

# Finding feedback on the RIVER<sup>4</sup>

## The Coach

Jamie Greenhalgh & Chris Brain

A paddler can develop faster and more effectively if they can tune in to the feedback they are offered from various sources. Some of this feedback can come from traditional sources such as a professional coach or someone else observing your paddling. However, some of the feedback may be found internally, from the personal reflections we can make about our paddling, allowing us to coach ourselves effectively. Of course, we can also gain feedback from the environment we paddle in and understand how to respond to the messages it gives us frequently during our time on the water.

In our previous chapters, we have looked at using feedback gained from the river, other paddlers, and ourselves to develop our skills (<https://paddlerezine.com/finding-feedback-on-the-river/> and <https://paddlerezine.com/finding-feedback-on-the-river-pt2/> and <https://paddlerezine.com/finding-feedback-on-the-river-3/>). In this final part, we will focus on using the input from a formal coach to aid your paddling progression.



# The Coach

One of the most useful things a professional coach can do is help you with the fundamental skills of finding feedback from the river and finding feedback from your efforts and learning process. Good professional coaching can also help you become a self-reliant paddler and an autonomous learner. For this reason, even if you want a coach to give you all the answers and tell you exactly how and where to take each stroke, sometimes the most helpful thing they can do for you is not to.

## BE SPECIFIC; THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREPARE FOR THE COACHED SESSION

If you are going to engage with a formal coach, you initially need to think about what you can do to get the most from the session(s). There are plenty of things that you can think about which will help you maximise your time on the water and to get the most value from your time. You may well be approaching this session with information gained from the previously discussed areas such as peers, the river and your observations. Coming to this coaching session with knowledge that you have already gained during your paddling and sharing this with your coach, will help get straight into it rather than start from scratch.

It is crucial to be specific with your aims and reasons for engaging with a coach. Often paddlers can approach a coach for help, saying, "I want to get better" or "I want to feel more confident." Whilst these are legitimate motivations for a coaching session, they are very subjective. It can be very hard to know if you are effectively making progress with them during or after the coaching session. Consider if you have a more specific target for the session, eg. "I would like to be more effective at breaking in and out on faster flows, as I often spin out on the eddyline – I think this will help with my confidence."

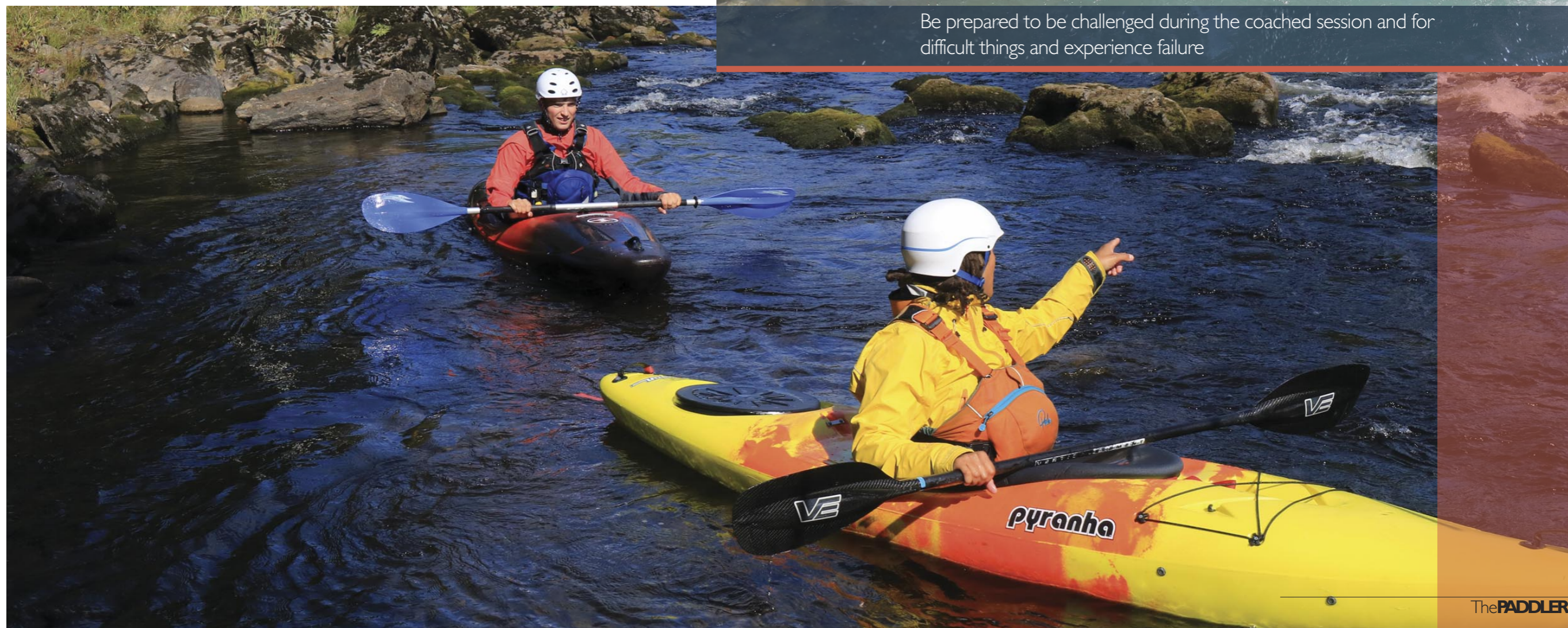
Whilst this may feel like a big jump from simply 'getting better' it helps the session become much more focused, and it will be much more tangible when you start to make progress with your goal.

