

# Advanced Paddlesports Guide Criteria



## OVERVIEW

The ACA's Advanced Paddlesports Guide certification courses equip paddlers with the trip planning and leadership skills to provide safe and enjoyable long-term expeditions in more technically challenging coastal or river environments. The certification is part of the ACA's Leadership and Guide certification program, and it is appropriate for paddlers who seek development and certification as paddlesport guides and expedition leaders. This may include guiding companies, outdoor leadership organizations, university degree programs, camps offering long trips, paddle club and meetup leaders, or any other paddler who wants to safely lead others on expeditions on remote waterways. These trips may occur in wilderness areas and involve challenging waters.

Advanced Paddlesport Guide courses are delivered in one of two different environments to equip participants to lead in each environment - the Advanced Coastal Guide course and the Advanced River Guide course. These courses are offered in a Guide Certification course format, which includes training and examination. Once certified, Advanced Paddlesport Guides may extend the paddlecraft they guide on by completing the appropriate skills assessment. They may also cross over to the other environment by attaining the necessary skills assessment and then challenging the exam.

### **ADVANCED COASTAL GUIDE COURSE**

Those participating in the Advanced Coastal Guide course will be equipped to lead in large lakes or coastal waters with exposure to wind and waves. Advanced Coastal Guide candidates will focus on developing the competencies necessary to lead multi-day expeditions. Upon successful completion of the course, the candidate is certified as an Advanced Coastal Guide whose operating conditions are determined by their level of paddlecraft skills assessment, and the size of the group follows the same maximum ratio for Leader Trainers.

### **ADVANCED RIVER GUIDE COURSE**

Those participating in the Advanced River Guide course will be equipped to lead with moving water with rapids. Advanced River Guide candidates paddling river canoes, kayaks, packrafts, paddle and oar rafts, will focus on the competencies necessary to lead multi-day expeditions in Class III-IV waters. Upon successful completion of the course, the candidate is certified as an Advanced River Guide their level of paddlecraft skills assessment, and the size of the group follows the same maximum ratio for Leader Trainers.

**PADDLESPORTS COURSE PREREQUISITES****ALL ENVIRONMENTS**

- Participants must be an ACA member at the time of the course to participate.
- Participants must currently be certified as a Wilderness First Responder or higher, at the time of the course. An exemption may be made if their certification has recently expired.
- Participants must have documented evidence (i.e. logbook) of a minimum of four trips of 5 days or more in length where at least 5 nights were spent camping during the trips.
- All participants must acknowledge personal compliance with the ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC).

**COASTAL GUIDE**

- Skill Assessment - L3, L4 or L5 Coastal Kayak Skill Assessments
  - L3 Coastal Kayak Skills Assessment (or)
  - L4 Open Water Coastal Kayak Skills Assessment (or)
  - L5 Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayak Skills Assessment

**RIVER GUIDE**

- Skill Assessment - L3, L4, or L5 River Skill Assessments
  - Any ACA L4 Skills Assessment including Whitewater Kayaking, Whitewater SUP, Whitewater Canoeing, Whitewater Paddle Rafting, Whitewater Oar Rafting, or Whitewater Packrafting (or)
  - Any ACA L5 Skills Assessment including Adv. Whitewater Kayaking, Adv. Whitewater SUP, Adv. Whitewater Canoeing, Adv. Whitewater Paddle Rafting, or Adv. Whitewater Oar Rafting Skills Assessment
- Swift Water Rescue Skills Assessment of L4 Swiftwater Rescue

**RECOMMENDED / SUGGESTED EXPERIENCE**

- Leave No Trace Level 1 Instructor or higher
- ACA Instructor certification or IDW completion
- ACA L3 skills training and/or assessment in other paddlecraft.
- Experience assisting and/or leading multi-day to week long expeditions in varied conditions.
- Paddling experience in varied conditions and environments.
- Food Handler's Card



**COURSE FORMATS**

- Advanced Guide Training Course - Minimum 4 Days & 2 Nights (~50 hours) and Advanced Guide Certification Exam - Minimum 3 Days & 1 Night (16 hours), OR
- Advanced Guide Certification Course - Minimum 8 Days & 3 Nights (~68 hours) with a required rest day between Training and Exam.
- Challenge Exam: Advanced Guides certified in one environment (for example, an Advanced River Guide) may gain certification in another environment (for example, an Advanced Coastal Guide or Advanced Raft Guide) by successfully completing a skills assessment and Certification Exam in that environment.

**PADDLESPORTS COURSE VENUES / LOCATION****RIVER COURSE**

Advanced River Guide Trainers shall choose a location with moving water on rivers including class III-IV sections. A rapid class includes rapids at the lower and upper ends of the difficulty range, designated “-“ and “+” respectively. Rivers with class V rapids may be used as long as portages are possible, and rivers with extended and committing class III-IV sections may be used with suitable groups.

