

BODYBOARD HOLIDAYS INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDE



BY ROB BARBER

SHOT ON LOCATION IN COSTA RICA
AND EL SALVADOR

VOLUME #1



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THE BODYBOARDING STARTER GUIDE (FROM SOMEONE WHO NEVER STOPPED)



If you'd told me 40 years ago that a simple piece of foam would end up shaping my entire life, I'm not sure I'd have believed you. But that's bodyboarding. It has a habit of getting under your skin quickly, and it tends to stay there. It's taken me all over the world, introduced me to waves and people I never would have found otherwise, and given me a lifetime of stories along the way. I've worked as a bodyboarding journalist, run a bodyboard school, an online bodyboard shop, and of course Bodyboard Holidays. And for the past 25 years I've been fortunate enough to spend my life coaching and sharing this sport. I've probably bored more people than I should admit talking about it, but that probably says everything about how much it means to me.

Bodyboarding, at its heart, is simple. It's catching a broken wave and riding it to the beach in its purest form. It's also one of those rare

sports where, within your very first session, you're almost guaranteed to experience it properly. Catch a wave, feel the speed, and you'll usually come back to the beach with an ear-to-ear grin. From there, it can stay simple, or it can open up into something far more technical, from clean bottom turns to progressive aerial manoeuvres, spins, and everything in between. There's always another level to explore.

What I've noticed over decades in the water and on the beach is just how accessible bodyboarding is. You don't need much to get started, and compared to many other watersports, the entry cost and barrier to learning are low. It's also far easier on the body than a lot of impact sports, while still giving you a full workout. You'll build cardio fitness and develop strength throughout your body from head to toe, without the heavy strain and impact that comes with many other activities.

But the real pull goes beyond that. There's something about being in the ocean that resets everything. When you're riding, you become so focused that everything else drops away. The noise of everyday life disappears, and in many ways it takes you back to something more instinctive, like being a child again, fully present and absorbed in the moment. It's hard to explain properly until you've felt it, but for many of us it becomes a kind of reset button for the mind.

Then there's the people. Bodyboarders don't really carry attitude or ego in the water. There's no real clique to it. In all my years travelling and surfing around the world, I've consistently found bodyboarders to be welcoming and willing to look out for each other. It's a close-knit community built around a simple shared goal: good waves and good times.

And of course, it's addictive. Once it gets hold of you, you start checking forecasts, watching wind charts, and planning your life around the next swell. You're always thinking about the last wave and how to improve it, or the next one you hope will be even better.

For me, that's the essence of bodyboarding. It can be simple fun on a small day, or something far more progressive and technical at the highest level. But ultimately, the best bodyboarder in the water is still the one having the most fun.

In this first Bodyboard Holidays' ebook, we're going to walk you through nine fundamental techniques to help you get started, build confidence, and get the most out of your time in the water from day one. ●

Director, Bodyboard Holidays



▲ Slide your foot in to your fin while it is flat on the floor.



▲ Pull the ankle strap up on to your heel in order to secure the fins fit.



▲ Attach your fin string or tether above your ankle.



▲ Repeat process with your other foot.

PUTTING YOUR FINS ON

Putting your fins on correctly is a simple part of bodyboarding, but it's an important one to get right before you head into the water.

Make sure the fins are the correct way up (drainage holes on the underside) and that you have the right and left feet correct, most fins have small markings to show this. Standing in front of your fins, slide one foot in all the way until it feels secure. While standing on that foot, pull the heel strap around the back of your ankle

and settle it into place. Repeat the same process with your second fin.

Once both fins are on, secure your fin savers or strings just above your ankle. A useful tip is to roll up your wetsuit leg first, fit the saver or tied string underneath, then roll your wetsuit back down over the top. This helps keep everything in place and also reduces drag in the water.

It only takes a moment to set everything up properly, but it can save you from losing a fin in the surf and cutting your session short. ●

To see this in action, check out our video:
[HOW DO I USE SWIM FINS?](#)



Fins come in different styles and designs. Try as many as you can to find the best fit for you.