It is worth considering what your expectations are for the results from your coached session. Whilst there may well be progress made during a coached session, typically, the most progress is made afterwards when you can practice what you have identified in this session. Be prepared to be challenged during the coached session and for difficult things and experience failure. You may leave physically but mentally exhausted, as your coach will be keen to push your understanding of the concepts by helping you solve problems with questions and experimentation.

If you only want to experience success throughout a coaching session and be given specific challenges, consider the value of this and the limited impact on your development.



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Chris would like to thank Pyranha kayaks, Palm Equipment, Red Paddle Co and Go Kayaking Northwest for making fantastic kit and their continued support. [www.chrisbraincoaching.com](http://www.chrisbraincoaching.com)



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Jamie is lucky enough to be supported by Pyranha Kayaks and NRS Equipment, both of whom make brilliant gear to keep him and his customers looking and feeling cool. [www.paddle365.co.uk](http://www.paddle365.co.uk) [www.deeriverkayaking.com](http://www.deeriverkayaking.com)

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**CONSIDER WHAT YOU CAN DO DURING THE COACHING SESSION TO GET THE MOST OUT OF IT**

To get the most out of a coaching session, you need to take responsibility for your learning! Information, questions and challenges should flow both ways between the student and the coach during a session; it will not be helpful to say, "Yes coach" throughout the session!

Ensure you ask questions and clarify your understanding of what is going on and the point of the tasks. Doing this helps to deepen the learning and make the skills more transferable to other locations you may practice after the session. While a coach may deliberately give you small chunks of information, so they don't overload you, it is essential to understand what is happening. You should know what direction the session is heading in at all times.

Do be prepared to think for yourself and not to follow the advice of the coach blindly. You may well be asked questions about how you think something should be done or the ways that a task may be completed. Whilst it might seem counterintuitive at first that the coach would ask you what you think the answer might be rather than telling you, this approach helps paddlers much more in the long run.

**THINK LONG TERM – GENERATE A PLAN**

You can use the feedback given during a formal coaching session to help you plan your development for the long term. Everyone will approach their long term development differently on the water; but if you have engaged with a formal coach, we will assume that you are open to a more structured approach to your action plan. Whilst your long term plan doesn't necessarily need to be formalised on paper or said out loud, it can be beneficial to identify specific benchmarks that you want to aim for on your way to your long term goal. These benchmarks could be

- Paddling in a specific area/country.
- Paddling a specific river.
- Paddling a certain number of rapids at a specific grade.
- Catching a certain eddy.
- Rolling on both sides.
- Paddling your first waterfall.

It would help if you had some feedback from your engagement with a coach, which will help you structure this plan. You should use this information to create a clear progression that you can use to move forwards with your paddling skills. By being focused on this plan and having tangible milestones, it will make tracking your progression much more manageable, and you will easily be able to see how far you have come.

Whilst it can be advantageous to regularly work with a coach, be cautious of starting to use them as a crutch where you only paddle at your best or challenge yourself fully whilst you are there. The best long term goal will always include a vital element of independence so that you are not entirely reliant on your coach and ensure you can continue to make progress when they are not there. Remember gaining help from an expert is useful, but ultimately, you have to do the hard work!

**From all of us here at the Paddler magazine, thank you Chris and Jamie for such a great resource for paddlers and all the best for 2021.**