**COASTAL COURSE**

Advanced Coastal Guide Trainers shall choose a location on large lakes or coastal waters with exposure to conditions where an area of retreat is accessible and within 3.0 nautical miles of shore: Participants must be observed in 3 of 4 of the following conditions during the exam:

- **Winds** of at least 15 knots
- **Waves** of at least 3 feet (1 meter)
- **Surf** of at least 3 feet (1 meter)
- **Tidal** Current of at least 3.5 knots

**RE MOTENESS: ALL ENVIRONMENTS**

Advanced Paddlesport Guide certification courses shall include wilderness and austere locations that have delayed access to rescue services and unreliable communication. Evacuations may require carry outs and time frames to emergency services may exceed a full day but not exceed two full days. Upon certification as an Advanced Paddlesport Guide, the remoteness of their subsequent trips will not exceed the scope of their wilderness medical certification.

**CLASS SIZE**

**4 Leader Candidates to 1 Leader Trainer.** 4 Guide Candidates: 1 Guide Trainer. The course maximum is 8 candidates and may be achieved by having an additional trainer or qualified assistant (8 Candidates: 2 Trainers) Certified Advanced Paddlesport Guides will also follow these ratios.

The following is a list of the criteria used to evaluate guide candidates. The content and evaluation sequence should be adjusted to fit the participant's needs, class location, and time allowance.

**GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATIONS**

- Be at least 18 years old.
- Demonstrate general knowledge of ACA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives.
- Successfully completed a Leader Certification Exam (LCE) Course.
- 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 plan and prepare for a trip, communicate with all trip members, and lead the group balancing support and challenge in the appropriate paddling venues.

**CERTIFICATION MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS**

- Lead at least four trips that meet ACA standards within the four-year certification period and properly report the trips using the ACA Course Management System (CMS).
- Complete an Advanced Paddlesports Guide Update, or earn certification as an Advanced Paddlesports Guide in another environment, during the four-year certification period.
- Maintain ACA membership and SEIC registration annually.
- Maintain a minimum of WFR certification and CPR (child-adult) for the duration of certification.

**ADVANCED PADDLESPORTS GUIDE REQUIREMENTS**

**NOTE:** The following criteria for the Advanced Paddlesport Guide have sections which apply to "All Environments" and sections specific to each course environment - Coastal and River. Further descriptions and details are provided in the guidance documents.

**PERSONAL PADDLING: COASTAL**

- Able to paddle and maneuver their craft with ease in the advanced coastal course venue.
- Able to display effective and efficient paddling technique.
- Able to perform assisted rescues for other craft users (for example, sea kayak, SUP, surf ski, etc.)
- Able to perform self-rescues in the advanced coastal course venue that reduce risk, are effective, and efficient.

**PERSONAL PADDLING: RIVER**

- Able to paddle and maneuver their specific craft with ease in the river course venue.
- Demonstrates comprehension of, and is able to perform, swiftwater rescue in the river course venue that includes other craft users (for example, canoe, ww kayak, SUP, raft, packraft, etc.)
- Able to perform self-rescue in the river course venue that reduce risk, are effective, and efficient.

## ADVANCED PADDLESPORTS GUIDE REQUIREMENTS cont'd

## LEADERSHIP

- Able to identify and utilize a variety of opportunities to challenge paddlers and provide individualized support that progress over a long-term expedition.
- Able to prioritize and address health and safety, enjoyable experiences, and expedition logistics when making decisions that involve considering individual members and the group as a whole.
- Able to communicate effectively and proactively with the group, individual members, co-leaders, and other users even under duress.
- Able to establish group norms and expectations at the start of the expedition and continue to develop and foster a positive social environment during the expedition.
- Able to delegate suitable responsibilities for all members and provide variance for the expedition.
- Able to include the members of the expedition in the decision making process and allow for relevant opportunities of varied outcomes.
- Able to use a range of leadership behaviors from being directive to facilitating with intention and be able to use a range of leadership behaviors under duress.
- Able to display positive social behaviors and actions even when in challenging circumstances over a period of time.
- Demonstrates knowledge of addressing and resolving conflicts and strategy for de-escalation.
- Able to provide varied instruction and feedback for paddlers on an expedition that account for the environment and paddling situations.
- Basic concepts to make informed decisions / guide decisions for creating and implementing inclusive programming.