If you're unsure about fit or how different setups work in practice, this video is a useful reference:
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BODYBOARD SWIMFINS



TRYING DIFFERENT FINS

In the summer it's always nice to shed as much neoprene as possible, so ideally you'll want a pair of fins that fit comfortably without socks. Most bodyboarders end up with two setups: a slightly bigger pair for winter that works with socks, and a smaller, snugger pair for summer when you're barefoot.

It's worth trying a few different brands and styles to see what

feels best. Fit is personal, and what works perfectly for one person might not suit another. Finding the right pair is a bit like the Cinderella story, most people discover that only one or two brands really suit their feet properly. For that reason, it's well worth testing different fins and even trying friends' pairs before buying your own.

The key is comfort. Your fins should feel secure without being painfully tight, as you'll be wearing them for long periods in the water. ●





▲ Ensure that there is no sand in the Velcro of your leash before putting it on.



▲ Feed the Velcro through the loop and attach around your arm.



▲ Most riders prefer the cuff to be attached above their bicep or just below it.



▲ The cord of the leash should be coming away from your arm on the inside, this will ensure that it stays out of the way when you are paddling

STRAPPING ON YOUR LEASH

Putting your leash on correctly is something that often gets overlooked, but it makes a big difference to comfort and performance in the water. The key detail is the orientation. The cord should always come away from the inside of your arm, the thumb side. This allows the leash to sit naturally along the deck of the board rather than hanging off the side and dragging in the water.

Whenever possible, use a coiled leash. They stay out of the way far more effectively and reduce drag while paddling and riding. Fit the

leash over the top of your wetsuit rather than underneath it, don't roll your sleeve up and tuck it inside.

If you're using a bicep leash, position it just above your elbow or around the lower part of your bicep muscle, again ensuring the cord runs from the inside of your arm. If it's a wrist leash, place it just past your wrist joint and make sure to remove any watch from that arm to avoid discomfort.

Getting this set up properly before you enter the water keeps everything secure, streamlined, and out of the way so you can focus on your session. ●

For more top tips on leashes, strap in to our video: **EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BODYBOARD LEASHES**





▲ Take big steps so that the fins don't get caught under your feet when you're walking.



▲ Keep your toes pointed up in the air and this will help to avoid the fins getting caught underneath you when you walk.



▲ When you enter the ocean, walk backwards and slide your feet across the sand. Remember to look where you are going.



▲ Hold the nose of your board against your stomach, this helps to stop the board creating resistance to oncoming waves which could knock you over.

WALKING IN SWIM FINS

Walking in swim fins when you're not used to them can feel quite awkward at first. The trick is to take exaggerated steps, lifting your knees higher than you normally would, almost like a skipping action so the fins don't catch as your feet come through. After a while it becomes second nature, but until then you need to concentrate, otherwise you'll end up face first in the sand, which is never a good look.

Once you reach ankle depth, turn around and start walking

backwards out through the whitewater. Don't lift your feet off the seabed, just slide them along in a slow, controlled "moonwalk" style movement. Keep looking over your shoulder in the direction you're heading and try to time your steps as waves come through.

Hold your bodyboard with both hands on the front corners, keeping the tail resting lightly in the water. This reduces resistance and helps the wave pass through you with less chance of being knocked off balance. As soon as you reach waist deep water, you can turn around and start paddling out back. ●

One of the most common conversations we have with our guests is fin design and shape.
WE DISCUSS THE DIFFERENT FIN TYPES



CATCHING WHITEWATER FROM STANDING

Holding your left hand on the front corner and your right hand mid-way down the opposite rail, prepare to jump-launch into the wave. ►

For a visual reference, take a few minutes to watch our video:
HOW TO CATCH YOUR FIRST WAVE ON A BODYBOARD COACHING



Remember to glide on to the board rather than landing heavily, as this can cause you to miss the wave. ►

STEP 1 Spot the whitewater early so you've got plenty of time to set yourself and prepare for the take-off.

STEP 2 Place one hand on the front corner of the nose and your other hand halfway down the rail on the opposite side of the board. This gives you control and stability as the wave arrives.

STEP 3 As the whitewater reaches the back of your board, smoothly jump forward onto it in a skimming motion. Aim to land with your hips towards the back of the board to avoid nose-diving.

