



Level 1: Introduction to Kayaking 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!

Note: The use of spray skirts is not appropriate for Level 1: Introduction to Kayaking courses.

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

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

Instructor

This course may be offered by Level 1: Introduction to Kayaking (or higher) ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

Succeeding Courses

Level 1: Introduction to Kayaking Certification Course

Level 2: Essentials of Kayak Touring Skills, Assessment, Trip Leader, or Certification Course

Level 2: Essentials of River Kayaking Skills, Assessment, Trip Leader, or Certification Course

Level 2: Sit-On-Top Surf Kayaking Skills 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

Preparing to Depart

- Describe and follow safe boating practices (behavior, substance abuse, on water and land etiquette, Leave No Trace ethics)
- Review elements of a float plan (who, what, when, where, filing practices)
- Discuss current weather conditions, forecasts, and other environmental hazards (wind, water, weather, waves)
- Discuss and evaluate hazards to navigation
- Discuss importance of developing good judgment, group responsibility, and management
- Evaluate individual's ability, water comfort, and confidence prior to beginning the trip
- Warm up to reduce injury
- Review life jackets appropriate for the paddler's size, boat, and activity, assuring all others in the group are properly wearing their life jacket
- Review personal equipment needed for the boat, specific trip/activity, and environment
- Review paddling terminology (boat and paddle) and care of gear
- Review of additional personal and group gear, including, but not limited to:
 - Environmental supplies (food, water, appropriate clothing, sunscreen, etc.)
 - Navigational and signaling tools (maps, charts, whistle, etc.)
 - Safety and rescue tools
 - Repair kit
 - First aid kit (appropriate to training)
- Review proper techniques to safely lift and carry the boat on shore
- Inspect the boat and all safety equipment to meet state, federal, and local requirements for the vessel and activity
- Prepare boat for departure: stowing gear securely and ensuring it is balanced
- How to hold the paddle in correct orientation and grip for effective paddling

- Appropriately use communication (paddle, hand, and whistle) signals

Maneuvers to be performed while maintaining trim and balance of the boat

- Enter and launch the boat from shore in a controlled manner, checking for clear departure
- Propel the boat forward in a straight line 15-20 boat lengths
- Stop the boat within two boat lengths
- Move the boat backwards 3-4 boat lengths
- Move the boat sideways 10 feet (3 meters) to each side
- Turn the boat from a stationary position 180° to the right and left
- Turn the boat while maintaining forward motion 90° to the right and left
- Propel the boat in a figure of 8 course around markers 3-4 boat lengths apart
- Arrive at destination point, checking for clear approach, and exit the boat in a controlled and safe manner

Safety & Rescue

Discuss and demonstrate and describe the principles of rescue:

- Use of safe rescue strategies such as T-RETHROG (Talk, Reach, Throw, Row, Go) including throwable buoyancy aids and throw bag use
- Rescue Priorities: People, craft, paddle, gear
- Responsibilities of the group, rescuer, swimmers
- Identify and demonstrate the use of appropriate rescue and safety gear for the craft and planned activity

Boat Based Rescues

- Calmly exit the boat after a capsize, using proper body position and contact with the craft and paddle
- Describe and demonstrate paddle recovery options

- Describe and demonstrate strategies for boat recovery
- Demonstrate a successful self-rescue: swimming with equipment
- Describe and demonstrate swimmer tow options
- Demonstrate successful swimmer re-entry/re-mount techniques (i.e., heel hook, rescue sling, paddle float)
- Describe and demonstrate techniques for bumping, bulldozing, or towing a boat or swimmer to shore
- Perform successful assisted rescues: boat over boat or side by side or others appropriate to conditions
- Perform a successful unresponsive paddler rescue
- Successfully empty water from the boat (on shore, bailers, pumps, etc.)

Technical Knowledge

- Review the dangers of paddlesports and how to plan an appropriate course to avoid potential hazardous situations
- Discuss how to avoid and prevent cold water shock, hypothermia, and hyperthermia by choosing proper clothing and recognizing and treating early symptoms
- Follow basic navigational rules for inland waterways
- Develop awareness of the group and effective on water management techniques

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)

This course content meets the National On Water Standards for human powered craft (<https://www.usnows.org/assess-and-update>). The National On Water Standards for human powered craft (NOWS) can be used to:

- *Evaluate other paddlers and provide effective feedback*
- *Effectively make documented skill assessments*

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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](#).