



Level 3: Freestyle Canoeing 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!

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

Protected water with constant access to safe landing and within .5 nautical miles from shore:

- Winds less than 10 knots

- Waves less than 1 foot (0.3 meters)
- Current less than 1 knot

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 3: Freestyle Canoeing ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

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)
- 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
 - Paddle: parts, materials, sizing, hand position (straight and bent shafts)
 - How to hold the paddle in correct orientation and grip for effective paddling
 - Life jacket: types, materials, fit
 - Outfitting for touring: paddles, hulls, pads
- 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 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:
 - Overhead and suitcase
- Prepare boat for departure: stowing gear securely and ensuring it is balanced
- Appropriately use communication (paddle, hand, and whistle) signals
- What is Freestyle?

- Proper use of the hull: why heel and pitch the canoe?
- Types of heeling: muscle control (J-lean) and weight control (both knees to one side)
- Types of kneeling: three point, high kneel, Canadian, transverse
- Palm roll: keep one blade face force loaded
- Parts of Freestyle maneuvers: initiation, heel, placement, pitch, and conclusion

Paddling Efficiently and Comfortably in Flatwater

- 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
- Canoe physics: pull the paddle, push the canoe; quick turns, steer from the rear
- Paddle physics: vertical blade and shaft, not carried past body on a travel stroke

Solo Maneuvers

- Post
- Wedge
- Offside slip (from onside)
- Onside slip (from onside)
- Onside and offside Gimbal
- Reverse Axle
- Reverse Post
- Reverse Wedge
- Reverse Christie
- Reverse offside sideslip (from onside)

- Reverse onside sideslip (from onside)
- Cross Axle
- Cross Post
- Cross Wedge
- Cross onside sideslip
- Cross offside sideslip
- Cross Christie
- Cross onside and offside Gimbal
- Cross reverse Axle
- Cross reverse Post
- Cross reverse Wedge
- Cross reverse Christie
- Cross reverse onside sideslip
- Cross reverse offside sideslip

Tandem Maneuvers

- Post
- Wedge
- Offside sideslip
- Onside sideslip
- Onside and offside Gimbal
- Stern Axle
- Stern Post
- Stern Wedge
- Stern offside sideslip
- Stern inside sideslip

- Cross Axle
- Cross Post
- Cross Wedge
- Cross onside sideslip
- Cross offside sideslip
- Cross onside and offside Gimbal
- Stern Cross Axle
- Stern Cross Post
- Stern Cross Wedge
- Stern Cross onside sideslip
- Stern Cross offside sideslip

Safety & Rescue

- Paddling environments pertinent to paddlers
 - Wind
 - Waves
 - Weather
 - Water
 - Water confidence and comfort including swimming ability
- 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
 - Bailer, pump, sling, lights, etc.

- Emergency procedures
- Communication
 - Paddle, hand, and whistle signals
 - Cell phone and radios when appropriate
- River etiquette and Leave No Trace (LNT) principles and application to paddling environments
- 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

Boat-based rescue techniques:

- Deep water exits: vault and slide performed in flat water
- Calmly exit the boat after a controlled capsize, using proper body position and contact with the craft and paddle
- Self rescue: swim 20 feet (6 meters) to shore in moving water using defensive and offensive techniques
- Strategies and techniques for boat and paddle recovery including bumping, bulldozing, towing, or swimming equipment to shore
- Swimmer tow options
- Self and assisted swimmer re-entry techniques (i.e., heel hook, rescue sling, paddle float, etc.)
- Assisted rescues: boat over boat or side by side or others appropriate to conditions
- Unresponsive paddler rescue
- Emptying water from the boat (on shore, bailers, pumps, sponges, etc.)

Technical knowledge:

- Life jackets: types, usage, fitting, regulations
- Canoe: types, parts, materials, nomenclature, and design

- Paddle: types, parts, materials, fit
- 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
- Canoe carries: overhead & suitcase
- Importance of developing good judgment and group responsibility for a trip
 - Group organization, trip planning, and travel strategies
 - Float plan components and filing
 - Maps, guide books, local knowledge
 - Safety issues and hazards of larger lakes and lake travel
 - Boat traffic awareness and safe practice
 - Lead boat, sweep boat, safety boats, spacing, group members with repair kits, first aid kits, and first aid and CPR training
 - Federal, state, and local laws and regulations that apply to trip venue or route
 - Put-in safety briefing
 - Three boat minimum for group trip

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 Canoeing Committee. To connect with the leadership of this committee, please view the SEIC Committee rosters on [the ACA website](#).