STEP 4 Make sure the nose of the board is pointing straight at the beach. If it's angled across the wave, it will be much harder to catch and stay with the whitewater.

STEP 5 Hold on firmly and kick your legs to help generate momentum as the wave pushes you forward.

STEP 6 Once you're up and riding, bring both hands onto the nose of the board. To pick up speed, shift your weight slightly forward while keeping a gentle arch in your back so you don't overload the nose and dive. ●

As you feel the momentum of the wave taking you, arch your back, look up and place your left arm in a right-angle position, letting your weight rest through your shoulder in to your elbow. ►





▲ When paddling for a wave, lock your elbows, apply pressure with the heel of your hand and kick as hard as you can as the wave approaches you.



▲ When paddling around the line up, have your weight off the back of the board to maximise the propulsion from your legs and fins.



▲ Take a firm grip of your board before attempting to brake.



▲ Pull up the nose of your board and plant your legs in the water to anchor you. This will allow the wave to pass over you.

HOW TO BRAKE

Braking is an essential beginner bodyboarding skill used to slow down or get off a wave and out of the whitewater.

STEP 1 Push your weight towards the back of the board by extending your arms forward.

STEP 2 Hinge at the hips and push your legs down into the water. Opening your legs wide at this stage helps to anchor you and increase resistance.

STEP 3 Pull the nose of the board up so the deck is facing towards the beach. This creates maximum drag and slows you down quickly.

STEP 4 Wait for the wave to pass, then turn around and either walk or paddle back out, depending on the depth of the water. ●

To see this in action, take a look at our training video:
HOW TO PULL OUT OF A WAVE?





▲ Step 1 involves sliding your hands down the rail of the board and sliding your weight forward.



▲ Step 2 involves sliding your weight forward, pushing your knee against the tail of the board and pushing your board under the water, using your arms like pistons.



▲ Step 3 will see the board sink, it's time to gain as much depth as possible and to guide the tail of the board under the water using your knee.



▲ When you are under the water, you should push your board out in front of you and paddle as hard as you can. You are aiming to resurface after the wave has passed over you.

GETTING THROUGH WAVES AND DUCKDIVING

To get out the back, you'll constantly be making a decision: go over the wave or go under it. For smaller broken waves (whitewater), going over the top is usually the easiest option. Paddle towards the wave with some speed and, as it reaches

you, lift the nose of your board slightly, about 20cm is enough (a bit more for bigger broken waves). Then keep paddling and let the wave pass underneath you. A common mistake is lifting the nose too high, which creates resistance and can push you backwards or knock you off balance. Stay low, keep moving forward, and let the board slice over the whitewater.

When the wave is bigger or about to break directly on top of you, you'll need to duckdive. Paddle towards the wave with purpose. Around two metres out, slide your hands down the rails about 30cm from the nose and grip firmly. Push your upper body down into a press-up position so your head is over the nose of the board. As the board starts to sink, use one knee to push the tail down while extending your other leg behind you to help drive the board under the wave.

If your timing is right, the wave will pass overhead while you stay tucked beneath it. Once it has gone through, release the pressure, bring your body back onto the board, and angle slightly upwards to resurface. Keep kicking with your fins throughout to avoid getting pulled backwards underwater.

The key is timing and reading the sets. If you can, avoid the biggest waves by watching the pattern and using channels or rips to make your paddle-out easier. On shallow reef breaks, be especially careful not to dive too deep, keep control of your board by holding the rails or keeping your hands on the deck rather than underneath it. ●

It takes practice, but once you get the timing right, duckdiving becomes one of the most efficient ways to get out the back. And of course for further insights, watch our video:

HOW TO DUCK DIVE A BODYBOARD?





▲ Paddle with both legs, concentrating on keeping your left elbow locked. Paddle with your right arm.



▲ Use long, deep strokes to maximise your paddling speed.



▲ Lock your arms to press the board flat against the water and paddle hard with your feet and legs.



▲ Move your weight further up your board so that you can sink it a little, then use both arms to paddle.

PADDLING

The secret to easy paddling is finding a rhythm. There isn't just one way to do it. Good paddling is about switching between techniques depending on the conditions and how quickly you need to move.

