



# Level 4: Whitewater Rafting - Oar Instructor Criteria

## Course Outline

Fundamentally, participants are expected to have the paddling skills, technical knowledge, rescue ability, teaching ability, group management, and interpersonal skills commensurate with this level of certification prior to presenting themselves for evaluation as Instructor Candidates at an Instructor Certification Exam (ICE).

## Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgement of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- Be a current ACA member
- Completion of the appropriate level skills course, assessment course, or equivalent skills
- Completion of an ACA, Rescue III, or similar swiftwater rescue course within the last 3 years

## Course Duration

Combined Instructor Development Workshop (IDW) and Instructor Certification Exam (ICE) - Minimum 4 days (32 hours).

## Course Location / Accessible Venues

Sections of rivers rated up to class II-III, where maneuvering in current is required to avoid obstacles. *A rapid class includes rapids at the lower and upper ends of the difficulty range, designated “-“ and “+” respectively.*

## **Course Size**

6 Instructor Candidates : 1 Instructor Trainer; with an additional qualified assistant, the ratio can be 12 : 2. The maximum number of instructor candidates permitted is 12.

## **Instructor Trainer**

This certification course may be offered by Level 4: Whitewater Rafting - Oar (or higher) ACA Instructor Trainers or Instructor Trainer Educators.

## **Succeeding Courses**

- Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Rafting - Oar Skills, Assessment, Trip Leader, or Certification Course

## **Complementary Courses**

- Level 4: Rafting - Paddle Assessment or Certification Course
- Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Rafting - Paddle Skills, Assessment, Trip Leader, or Certification Course

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The following is a list of the criteria used to evaluate Instructor Candidates. The content and sequence of evaluation is to be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location, time allowance, and be craft appropriate.

## **General Requirements for all ACA Certification Candidates**

- Be at least 18 years old
- Demonstrate general knowledge of ACA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives
- Successfully complete an Instructor Certification Workshop (IDW and ICE)
- Upon successful completion, register with the Safety Education and Instruction Council
- Have and maintain first aid and age appropriate CPR

- Demonstrate a general knowledge of paddlesports and the ACA
- Demonstrate the ability to appropriately perform and teach all of the following material, unassisted, in the appropriate venue

## **Certification Maintenance Requirements**

- Teach at least two courses that meet ACA standards within the four-year certification period and properly report the courses using the ACA Course Management System (CMS).
- Complete an Instructor Update, at the highest level of certification, during the four-year certification period
- Maintain ACA membership and SEIC registration annually
- Maintain appropriate CPR and first aid certification for the duration of certification

## **ACA Level 4: Whitewater Rafting - Oar Instructor Requirements**

### **Demonstrate a knowledge of ACA administrative processes:**

- How to register and report a course (with and without insurance)
- An understanding of the ACA Waiver and Release of Liability
- Familiarity with the ACA website and the resources and SEIC policies available

### **Demonstrate a knowledge of teaching and learning theory:**

- Understand multiple modalities of teaching and how they impact different learners
- Differentiate instruction targeting different learners
- Use effective teaching methods including appropriate skills progressions when teaching complex skill sets
- Present information effectively, both prepared and impromptu
- Effectively make documented skill assessments
- Focus on **core principles** rather than specific techniques

- Provide appropriate, specific, and meaningful feedback

### **Demonstrate the following:**

- Positive interpersonal skills
- Appropriate group management skills including leadership and judgment
- Ability to choose an appropriate venue / class site

### **Demonstrate ability to paddle efficiently and comfortably in venue utilizing:**

- 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)
- Parts of strokes: CPR (catch, power, recovery), static and dynamic

### **Demonstrate knowledge of and the ability to teach the following knowledge and skills effectively:**

- Raft history
  - History of the sport
  - Terminology
- Life jackets: types, usage, fitting, regulations
- Rafts: types, parts, materials, nomenclature, and design
  - Outfitting: bow & stern lines, flip lines, chicken/life lines
  - Proper inflation
  - Securing equipment in the raft
  - Raft maintenance and repair
- Oars: types, parts, materials, fit, and length for different boats
  - Oar and frame interface, proper oar spacing, and position for ergonomic rowing
  - Oar locks: free oars, oar rights, pins and clips

- Frame parts, mounting, position, adjustment, design, oar towers, loading, and types
- How to hold/orient oar based on frame/oar interface
- Shipping oars
- Positions in the raft
  - Seating and proper rowing position
    - Back and shoulder protection
  - Foot and knee position for effective rowing
  - Positions of frame in raft: stern mount, center frame, bow frame (catarafts).  
Frame position changes the pivot point
  - Proper body position for forward, backward, and rotational strokes
  - Rest positions while rowing
  - Movements in the raft: high side, down
  - Personal protection from oar ejection and pinch potential, entrapment, and safety of passengers
  - Considerations for rowing full loaded rafts
- 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
- Raft carries: overhead and underhand
- 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
    - Responsibilities of boatman with passengers
      - Distribution of paddlers: keep clear of oar swing
      - Paddle assist

