



Your Grief River® Guide to:

# The International Scale of River Difficulty (ISRD)



Know your limits!

A set of guidelines was created to describe how difficult it will be for people to canoe, raft, or kayak down any river. Six levels of difficulty were created; one is the easiest, and six is the most difficult or dangerous.

If you are traveling down the Grief River, it will be important for you to know when you or other people you care about are in over your head and what you will need to do in order to navigate your way through the rough spots.

## Level 1 Easy

A level one river has fast moving water but only small waves. There will be only a few rock, boulders, or fallen trees that are easy to see, and with a bit of practice, can be avoided with little effort. If you fall out of the boat you can swim to safety.

## Level 2 Novice

The next level is pretty straightforward; there are some rapids with wide, clear channels. Occasionally you will have to maneuver around rocks and medium sized waves, but with a little training you will be ok. Swimmers usually are fine and although some help from paddle partners is good, you typically don't need much assistance.

## Level 3 Intermediate



The next level of river difficulty can swamp an open canoe so it is best that canoe paddlers don't attempt to go down a level three river. The current is faster and bigger waves are present but with some practice you can still avoid them. You will encounter

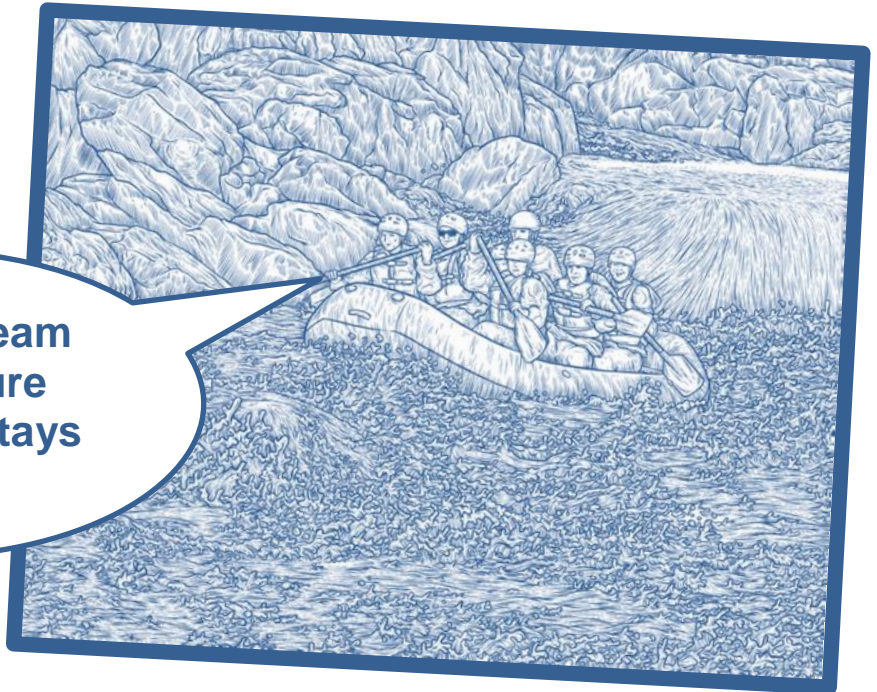
strong eddies and a powerful current so scouting out what is up ahead is advisable for inexperienced kayakers and rafting groups. Injuries to swimmers is typically rare; self-rescue should be easy but group assistance may be required to avoid long swims.

## Level 4 Advanced

On a level four river you will encounter intense, powerful but predictable rapids and waves that require experience to handle the turbulent waters. Scouting is

necessary the first time down. The river will have some big unavoidable waves and constricted passages that demand fast maneuvers and the ability to stay calm. You can stop behind an eddy in order to rest and scout out the next section of the river. Don't overestimate the skill level that is required to negotiate dangerous hazards. Risk of injury to swimmers is moderate to high, and water conditions make self-rescue more difficult. Group assistance for rescue is essential and requires practice. The ability to perform a strong Eskimo Roll is highly recommended.

**Work as a team  
to make sure  
everybody stays  
safe.**



## **Level 5: Expert**

On a level five river you will encounter extremely long, obstructed, or very violent rapids. The danger level is high. Drops or a series of waterfalls may have large, unavoidable waves, holes, and steep chutes. You need lots of experience to think your way through complex and demanding routes. Rapids may continue for long distances between calmer pools, You need a high level of fitness to navigate this level of rapids. The eddies that exist may be small, turbulent, or hard to reach. Scouting up ahead is mandatory and usually difficult. When you get knocked out of your boat, swimming will be dangerous, and rescue is difficult, even for experts. You have to be very good at performing an Eskimo Roll, proper equipment, including a helmet, as well as extensive experience and practiced rescue skills, are essential for survival.

## **Level 6: Extreme**

The top level of river difficulty is extremely dangerous, even for experts! The consequences for those who over-estimate their skill level is very severe and you must understand that rescue may be impossible. It is recommended that

only teams of experts attempt navigating down this level of river, only when water levels are lower. Scouting is a must. Take all precautions. This level does not have falls that are thought to be un-runnable, but certainly includes sets of rapids that are only occasionally run.

## Navigating the Grief River

We can use the ISRD as a kind of private code to let our paddle partners and other important people in our lives know the intensity of this phase of the Greif River.

When someone asks, "How ya doin'?" instead of responding, "Okay," now you can say, "Oh, today is about a 3." Or "It's been an overwhelming week, somewhere around a 5 1/2 or 6!"

In a support group you can be sure that another person's "5" will be different from your "5," but you will get a pretty good idea of how they are managing the "waves" of grief at that particular moment in time.

With practice and support, you are going to get through the rough spots and learn how to navigate your way through the waves of grief with the skill and agility of an expert kayaker!

**We got this!**



Learn more about *The International Scale of River Difficulty* by visiting:  
<https://www.americanwhitewater.org>

