



Level 3: Essentials of Surf 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.

Note: This course may be completed using sit-on-top kayaks with thigh straps, whitewater kayaks, surf-specific kayaks, and wave-skis.

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

Sandy beach with moderate surf, mostly spilling waves with occasional steeper (plunging) waves during sets, with access to flat, protected water.

- Winds less than 15 knots
- Waves less than 3 feet (1 meter)

NOTE: When selecting a venue, careful consideration should be given to hazards including other surfers, rip currents, long- shore drift, rocks, and man-made structures.

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 3: Essentials of Surf Kayaking (or higher) ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

Succeeding Courses

- Level 4: 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

Personal Preparation & Getting Started

- 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
 - Swell
 - Tides
 - Surf forecasting
 - Time of day
 - Venue accessibility
- Discuss importance of developing good judgment, group responsibility, management, and dynamics
- Warm up to reduce injury
- Evaluate individual's swimming ability, water comfort, and confidence prior to beginning the trip
- Review paddling terminology and care of gear (to be reviewed by the instructor):
 - Boat: parts, materials, sizing, outfitting
 - Fins: design and placement
 - Paddle: parts, materials, sizing, hand position
 - How to hold the paddle in correct orientation and grip for effective paddling
 - Life jacket: types, materials, fit
 - Helmet: types and fit
- Review of additional personal and group gear, including, but not limited to:
 - Environmental supplies (food, water, appropriate clothing, sunscreen, etc.)
 - Personal thermal / UV protection and fit
 - Wetsuit
 - Dry suit
 - Paddle jacket
 - Dry top

- Paddle shorts
 - Rash guard
- Navigational and signaling tools (maps, charts, whistle, etc.)
- Safety and rescue tools including group shelter and throw rope
- Repair kit
- First aid kit (appropriate to training)
- Review securing boat for transport on car or trailer using proper tie downs, straps, or knots
 - Knots: Figure-8, bowline, truckers hitch, and 2 half hitches
- Review proper techniques to safely lift and carry the boat on shore
- Appropriately use communication (paddle, hand, and whistle) signals

Paddling Efficiently and Comfortably

- Boat stability (trim, posture, rocking, balance, etc.)
- Efficient and effective paddle placement for intended maneuver
- Safe and effective body usage: bio-mechanics (body, linkage, and rotation)
 - Avoidance of positions that contribute to shoulder injury
- Parts of strokes: CPR (catch, power, recovery), static and dynamic

Strokes

- Forward, backward and stopping strokes
- Forward and reverse sweeps
- Edging
- Low brace, high brace
- Stern rudder
- Low brace turn
- Deep water re-mount or re-entry, paddle to shore

- Power acceleration stroke

Surfing Maneuvers / Techniques

- Launching: positioning and timing, depth of water, side saddle technique (SOT kayaks)
- Holding position in the soup: bow to the waves, stern to the waves, parallel to the waves – bracing, prepare to side surf
- Paddle out: timing, reaching over the back of the wave, paddle position when punching through waves, “bunny hops”, using a rip
- Positioning: drift – use of ranges, sets, reading the water – previous waves, observation of other surfers
- Take off: waiting for waves, timing, upright posture, power forward stroke, straight / angled take off, late take off
- Riding the wave: diagonal run, trimming using the top half of the wave, stern rudder, changes of direction (head, torso, paddle, edge)
- Bottom turn, top turn
- Prepare for broach
- Side surfing with control

Safety and Rescue

- Surf zone environment
 - Wave dynamics and beach characteristics
 - Anatomy of surf zone and terminology: swash / backwash, soup zone, impact zone, outside
 - Swell height and period
 - Weather, wind, water and air temperature
- Surf zone safety
 - Beach suitability: identify hazards including rips, other surfers, swimmers, other beach users

- Identify surf break – type of waves, height, period, wind effect, tide effect, sets and lulls
- Surf area, beach positioning, setting boundaries
- Introduction to surf etiquette
- Surf zone safety; swimming in surf, separation from kayak, control of free boat and use of grab loops / webbing tails, always staying ocean side of kayak
- Use of leashes – pros and cons
- Principles of Rescue
 - Use of safe rescue strategies such as T-RETHROG (Talk, Reach, Throw, Row, Go)
 - Rescue Priorities: people, boat, paddle, gear
 - Responsibilities of the group, rescuer, swimmers
 - Appropriate use of rescue and safety gear
 - Emergency procedures
- Self care and care of other group members
 - Importance of fueling, hydration, clothing/insulation, and sun protection
 - Cold shock, hypothermia, and hyperthermia: prevention and treatment
- Calmly exit the boat after a controlled capsize, using proper body position and contact with the craft and paddle
- Deep water remount
- Self rescue: swim 20 feet (6 meters) to shore in moving water using defensive and offensive techniques
- Strategies and techniques for boat recovery including bumping, bulldozing, towing, or swimming a boat to shore
- Swimmer tow options
- Unresponsive paddler rescue

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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<https://americancanoe.org>

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