



# Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Tidal Currents 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 \(EEC\)](#).
- 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 provide access to open water and at least one set of conditions within the following range, with constant access to safe landing and within 2 nm from shore:

- 2 - 4 knots of current
- Wind less than 15 knots
- Tide rip with large eddy

## **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
  - Helmets: types, 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)
- 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
- Prepare boat for departure: stowing gear securely and ensuring it is balanced
- Appropriately use communication (paddle, hand, and whistle) signals

## **Tides and Currents Discussion**

- Explain what the tides and currents will be doing throughout the day and describe a trip plan based on the currents
- Use a local chart, tide book, and any useful props
- Discuss local currents; keep it simple and
- Cover general current phenomena
- Describe strategies for paddling in current:
  - Go with the flow whenever possible
  - Hug the shore and use eddies when traveling against current
  - Use a range to hold ferry angle when crossing current
  - Ferry angle can also be determined using a vector solution

- Preview what the class will doing in the tide rips:
  - How to cross an eddy line
  - How to ferry back and forth across current
  - How to surf waves in a tide rip (assuming waves are present and the class is up for it)
- The destination and trip should be timed to go with the current and return with the current, if possible. Time it to arrive at least one hour before maximum current.
- While underway
  - Demonstrate how to use current to your advantage by going with the current, or across and down current
  - Demonstrate how to use ranges to hold course and to monitor progress

## **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)

## **Tide Rips Exercise**

Orientation: Make sure all participants know where the eddy line is located

**Peel-outs:** Instructor demonstrates a peel-out from the top of the eddy into the current, paddling well out into the current, then turning downstream using a sweep stroke, followed by an eddy turn back into the eddy (a large eddy is needed)

- Have each student perform this maneuver several times
- Emphasize speed and forward momentum to punch across the eddy line, and down-current boat lean, (into the turn) for stability

**Ferrying:** Instructor demonstrates how to ferry by leaving the eddy on a ferry angle (facing upstream) and ferrying back and forth across the current

- Have the students practice this maneuver one or two at a time
- Get them to adjust their ferry angle using sweep strokes and stern draws
- A good technique for giving feedback is ferry alongside the student, coaching as necessary

**Surfing:** If conditions allow, and the students are prepared, have them practice surfing and ferrying-gliding across waves

- Explain/demonstrate how to use a stern rudder stroke to control direction while surfing
- Explain/demonstrate boat edge for stability; edge boat into waves, down current

**Rescues:** Be prepared for unplanned capsizes. In most cases the instructor will perform rescues. If one or more students want to practice rough-water rescues, prepare space for their experience, but be ready to help.

**Instructor Awareness:** Keep an eye on students at all times. With two instructors it is best to keep one instructor stationed down current.

## **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
- Practice wet-exits with one-on-one supervision by instructor

- 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
- 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
  - Basic towing demonstration and practice
  - Standard one-on-one tow
  - Push tow
- Self and assisted swimmer re-entry techniques (i.e., heel hook, rescue sling, paddle float, etc.)
- Assisted rescues: boat over boat or side by side or others appropriate to conditions
  - T-rescue
- Unresponsive paddler rescue
- Emptying water from the boat (on shore, bailers, pumps, sponges, etc.)

## **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](#).