- Balance each paddler's ability
  - 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 or permits that apply to trip venue or route
- Special Equipment: such as groovers, coolers, dry boxes, ammo cans, etc.
- Put-in safety briefing
- Scouting
- Portaging and lining

### **Demonstrate ability to teach and model these rowing strokes:**

- Forward: use of double stroke and bicycle stroke
- Back: emphasized as power stroke and need for proper body position
- Single oar rotation strokes
- Double oar rotation strokes
- Stern rudders and bow draw strokes
- Slowing strokes
- Feathering (for open oarlocks - free oars)
- Focus on oar entry, purchase, and exit of water to maximize efficiency

### **Demonstrate ability to teach and model these flatwater maneuvers effectively:**

- Launching and landing
  - Lifting
  - Stacking
  - Low dock or bank to enter and exit safely
- Forward: with speed, row 200 yards row in a straight line (using corrective strokes as needed)

- Forward left/right turn: make a square with 10 yard sides, 4 left turns, then spin and repeat in opposite direction
- Forward right/left turn: row a figure of 8 in both directions
- Backward: 200 yards row in a straight line starting slow and working up speed (using corrective strokes as needed)
  - Backward left/right turn: make a square with 10 yard sides, 4 left turns, then spin and repeat in opposite direction
  - Backward right/left turn: row a figure of 8 in both directions
- Turn forward/backward: broad arcing turn while underway using double and single oar techniques, with a goal of keeping speed through turns
- Spin: pivot the raft left, right, and stop spin using single and double oar techniques
- Stop (both forward and reverse): stop the raft from a good speed (within ½ boat length)

**Demonstrate the ability to teach the following river hydrology features and articulate the associated risks:**

- Currents, tongues
- Rocks (upstream and downstream Vs)
- Ledges and low head dams (horizon lines)
- Pins and entrapment
- Strainers/sieves
- Bends
- Undercut rocks or ice
- Dams/flow diversion structures and pipelines

In addition:

- How each of the above changes with river levels
- How each of the above effects a raft and why
- Consideration for how each feature impacts a full loaded raft

## **Demonstrate ability to teach and model these moving water maneuvers effectively:**

- Proper raft angle when entering a rapid/tongue
- Angle adjustment during a rapid
- Proper use of forward stroke versus back stroke in moving water
- Ferries: front and back
- Eddy turns
- Peel-outs
- Spins
- Micro eddy use: while running rapids, boat scouting and safety positions
- Surfing: hole and wave

## **Demonstrate the ability to teach and model rescue techniques and concepts effectively, and as appropriate to craft:**

- Paddling environments pertinent to paddlers
  - Wind
  - Waves
  - Weather
  - Water
    - Water confidence and comfort including swimming ability
    - River classifications (Understanding of Class I - VI)
    - AW safety code
- 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, boat, oars, gear
  - Responsibilities of the group, rescuer, swimmers



- Appropriate use of rescue and safety gear
  - Bailer, pump, sling, lights, carabiners, anchor systems, etc.
  - Rescue equipment: unique safety considerations while rescue equipment is under load of heavy boat
- 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

**Demonstrate ability to teach and model these boat-based rescue techniques effectively:**

- Calmly exit the boat using proper body position and contact with the craft
- Self rescue: swim 20 feet (6 meters) to shore in moving water using defensive and offensive techniques
- Strategies and techniques for boat and paddle/oar recovery including bumping, bulldozing, towing, or swimming equipment and other boats to shore
- Boat flips: self, assisted (considerations: load, flip safety, and shore-based flips for heavy boats)
- Self and assisted swimmer re-entry techniques
- Unresponsive paddler rescue
- Throw rope: rescuer must be able to throw a rope to a swimmer in moving water at 30 feet (9 meters) and demonstrate proper rope receiving technique as a swimmer

- Basic one and two person wading
- Pinned boat rescues (arm strong, rope/vector, simple mechanical advantage, anchor systems, etc.)

**Demonstrate the ability to perform demonstration quality strokes, maneuvers, and rescues outlined above with competence:**

- Perform in real-time
- Perform in slow motion
- Emphasize particular phases of skills through exaggerated movements
- Perform at mental ease
- Perform consistently

**Demonstrate leadership, group management skills, experience and judgment necessary to be a safe, effective instructor**

**Notes:**

*An ACA Level 4: Whitewater Rafting - Oar Instructor is expected to be able to demonstrate and teach everything on the Level 4: Skills Course and Level 4: Skills Assessment for their level/craft.*

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