



Level 4: Open Water Coastal 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!

Skills Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- Completion of Level 3: Coastal Kayaking Basic Strokes & Rescues skills course or equivalent skills

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

The selected venue should provide access to open water and at least one set of conditions within the following ranges, with constant access to safe landing and within 2

nm from shore:

- 15 - 20 knot winds
- 3 - 5 foot waves (chop) (0.9 – 1.5 meters)
- 2 - 4 knots of current

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 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking (or higher) ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

Succeeding Courses

- Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayak Surf Zone Skills Course
- Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayak Tidal Currents Skills Course
- Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayak 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

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
 - Tides
 - Time of day
 - Venue accessibility
 - Boat traffic
 - Rocks, bridges, piers, dams, strainers, etc.
- 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, adjustment
 - Paddle: parts, materials, sizing, hand position
 - How to hold the paddle in correct orientation and grip for effective paddling
 - Torso rotation and the "paddler's box"
 - Spray skirts: types and materials, grab loop
 - Life jacket: types, materials, fit
 - Optional equipment and outfitting for improved control (i.e., skeg, rudder, foot pegs, back band, etc.)
- Review of additional personal and group gear, including, but not limited to:

- Environmental supplies (food, water, appropriate clothing, wetsuit, 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
- Prepare boat for departure: stowing gear securely and ensuring it is balanced
- 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
- Importance of body/boat weld
- Importance of edging (carving turns and correcting course)

Strokes

- Forward Stroke
 - Work on torso rotation
 - Work on keeping power phase well forward with a short stroke
 - Keep upper hand near eye level, do not drop upper hand toward deck

- Reverse stroke and stopping
- Side slip using static draw
 - Start with sculling draw
 - Introduce static draw position
 - Practice using static draw while moving forward
- Draw stroke
- High and low braces (hip snap/boat edging/lower body control)

Edging and Maneuvers

- Edge boat side-to-side, keeping upper torso steady
- Hold boat on edge, using balance on both sides
- Paddle forward, lift paddle, lean boat, allowing it to carve a turn
- Edge boat and hold on edge, while paddling forward
- Edge boat, initiate turn with one sweep stroke, and paddle forward continuing the turn, while holding boat on edge
- Practice sweep strokes with edge; edge boat toward working blade
- Paddle in a large circle, using edging and sweep strokes to maintain turn
- Paddle on a range (straight line), using sweep/edging corrective strokes to maintain course
- Surfing
- Bracing
- Rolling
- Practice course corrections
- Practice using ranges

Navigation

- Compass use in low visibility (safety heading)

- Chart use to fix location
- Bow angle method of avoiding collision
- Brief on-land review of rescue technique

Safety and Rescue

- 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
- Practice wet-exits with one-on-one supervision by instructor
- Calmly exit the boat after a controlled capsize, using proper body position and contact with the craft and paddle
 - When exiting the kayak with a spray skirt after capsize: must be modeled two ways: (1) utilizing the spray skirt grab loop and (2) releasing the skirt off the hip
- 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
 - Basic towing demonstration and practice
 - Standard one-on-one tow
 - Push tow

- 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
 - T-rescue
- Unresponsive paddler rescue
- Emptying water from the boat (on shore, bailers, pumps, sponges, etc.)

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