funboard than on a longboard. Having less length makes it easier to turn around to get into position to catch a wave.

The frequency you will be surfing is a deciding factor too. If you only have time for one day and won't be surfing again for some time, I would recommend the longboard. If you will be surfing several days close together, a funboard will provide more of a challenge and you will learn to turn sooner.

But I Want to Surf on a Shortboard!

So many new surfers get hung up on the idea of surfing on a shortboard. Perhaps it is that shortboards are easier to duck dive and maneuver. I think the truth of it is that most people want to look like a surfer by walking on the beach with a needle nose shortboard. Until you have mastered popping up and riding breaking waves and making bottom turns and angling across the face of the waves, forget about it. You might look the part on the shore, but you're going to look and feel like a kook when you are out in the water on a board that is too short for you.

Paddling – One of the Keys to Awesome Surfing

Most people starting out don't realize how huge of a roll paddling plays in surfing. Go to a beach where people are getting lessons, odds are you will hear the instructor yelling “Paddle, Paddle, Paddle!”. If you want to catch a wave you have to get your speed up. Don't be timid and just lie on your surfboard expecting the wave to push you along. Paddle to catch the wave as if your life depended on it.

Not only is how well you paddle important in getting you out to the line-up, it is tremendously important in getting you in a position to catch a wave. I guarantee you will catch more waves as you improve your paddling conditioning and paddling style.



Fitness Plays a Huge Role in Paddling

You will catch more waves with good paddling conditioning, and you will be able to stay out longer and have much more fun surfing too. It pains me to see a beginner surfer flopped out on their surfboard because they are not in paddling shape. If you want to learn how to surf, do whatever you can to get your upper body in shape before learning to surf. Exercises to strengthen your shoulders, arms and core should be your focus. Simple exercises like push ups and sit ups will go a long way. Trust me, pay attention to your surf fitness and everything else will be so much easier. The key to good surfing and how much you will enjoy your first few times out in the water will be what kind of paddling shape you are in, before heading out into the surf.

The actual act of paddling sounds pretty simple and it is, you just need to get your position correct on the surfboard and concentrate on your paddling form.

How to Position Yourself on the Surfboard

Your surfboard will probably have a stringer. This is the wooden strip that runs down the center line of the surfboard. Use this to position your body exactly in the center of the board. Next, you will position your body on the surfboard so that when you are paddling in the water, the nose of the surfboard is about one inch above the surface of the water. If it's up more than that, slide up a little on your surfboard. Most beginners tend to be too far back on their surfboards. If the nose

of your surfboard is digging or plowing into the water, slide back a little on your surfboard. You'll find small adjustments are usually all it takes to get the trim of your board just right for paddling.

If you are paddling out through the whitewater and the surfboard slides out from under you and shoots out backwards, this is a sign that you are too far forward, slide back a little more. If the incoming water lifts the nose of your surfboard way up into the air, possibly sending you onto your back with the surfboard on top of you, slide forward more.

How To Paddle:

Here is what you need to focus on when paddling on your surfboard. You want to keep your fingers together and cup your hand. Focus on extending your arm all the way forward towards the nose of your surfboard and keep those fingers together and give a good steady stroke. Dig deep into the water on the stroke. Don't let your arms drift out from the sides of the surfboard.

While this is going on, you need to also focus on your posture. Good paddling posture will be keeping your back arched and your chest up off of the surfboard. Your head will be up and your eyes looking forward. If you are paddling and your chin is on, or very near the surfboard, remind yourself to get that chest up and eyes forward.

Learn to paddle with good form and conditioning and you will catch more waves.



Goofy or Normal?

Determining Your Surf Stance:

You will need to determine which foot is your front foot on the surfboard. This is part of your *surf stance*. There are a couple of things you can experiment with to determine which will be your front foot on your surfboard.

Think about going down a set of stairs, which foot would you put on the first step down. That is the foot you put forward on your surfboard.

Another test you can do is stand with your feet fairly close together and have someone push you (gently now) from behind. The foot that goes forward to stop you from falling would be the foot you put forward on the surfboard.

If it is your left foot that is forward on the board, you have what is referred to as a normal or *regular stance*. If it is your right foot that is forward, this is known as *goofy foot surfing*. It sounds like an insult, it's not, so don't sweat it if you're a goofy foot.

I am a goofy foot surfer. I favor my right side in every sport I do, except for surfing. I live in Costa Rica. There is a great surf break in Pavones that is one of the longest breaking lefts in the world. I love to surf there because I am riding the wave front side, which is easier than backside.

Which Foot to Attach the Leash:

Now that you know which foot you are going to place forward on your surfboard, you will attach the surf leash to your rear foot.

How to Attach the Leash:

When you attach the surf leash, you will want to make sure that the part where the neoprene chord attaches to the velcro is on the outside of your leg. Don't attach it so it is facing inward, it just gets in your way when you try to stand up.



The Pop Up

Now you have made it out to the spot you identified on the shore as your take-off area, you are ready to ride a wave. To do that you will need to paddle into position, paddle hard to get your speed up and pop up when you feel the surfboard start to slide with the wave.

Notice in surfing we don't say “slowly, move yourself from a prone position like an old man, to eventually get to your feet, by maybe putting a knee down first and tentatively pushing the rest of your body up off the board”. We don't even say “now stand up”. It's called a pop up because that is what you've got to do. In some parts of the world they'll say “jump up”. Do the pop up fast and get into your surf stance quickly.

New surfers who are learning are often tentative in the pop up. Sometimes it's because the beginning surfer is worried about [pearling](#). Well, the faster you pop up the less chance you'll have of pearling.

How to do the Pop Up

- As you feel your surfboard begin to accelerate with the wave take two more good hard paddles.
- Put your hands on the rails just below your chest and push your chest up hard arching your back.
- Swing your feet in one motion to a crouched position, with your front foot forward. Keep your body low, you don't want to be standing erect, it's too easy to lose your balance.
- Your chest should be facing forward and your feet at right angles to the centerline (stringer) of the surfboard. You really need to focus on executing the pop up quickly and smoothly.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, you may want to take a look at the video on the pop up page to see the correct way to do a [pop up on a surfboard](#).

The Surf Stance

The goal of the pop up is to get you quickly to your feet on your surfboard. The position you want to be in after executing the pop up maneuver is your surf stance. Ideally, you will be in this position without needing to adjust your feet after performing the pop up.



Your feet should be at least shoulder width apart or even a little wider and at a right angle to the centerline of the surfboard. A wide stance will give you more stability on the surfboard. If you have ever done martial arts, you'll know what I'm talking about here. Your stance gives you strength and stability. Your chest should be facing forward and your arms extended for balance. Keep those knees bent in the crouched position. These things will give you stability on the surfboard.

A correct surf stance is a crucial part of surfing once you get to the point where you are surfing the breaking waves (wave faces). For a more thorough look at the surf stance and some of it's finer points you can check out the [page surf stance](#). It gives advice on improving your balance/stability after popping up and getting into your surf stance.

You're Surfing!

So, your feet are in position, your knees are bent and you are in a crouched power position with your chest facing forward on the surfboard and your arms are extended you're all set. Go for it! You're on your feet and surfing!

Further Resources:

[How To Duck Dive](#)

[Making The First Turn](#)

[Trimming Your Surfboard & How To Carve Waves](#)

[How To Repair Surfboard Dings](#)

[Surfing FAQ's](#)

[Surfing Terms / The Language of Surfing](#)

[Surfing Videos](#)