



River Kayak Trip Leading 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

For Level 2: Moving water on rivers up to and including class I sections.

For Level 3: Sections of rivers rated up to class I-II, where limited maneuvering in current may be required to avoid obstacles.

For Level 4: Moving water on rivers up to and including class II-III sections.

A rapid class includes rapids at the lower and upper ends of the difficulty range, designated “-” and “+” respectively.

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: Whitewater Kayaking (or higher) Instructor
- Level 2 or 3: River Kayaking Instructors with the River Kayak Trip Leading Endorsement

All Instructors must operate within the venue corresponding to their level of certification.

Succeeding Courses

- Level 2: Essentials of River Kayaking Assessment or Certification Course
- Level 3: River Kayaking Skills, Assessment, Trip Leader, 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)
- 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
 - How to hold the paddle in correct orientation and grip for effective paddling
 - Spray skirts: types and materials, grab loop
 - Life jacket: types, materials, fit
 - Helmet types and use
- 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)
- Appropriately use communication (paddle, hand, and whistle) signals

Trip Preparation and Planning

- Sources of venue information: maps, guide books, local knowledge, etc.
- Thorough float plans including
 - Trip timing and schedule
 - Contingency plans for unexpected events and conditions
 - Emergency contact information for local rescue agency(s) and/or governmental agency(s) responsible for the chosen venue and
 - Designated emergency contact person for group
 - Federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and permits that apply to trip venue or route
 - Buddy boats, lead and sweep boats, group formations, and evacuation routes
 - Put-in and take-out locations, transportation route, and shuttles to include possible assistance from local outfitters or liveries

Venue Hazards and Prevention of Accidents

Environmental hazards

- Air temperature
- Water temperature
- Weather

River Hydrology and dynamics

- Flow volume
- Gradient/elevation changes
- Flow rates and current
- Currents
- 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

River features

- Eddies
- Waves
- Holes and hydraulics
- Downstream Vs

Prevention of accidents

- Proper planning and pre-trip hazard identification
- Put-in safety briefing
- Constant reassessment of venue conditions
- Scouting
- Portaging and lining

Personal and Group Equipment

- Life jackets: types, usage, fitting, regulations
- Kayak: types, parts, materials, nomenclature, and design
- Paddle: types, parts, materials, fit
- Spray skirts: types and materials, grab loop
- Helmets: types, fit, usage
- Flotation
- 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
- Kayak carries

- Repair kits, first aid kits, and group members with first aid and CPR training
- 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
- Throw ropes
- Emergency shelter, water purification, sanitation equipment, and bivouac (a.k.a., bivy kit)

Paddling strokes in course venue

- Forward
- Back
- Sweeps
- Draws
- Sculling
- Rudder

Maneuvers in course venue

- Forward in a straight line
- Backward in a straight line
- Front ferries
- Eddy turns
- Peel-outs
- C-turns
- S-turns
- Bracing and rolling

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, paddle, gear
- Responsibilities of the group, rescuer, swimmers
- Appropriate use of rescue and safety gear
 - Bailer, pump, sling, lights, etc.
- Emergency procedures such as a lost paddler scenario
- Discuss foot entrapment, defensive and aggressive swimming
- 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
- Calmly exit the boat after a capsize, using proper body position and contact with the craft and paddle
- 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) in flat water
- Assisted rescues: boat over boat in flat water, side by side in moving water
- Basic wading with a paddle
- Emptying water from the boat (on shore, bailers, pumps, sponges, etc.)
- 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 River Kayaking Committee. To connect with the leadership of this committee, please view the SEIC Committee rosters on [the ACA website](#).