



# Level 4: Surf 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.

**Note:** This course may be completed using sit-on-top kayaks with thigh straps, whitewater kayaks, surf-specific kayaks, and wave-skis.

## Skills Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- Completion of Level 3: Essentials of Surf Kayaking course, or possess equivalent skills
- Having a reliable A combat roll is strongly recommended

## 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

Sandy beach break with significant surf, a majority of steep (plunging) waves during sets, with access to flat, protected water.

- Winds less than 20 knots

- Wave faces greater than 3 feet (1 meter) and less than 4 feet (1.2 meters)

*NOTE: When selecting a venue, careful consideration should be given to hazards including other surfers, rip currents, long- shore drift, rocks, and man-made structures.*

## **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: Surf Kayaking (or higher) ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

## **Succeeding Courses**

- Level 5: Performance Surf Kayaking Skills 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
  - Swell
  - Tides
  - Surf forecasting
  - Time of day
  - Venue accessibility
- 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
    - Surf kayak design, construction, and outfitting
    - Wave-ski design, construction, and outfitting
  - Fins: design and placement
  - Paddle: parts, materials, sizing, hand position
    - How to hold the paddle in correct orientation and grip for effective paddling
  - Life jacket: types, materials, fit
  - Helmet: types and fit
- Review of additional personal and group gear, including, but not limited to:
  - Environmental supplies (food, water, appropriate clothing, sunscreen, etc.)
  - Personal thermal / UV protection and fit
    - Wetsuit

- Dry suit
- Paddle jacket
- Dry top
- Paddle shorts
- Rash guard
- Navigational and signaling tools (maps, charts, whistle, etc.)
- Safety and rescue tools including group shelter and throw rope
- 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
- 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

## **Strokes**

- Forward, backward and stopping strokes
- Forward and reverse sweeps
- Edging
- Low brace, high brace

- Stern rudder
- Low brace turn
- Deep water re-mount or re-entry, paddle to shore
- Power acceleration stroke

## **Surfing Maneuvers / Techniques**

- Stern squirt
- Powerful acceleration stroke
- Edging: hull flat to wave face; rail to rail transitions
- Low brace, high brace
- Rolling from non-set-up position
- Draw strokes
- Low brace turn
- Down-wave rudder
- Paddle out: timing, reaching over the back of the wave, paddle position when punching through waves, “bunny hops”, using a rip
- Positioning: monitoring drift – use of ranges, sets, reading the water – previous waves, observation of other surfers
- Take off: waiting for waves, timing, sinking stern, power forward stroke, straight / angled take off, late take off
- Riding the wave: diagonal run, staying high, staying close to power pocket – stalling, rudder on down wave side
- Bottom turns: practice with paddle out of the water
- Top turns: paddle on down wave side; head and body position
- Cut backs: head, torso, paddle, edge to edge

## **Safety and Rescue**

- Surf zone environment

- Wave dynamics and beach characteristics
- Anatomy of surf zone and terminology: swash / backwash, soup zone, impact zone, outside
- Swell height and period
- Weather, wind, water and air temperature
- Surf zone safety
  - Beach suitability: identify hazards including rips, other surfers, swimmers, other beach users
  - Identify surf break – type of waves, height, period, wind effect, tide effect, sets and lulls
  - Surf area, beach positioning, setting boundaries
  - Surf etiquette and collision avoidance
  - Surf zone safety: swimming in surf, separation from kayak, control of free boat and use of grab loops / webbing tails, always staying ocean-side of kayak
  - Use of paddle leash – pros and cons
- 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
- Calmly exit the boat after a controlled capsize, using proper body position and contact with the craft and paddle

- Deep water remount
- 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
- Swimmer tow options
- 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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This curriculum is managed by the ACA Surf Kayaking Committee. To connect with the leadership of this committee, please view the SEIC Committee rosters on [the ACA website](#).