



Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Rafting - Paddle Skills Assessment

Assessment Course Overview

This ACA Assessment Course is designed to evaluate your ability to perform all of the skills listed and demonstrate an appropriate level of paddling knowledge. This assessment course provides the opportunity for you to receive documentation of having achieved this level of paddling ability.

Assessment Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC).
- Be a current ACA Member

Course Duration

One day (8 hours) or more.

Course Location / Accessible Venues

Sections of rivers rated class III-IV, in rapids where precise 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.

Assessor

This assessment course may be offered by Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Rafting - Paddle ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

Succeeding Courses

- Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Rafting - Paddle Certification Course

Complementary Courses

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

Course Outline

The sequence of assessment should be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location, time allowance, and craft being used. Participants must be able to perform all strokes, maneuvers, rescues, and skills in the appropriate venue. In addition, the participant must demonstrate the appropriate level of knowledge for this level of skill assessment.

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
- Explain the process of assessment and evaluation
- Review liability waiver (if applicable), assumption of risk, challenge by choice, and medical disclosure

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)

Assessment Criteria Checklist

Preparing to Depart	Pass? Y/N
Elements of a float plan (who, what, when, where, filing practices)	
Securing boat for transport using proper tie downs, straps, or knots (figure 8 or bowline, truckers hitch, and 2 half hitches)	
Proper techniques to safely lift and carry the boat on shore	
Put on and secure a life jacket appropriate for the individual's size and activity, assuring all others in the group are properly wearing their life jacket	
Explain safe boating practices including behavior, substance abuse, on water and land etiquette, and Leave No Trace ethics	
Communication protocol ◦ Paddle, hand, and whistle signals ◦ Cell phone and radios when appropriate	
Federal, state, and local laws and regulations that apply to trip venue or route	
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	
Discuss paddling environments pertinent to paddlers ◦ Wind ◦ Waves ◦ Weather ◦ Water ▪ Water confidence and comfort including swimming ability ▪ River classifications (Understanding of Class I - VI) Water ▪ AW safety code	
Launching and landing: low dock or bank to enter and exit safely	

Strokes and maneuvers listed below must be demonstrated with and without the assistance of a paddle team.

Strokes	Pass? Y/N
Demonstrate how to hold the paddle in correct orientation and grip for effective paddling	
Forward	
Back	
Sweeps (forward, reverse)	
Draws (out of water and in water recovery)	
Stern rudder	
Pry	
Blended strokes (in venue)	

J-stroke	
----------	--

Flatwater Maneuvers	Pass? Y/N
Establish boat trim, posture, rocking, and balance	
Stop the boat within 2 boat lengths	
Move the boat forwards and backwards in a reasonably straight line 3-4 boat lengths	
Spin: rotate 360° on the spot	
Propel the boat in a figure of 8 course around markers 3-4 boat lengths apart	
Turn the boat while maintaining forward motion 90° to the right and left	

Maneuvers to be performed in venue	Pass? Y/N
Ferries	
Eddy turns	
Peel outs	
C-turns	
S-turns	
Catch an eddy and maintain raft position in eddy (in venue)	
Demonstrate appropriate use of bow draw and stern rudder in venue	
Demonstrate proper raft angle when entering a rapid/tongue and while performing a ferry	

Maneuvers to be performed in venue	Pass? Y/N
Complete a successful angle adjustment during a rapid	
Surfing: hole and wave, maintaining proper body position	
Demonstrate ability to correct, change, hold ferry angle, and obtain raft angle while in venue	
Demonstrate the knowledge of and ability to “play boat” including playing with strong eddy lines and boofing a raft	
Safety & Rescue	Pass? Y/N
Knowledge of river hydrology features and the associated risks	
Demonstrate and describe the principles of rescue: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 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, paddle/oars, gear ◦ Responsibilities of the group, rescuer, swimmers 	
Identify and demonstrate the use of appropriate rescue and safety protocol for the boat and planned activity: assessing objective hazards, choosing routes/lines, options for setting safety	
Group organization, trip planning, and travel strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Put-in safety talk, lead boat, sweep boat, safety boats, spacing, group members with repair kits, first aid kits, and first aid and CPR training 	
Self care and care of other group members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Importance of fueling, hydration, clothing/insulation, and sun protection ◦ Cold shock, hypothermia, and hyperthermia: prevention and treatment 	
Boat Based Rescues	Pass? Y/N
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 and assisted (empty and minimally loaded)	
Self and assisted swimmer re-entry techniques	
Perform a successful unresponsive paddler rescue	
Demonstrate high side commands and technique	

Boat Based Rescues	Pass? Y/N
Understanding of pinned boat rescues (arm strong, rope/vector, simple mechanical advantage, anchor systems, etc.)	
Demonstrate comfort swimming in venue	
Scouting and techniques for portaging	
Basic wading with a paddle	

Technical Knowledge	Pass? Y/N
• Life jackets: types, usage, fitting, regulations • Boat: types, parts, materials, nomenclature, and design • Paddle: types, parts, materials, fit • Helmets: types, fit, usage	
Display awareness of the group and effective on-water management techniques	

- Demonstrate accurate self-perception of all personal skills & abilities presented in this skills assessment curriculum.
- For instructor: is this student's self perception accurate (i.e. does not display overconfidence or lack of confidence that could put self themselves or the group at risk)?
- Paddle rafting experience: Completion of one paddle rafting trip in venue lasting a minimum of four hours.

Final Assessment
Pass or Needs More Work (circle one)
Assessor Name:
Assessor Signature:
Assessor ACA Number:
Course Conclusion Date:
Comments:

Taking an ACA Safety & Rescue course for further training on rescue is strongly suggested

© American Canoe Association

Date of last revision: 1/1/2023

<https://americancanoe.org>

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](#).