When you're paddling across flat, calm water, arm paddling is usually the most efficient. In choppy or turbulent water, leg paddling becomes more useful. And when you need to get somewhere quickly, like racing to the peak of a wave, you combine both.

LEG PADDLING

For leg paddling, your hips should be slightly raised at the back of the board, with your legs fully submerged. Your hands hold the front corners of the board to keep it stable, and the board should sit flat on the water so you glide rather than push through it. You may need to apply a little pressure through your hands to keep the nose down.

Keep your back arched and your chest lifted, and kick using the full length of your legs. The power comes from the downward part of the kick, so focus on long, controlled strokes rather than fast, shallow kicks. Smooth, steady rhythm works far better than frantic movement.

ARM PADDLING

For arm paddling, shift your body slightly forward on the board so your chest is closer to the centre and your legs are stretched straight behind you. Your head should be up, looking forward in the direction you're travelling. Use a front crawl-style stroke, alternating arms and reaching as far forward as possible before pulling deep through the water.

Try to keep your fingers slightly spread to increase surface area and catch more water. The strongest part of each stroke is the second half, so focus on really driving the pull through to the end of the movement. Keep your body as still as possible and let your arms do the work.

COMBINED ARM AND LEG PADDLING

For maximum speed and power, you combine both arm and leg paddling. This is usually used when trying to catch waves or get through a tricky section of water. You'll need to position yourself slightly further back on the board, drop your chest to keep the nose flat, and coordinate arm strokes with strong, steady kicks.

It can feel unbalanced at first, but it quickly becomes more natural with practice. Many experienced riders, and professionals, use this combined technique when they need maximum drive to catch waves. ●

A useful visual reference for these paddling techniques can be seen here in our video:

CATCH MORE WAVES BODYBOARDING: PRO TIPS FOR INCREASED WAVE COUNT!



Look, lean and lunge to maximise ►
down the line trim speed.

For a visual reference, this short clip demonstrates
the trimming position in action:

HOW TO TRIM ON A BODYBOARD



STEP 1 Choose the direction you want to travel as early as possible. Look down the line of the wave and commit your focus in that direction. This early decision helps set your positioning on the wave face.

STEP 2 Your leading hand should grip the front inside corner of the board (the side closest to the wave face). Slide your body weight forward and place your other hand midway down the outside rail for balance. Your leading forearm should rest flat along the deck, with your wrist slightly twisted so your fingers can pull on the nose (what we term the claw grip - learn more here). This allows you to apply pressure and control more effectively, while your elbow helps create projection off the board. Your weight should be channelled through your shoulder and into your elbow, engaging the rail into the wave face and creating an “edge” for speed.

STEP 3 Your outside arm does not need to actively pull on the rail unless you are initiating a bottom turn. Instead, keep it relaxed, with the elbow angled outward for stability. Shift your body far enough forward so your hips are positioned just up from the tail of the board. Your legs should remain straight behind you. Letting them drag slightly can help with control or slow you down if the wave becomes steeper or more powerful.

STEP 4 Keep your back arched, head up, and shoulders square, with your inside shoulder slightly leading. This forward drive, often referred to as the “chicken head” position helps generate speed and keeps you engaged in the wave’s energy. Small adjustments in body position make a big difference to how fast and efficiently you trim along the face. ●

TRIMMING

Trimming is where bodyboarding really starts to come alive, the point where you’re no longer just riding the wave, but actively controlling your speed and line. The most exhilarating part of bodyboarding is gaining speed, and a good trim position is what allows you to do that.





Hopefully this ebook gives you a solid foundation to get started and feel more confident in the water. Bodyboarding is simple at its core, but there's always more to learn the more time you spend in the ocean.

If you want to keep building on these basics, check out the [Bodyboard Holidays YouTube channel](#) for more tips, techniques, and real-world coaching in action. You can also find out about our UK weekends and international coaching holidays at [bodyboardholidays.com](#) if you'd like hands-on guidance in the water.

And if you've got any technical questions along the way, feel free to reach out, we're always happy to help. ●

▲ Bodyboard-Holidays Trip Leader Damian Prisk enjoys a perfect Costa Rican barrel.

Check out our trip locations
[BODYBOARDHOLIDAYS.COM](#)





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