



Flatwater Canoeing Safety & Rescue Skills Course

Skills Course Overview

This course is designed as a short program emphasizing safety, enjoyment, and skill development. The skills and knowledge gained through this course can set the stage for a lifetime of exploration, adventures, a healthy lifestyle, appreciation of water and the natural world, lasting memories with family and friends, and a rewarding experience for all - we paddle because it is fun.

If you're a student who would like a resource to prepare for this course, ACA is pleased to provide a free online paddling safety course, [here](#). A certificate of completion is included!

Course Objectives

- Understand that prevention is the key to a safe trip
- Understand how to avoid potential dangers
- Develop and practice key self-rescue skills
- Learn to focus on fast, simple, low-risk rescue techniques
- Develop the skills to manage minor in-water incidents

Minimum Personal Equipment for the Course

Appropriately fitted life jacket designed for paddling, protective clothing suitable for extended time in the water, appropriate footwear, boat, paddle, and whistle.

Skills Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC).
- No prior paddling experience or training is required to participate in this course

Course Duration

The course duration should be adjusted to best fit the needs and goals of the participants. Up to 1 day (8 hours).

Course Location / Accessible Venues

Flat water, protected from wind, waves, and outside boat traffic, with current less than 0.5 knots, and within swimming distance of shore.

Course Size

Tandem: 6 participants : 1 Instructor; with an additional instructor, the ratio can be 12 : 2. The maximum number of participants permitted is 12.

Solo: 5 participants : 1 Instructor; with an additional instructor, the ratio can be 10 : 2. The maximum number of participants permitted is 10.

Instructor

This course may be offered by Level 2: Essentials of River Canoeing or Level 2: Essentials of Canoe Touring (or higher) ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

Succeeding Courses

Level 1: Introduction to Canoeing Skills, Assessment, or Certification Course

Level 2: Essentials of River Safety & Rescue Skills, Assessment, or Certification Course

Course Outline

The sequence of this course should be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location, time allowance, and craft being used.

Introduction, Logistics, and Expectations

- Welcome! We're so glad that you've chosen to further your paddling experience and education by attending this course! Let's review a few highlights about the ACA
- Let's talk about the course itinerary, expectations, and limitations
- Lay of the land (and water): the logistics of this venue
- Review liability waiver, assumption of risk, challenge by choice, and medical disclosure
- Life jacket policy: always wear while on the water

Let's Talk About: The Paddling Environment

- Wind
- Waves
- Weather
- Water
 - Water confidence and comfort
 - Swimming ability

Let's Review: Communications and Signaling

- Hand, paddle, and whistle signals
- Cell phone and radios when appropriate

All About: Equipment

- Enables your paddling trip and significantly contributes to comfort and safety
- Safe paddle and boat handling practices
- Boats with flotation or bulkheads
- Paddle floats, pumps, and slings
- Life jackets
- Clothing
- Other personal paddling equipment reviewed by the Instructor

Principles of Safety & Rescue

- Avoiding trouble and hazards
- Being a competent leader, through trip planning considerations
- Use of safe rescue strategies such as:
 - T-RETHROG (Talk, Reach, Throw, Row, Go) including throwable floating aid or throw bag use
 - Rescue priorities: people, boat, paddle, gear
 - Responsibilities of: rescuer, group, swimmers
 - K.I.S.S.
 - Rescue organization
 - Realities of injuries
- Safety and rescue equipment:
 - Whistle, knife
 - First aid kit
 - Cell phone and radios when appropriate
- Swimming skills are the basis for self-rescue; a fundamental personal safety skill
 - Defensive swimming
 - Aggressive swimming

Boat Based Rescues

- Practice: calmly exit the boat after capsize, using proper body position and contact with the boat and paddle
- Demonstrate paddle recovery options
- Discuss and model strategies for boat recovery
- Self-rescue: swimming with equipment
- Canoe bumping/bulldozing
- Canoe towing options

- Swimmer towing options
 - Rope handling skills to include, selecting a tow line, handling tows in wind or current, throw rope use
- Swimmer re-entry/re-mount techniques (e.g., stern entry, heel hook, rescue sling, etc.)
- Canoe specific rescues (e.g., boat over boat, boat to boat, scoop)
- Unresponsive paddler rescue
- Emptying water from canoe on shore (e.g., on-shore, bailers, pumps)

Conclusion and Wrap Up

- This has been a great class! Let's talk through what we've learned with a group debrief and/or Individual feedback
- Course limitations: there is always more to learn, and the skills and concepts we discussed require more practice and experience
- First aid and CPR training is a very valuable tool and could make the difference between a "near miss" and an emergency requiring outside rescue / first responders
- Paddling is a lifetime sport - there are local organizations, clubs, events, competitions, and classes through which you can continue your learning and build community. Get connected!
- Handouts and reference materials (if applicable)

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This curriculum is managed by the ACA Introduction to Paddling (IPC) Committee. To connect with the leadership of this committee, please view the SEIC Committee rosters on [the ACA website](#).