TRIP PLANNING  
AND DELIVERY

- Able to source and collate relevant and supplementary information for planning an expedition and gather up-to-date information during the trip.
- Able to develop a comprehensive expedition plan that includes phased contingencies.
- Able to develop a detailed daily plan, that accounts for ongoing adjustments, and be responsive to time management, especially during transitions and critical periods.
- Able to provide clear and effective communication in advance of, and if needed during, the expedition to individuals, the whole group, and external entities, such as land management agencies.
- Able to prepare relevant gear and equipment for paddling, camping, first aid, equipment repairs, emergency communication, etc. for the expedition and communicate individual needs to expedition members.
- Able to gather, and maintain confidentiality, relevant medical, health, and personal identification information from expedition members.
- Able to conduct individual and group reviews during the expedition and at the culmination.
- Able to set personal goals for an expedition, conduct an assessment during the expedition, and conduct a post-trip reflection for continued development.
- Able to conduct routine wellness checks with all members during an expedition.

## ADVANCED PADDLESPORTS GUIDE REQUIREMENTS cont'd

**TRIP PLANNING  
AND DELIVERY CONT'D**

- Able to source and collate relevant and supplementary information for planning an expedition and gather up-to-date information during the trip.
- Able to develop a comprehensive expedition plan that includes phased contingencies.
- Able to develop a detailed daily plan, that accounts for ongoing adjustments, and be responsive to time management, especially during transitions and critical periods.
- Able to provide clear and effective communication in advance of, and if needed during, the expedition to individuals, the whole group, and external entities, such as land management agencies.
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- Able to conduct routine wellness checks with all members during an expedition.

**EXPEDITION SKILLS**

- Able to develop a nutritionally balanced extended menu, that includes resupply, for the expedition.
- Can explain and is able to perform expedition food handling practices and personal health and hygiene.
- Can explain and demonstrate proper use of various backcountry cooking methods and equipment.
- Able to monitor, and as needed prepare, nutritious meals and snacks appropriate to the schedule of the day and phase of the expedition.
- Can explain and demonstrate how to source water, methods for purifying, and storage.
- Can explain and is able to perform LNT principles and practices on an expedition, especially: traveling and camping on durable surfaces, disposal of waste properly, minimizing campfire impacts, and respecting wildlife.
- Able to erect various shelters throughout an expedition for comfort and security accounting for the environment and available supplies.
- Able to manage group night paddling that includes launching prior to sunrise and landing after sunset.
- Able to use several methods to determine the approximate location of the group regularly.

## ADVANCED PADDLESPORTS GUIDE REQUIREMENTS cont'd

**RISK & RESPONSE**

- Able to conduct a risk assessment and area familiarization of the planned expedition.
- Able to identify objective and subjective hazards, determine potential risks, and explain their plan of action.
- Able to conduct dynamic risk assessments under time constraints that incorporate the group as a whole, individuals of the group, and purpose of the trip.
- Able to recognize and respond to simple and complex incidents both on and off the water.
- Able to facilitate extended care of an individual and manage the group.
- Able to coordinate rescues and evacuations that incorporate the group appropriately that reduce overall risk, are effective, and efficient.
- Able to communicate with group members, and outside parties if required, both during an incident and following.

**EQUIPMENT**

- Able to conduct suitable repairs of paddling equipment while onshore and basic repairs on-the-water and advanced repairs off-the-water
- Knowledgeable of core paddling equipment, that includes packing and storing for expeditions, with working knowledge of extraneous equipment.
- Able to conduct suitable field repairs of general camping equipment and troubleshoot alternatives if irreparable.
- Knowledgeable of core camping equipment, that includes packing and storing for expeditions, with working knowledge of extraneous equipment.

**ENVIRONMENT**

- Able to identify relevant and minor factors in the paddling environment and explain potential impacts to the group that include short and long term impacts.
- Able to select and explain rationale for a suitable campsite location that includes accounting for relevant and minor environmental factors, expedition plan, and LNT principles.
- Able to be proactive and responsive in preparing the group, and expedition plan, for changes in weather and/or conditions from observations and forecasts.
- Able to establish expectations and guidelines for Leave No Trace principles and practices to reduce impacts for both paddling and camping.

**ACA KNOWLEDGE AND PROFESSIONALISM**

- General knowledge of the history, mission, and philosophy of the American Canoe Association.
- Able to explain the purpose and mission of the ACA Safety, Education, and Instruction Committee (SEIC) and the Safety, Education, and Instruction (SEI) Department.
- Familiar with the Course Management System (CMS), use of the “test system,” dashboard, uploading of credentials, registering a trip with and without insurance, reporting trips, trip evaluations, and completing and submitting an ACA Waiver.
- Knowledgeable of their ACA trip leader certification remit and requirements for maintaining their certification.
- Able to explain purpose and use of ‘assumption of risk and release of liability’ waivers and public liability insurance