

# How to Take Care of Your Paddle

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## When to Finish the Surface

When you get cuts and deep scratches in the surface of your paddle take action to prevent cracks and rot by refinishing the surface. You can collect a few minor nicks before taking action, but try not to take longer than a week to seal the wood against water damage.

## Materials

The materials that you need to maintain the luster and finish of your paddle include:

- String
- Polyurethane clear gloss finish (We use Miniwax brand)
- Sandpaper (two grain sizes: 320 and 400, one sheet of each)
- Foam brushes (1 ½ inches wide, about 10 if you are refinishing the entire paddle)
- Water
- Moist cloth or paper towel
- Color electrical tape (optional)

## Instructions

**Sand the surface.** Use 320 sandpaper dipped in water to take out dents and scratches. Then use 400 sandpaper dipped in water to smooth the surface. The lubrication that water provides between the sandpaper and the paddle yields a smoother and more even surface. There is no need to sand down to bare wood unless the damage is deep.

**Clean the surface.** Use a moist towel to remove the sanded residue.

**Suspend the paddle.** Use string to suspend the paddle by the part you will not be refinishing. That means that to work on the shaft and blade you will need to suspend the paddle by its handle. To work on the handle, you will need to suspend the paddle by its blade.

**Coat the surface.** Use a foam brush dipped in polyurethane to lightly coat the surface of the paddle. Use long even strokes, in the direction of the grain. At least once per coating, stroke against the grain to cover missed spots. Finish in the direction of the grain, using light strokes to

prevent runs. Be sure to coat the edges and tips. Let each coat dry for about 10 hours. You can safely apply two coats a day—one in the morning and one at night.

**Sand the surface.** After the polyurethane coating dries, sand lightly with 400 sandpaper dipped in water to remove any rough surfaces, such as bubbles or thick spots.

**Clean the paddle.** Use a damp cotton rag to wipe off the wood dust.

**Coat the surface.** See the next section for tips about finishing the surface.

## Secrets for a Flawless Finish

**Layer the coats.** Repeat the sand, clean, coat process until you have four to six coats on the blade and shaft. When the last coat is dry, suspend the paddle from its blade, and repeat the sand, clean, coat process until you have four layers on the handle.



**Rinse the wipe cloth.** Rinse out the wipe cloth between wipe downs to prevent wood residue from being returned to the paddle surface.

**Cushion the surface.** Protect the surface you have already coated when working on the handle by placing a soft cloth or paper towel between the string and paddle surface. This will prevent indentions on the surface of the dry but not yet cured and hardened polyurethane.

**Finish with a dry brush.** During the finishing strokes of the last application (on both the blade/shaft and the handle), set the brush aside that you used to apply the polyurethane. Use a clean dry brush to finish the last strokes. This will give you a flawless smooth surface.

**Cure the finish.** Let the paddle dry for at least 72 hours after the last coat before using it.

**Tape the edges of the blade.** If you like, you can tape the edges of the blade with colored electrical tape. This serves to prolong the life of the polyurethane coatings. It is easier to replace tape than coat the blade.

**Painting.** If you'd like to have an image painted on the paddle, sand it to or close to the bare wood, finish it with one or two coats, paint on the design, then finish with at least two more coats, preferably more. Your goal is to protect the design during future finishes, but not add weight by applying too many polyurethane coats.