

The Ideals of Packing a Backpack

There is no one way to pack a backpack, but there are some ideal conditions for your backpack that you'll want to keep in mind while you practice packing and unpacking your bag.

1. Your backpack should never weigh more than 45 pounds. If you pack everything on this list you'll probably be somewhere between 20-25 pounds, 30 with full water bottles. You are missing an essential item: food. We distribute roughly 1lbs of food/person/day, or about 8lbs of food per person. Food and cookware will be distributed upon or shortly after your arrival, so when practicing keep this weight and space in mind. The same goes for if you are borrowing gear.
2. A well-packed backpack is rigid, well-balanced, and smooth. This means that things are packed tightly inside (this minimizes shifting weight), the heaviest part of the bag is placed as close to the center of the back as possible (slightly below the spot between your shoulder blades and just above your hips are where the bag shifts the least while moving, throwing around weight on your back puts you off balance and tires you quickly) and the bag should be able to sit up on its own (this shows the weight is centered in the bag, if you can't achieve this make sure it at least falls towards the straps and move the heavier things further down), and finally make sure there are no lumps or uneven pressure on your back, this will quickly cause you pain.
3. When packing your bag, keep accessibility in mind. If it starts raining or snowing, you'll want to be able to reach your rain jacket quickly.
4. On keeping things dry: anything that can absorb water, thus becoming heavier, should be placed inside a dry bag or liner. You do not need to go buy a bunch of dry bags. The easiest way to do this is to put a trash bag, one of the big black ones, inside your bag before you start packing. I have been caught in a flash flood before and had to wade through knee-deep water to retrieve my bag, which was floating away; when I opened it, its contents were completely dry inside the trash bag.
5. On making a bag rigid: This might not seem too important, but it's one of the best ways to keep your bag from tiring you out. If things in your bag can shift around, they are going to apply forces to you that are counter to your own movements; it tires you out

more quickly. The best way to make a bag rigid is to think of it as one big compression cube. In your bag, there will be a mixture of solid and “fluid” (compressible and fabric) items. You can put these fluid items in compression cubes, but then your bag will be filled with only solid items, and you’ll likely end up with a lumpy or shifting bag. Instead, you can fill in the space between the solid items with these compressible ones, so the entire bag becomes one solid. If space becomes too much of an issue with this technique, a compression cube for your sleeping bag will likely solve the problem.

6. Practice is important. Packing a bag is a skill, one I don’t expect everyone to be great at. If you are struggling, practice and experiment with different ways of doing things. If you are part of a troop, ask for help from the people who are struggling less, and help those who are struggling more. Backpacking is a group excursion, if any one member struggles, everyone struggles; besides this, you are scouts, help each other out.