



Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Surf Zone Skills Course

Skills Course Overview

This course is designed as a 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.

Skills Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC).
- Completion of Level 3: Coastal Kayaking Basic Strokes & Rescues skills course, Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking skills course equivalent skills

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

The selected venue should consist of a beach break with average surf height of 2-3 foot (0.6 to 0.9 meters), ideally spilling - with constant access to safe landing and within 2 nm from shore:

- Winds not to exceed 15 knots

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: Open Water Coastal Kayaking (or higher) ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

Succeeding Courses

- Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayak Tidal Currents Skills Course
- Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayak Assessment 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
- Tides
- Time of day
- Venue accessibility
- Boat traffic
- Rocks, bridges, piers, dams, strainers, etc.
- 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, adjustment
 - Paddle: parts, materials, sizing, hand position
 - How to hold the paddle in correct orientation and grip for effective paddling
 - Torso rotation and the "paddler's box"
 - Spray skirts: types and materials, grab loop
 - Life jacket: types, materials, fit
 - Optional equipment and outfitting for improved control (i.e., skeg, rudder, foot pegs, back band, etc.)
- Review of additional personal and group gear, including, but not limited to:
 - Environmental supplies (food, water, appropriate clothing, wetsuit, 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

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
- Importance of body/boat weld
- Importance of edging (carving turns and correcting course)
- Bracing and boat edging
 - Upper body/lower body separation and edging
 - Keep paddle low and horizontal, elbows in close

Surf Zone Orientation

- Point out soup zone, impact zone, & windows; what they mean to the kayaker
- Broach - demonstrate boat edge/brace while side surfing
- Launch - emphasize timing, paddling hard to break through waves
- Land - on top of wave and surf & broach
- Avoid collisions: stay out each other's way - if swimming, stay seaward of kayak
- Swimming practice: practice diving under waves and body-surfing
- Landing

Soup Zone Practice

Instructors in the water (not in boats) - students in kayaks

- Have students hold position in soup, practice moving back & forth
- Practice side surfing in soup on small waves, both sides
- Practice paddling in on top of waves in soup, then riding waves

Impact Zone Practice

- Students paddle out use timing (windows) and punch through waves
- Land by paddling in on top of wave (to get through impact zone)
- Signal students in once or twice using signals outlined above, then let them proceed on their own
- Land by surfing and broaching (side surf the break) on wave

Note: While signaling, you must use good timing; your goal is to get the student through the impact zone on top of the wave.

Discussion of Wave Types

Review, discuss wave types (dumping, plunging, spilling) shore contours and beach slope and the effect of tides and wind in surf zones

Safety and Rescue

- 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
 - 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
- 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 Coastal Kayaking Committee. To connect with the leadership of this committee, please view the SEIC Committee rosters on [the ACA website](#).