



Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Skills Assessment

Course Overview

This ACA Assessment Course is designed to evaluate your ability to perform all of the skills listed and demonstrate an appropriate level of paddling knowledge. This assessment course provides the opportunity for you to receive documentation of having achieved this level of paddling ability.

Assessment Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- Be a current ACA Member

Course Duration

One day (8 hours) or more.

Course Location / Accessible Venues

Assessment candidates must demonstrate proficiency in 3 of the following 4 conditions at some time during the workshop to receive certification. The selected venue is to have constant access to safe landing and be within 2 nm from shore:

- 15 - 20 knot winds
- 3 - 5 foot waves (chop) (0.9 – 1.5 meters)
- REQUIRED: 3 - 4 foot surf (0.9 – 1.2 meters)
- 2 - 4 knots of current

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.

Assessor

This assessment 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 Kayaking Trip Leader or Certification Course
 - Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking Skills or Certification Course
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Course Outline

The sequence of assessment should be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location, time allowance, and craft being used. Participants must be able to perform all strokes, maneuvers, rescues, and skills in the appropriate venue. In addition, the participant must demonstrate the appropriate level of knowledge for this level of skill assessment.

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
- Explain the process of assessment and evaluation
- Review liability waiver (if applicable), assumption of risk, challenge by choice, and medical disclosure

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)

Assessment Criteria Checklist

Preparing to Depart	Pass? Y/N
Elements of a float plan (who, what, when, where, filing practices)	
Securing boat for transport using proper tie downs, straps, or knots (figure 8 or bowline, truckers hitch, 2 half hitches, round turn, clove hitch)	
Proper techniques to safely lift and carry the boat on shore	
Put on and secure a life jacket appropriate for the individual's size and activity, assuring all others in the group are properly wearing their life jacket	
Explain safe boating practices including behavior, substance abuse, on water and land etiquette, and Leave No Trace ethics	
Communication protocol ◦ Paddle, hand, and whistle signals ◦ Cell phone and VHF radios when appropriate	
Federal, state, and local laws and regulations that apply to trip venue or route	
Navigation: able to interpret basic chart datum and a compass to plot a course and adjust for variation	
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	
Discuss paddling environments pertinent to paddlers ◦ Water ◦ Weather ◦ Wind ◦ Waves	
Launching and landing: low dock or bank to enter and exit safely	
Group awareness and leadership	

Strokes and Maneuvers	Pass? Y/N
Demonstrate how to hold the paddle in correct orientation and grip for effective paddling	
Effective forward paddling—demonstrate the ability to maintain directional stability through a variety of techniques and maintain speed appropriate to the environment while paddling forward	
Stop the kayak from a good speed, forward and reverse within 4 strokes	
Effective reverse paddling: efficient reverse paddling over a figure of 8 course with good boat control, using correct strokes and edging	
Rotate 360° on the spot using forward and reverse sweeps	
Edging / boat tilt: edging to assist turning in a circle, forward and reverse	
Turning with forward momentum: demonstrate the ability to turn kayak with a variety of techniques with forward momentum to include: low brace with onside tilt, high brace turn with onside tilt, and bow rudder with tilt	
Paddle a figure of 8 course using a variety of strokes	
Draw sideways: move the boat sideways 15 feet (both sides) • Draw to hip • Sculling draw • Draw on the move (forward & rev) • Side-slip (forward & reverse)	
Ruddering	
Preventing capsize using low and high braces	
Negotiate moderate wind & sea conditions • Paddling comfort in moderate seas • Ability to paddle in a head sea / bean sea / quartering sea / following sea • Ability to turn up and down wind efficiently • Ability to hold position	
Negotiate moderate surf • Launch and land forward • Launch and land backward • Hold position • Surf: broach and side surf	
Negotiate moderate current • Establish ferry-angle (forward and reverse) • Control peeling out / eddy turns	

Safety & Rescue Concepts	Pass? Y/N
• Life jackets: types, usage, fitting, regulations • Boat: types, parts, materials, nomenclature, and design • Paddle: types, parts, materials, fit • Spray skirts; types, parts, materials, fit	
Demonstrate and describe the principles of rescue: ◦ Rescue priorities: people, boat, paddle, gear ◦ Responsibilities of the group, rescuer, swimmers	

Safety & Rescue Concepts	Pass? Y/N
Display awareness of the group and effective on-water management techniques	
Identify and demonstrate the use of appropriate rescue and safety protocol for the boat and planned activity: assessing objective hazards, choosing routes/lines, options for setting safety	
Group organization, trip planning, and travel strategies ◦ Lead boat, sweep boat, safety boats, spacing, group members with repair kits, first aid kits, and 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	
Advantages and disadvantages during rescues of various kayaks	

Boat Based Rescues	Pass? Y/N
Calmly exit the kayak after capsize, using proper body position and contact with the kayak 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	
Deep water rescue: boat over boat rescue and deep water re-entry	
Self-rescue—demonstrate the ability to successfully self-rescue in conditions using the technique of choice such as re-enter and roll, cowboy, scramble, paddle float, etc. If a device is required, such as a paddle float, then must be able to access, deploy, and re-store the device in a timely fashion	
Towing—demonstrate proficiency in a variety of towing techniques to include: contact tows, rafted tows, inline tows, towing/carrying a swimmer, etc (solo and assisted)	
Bow, stern, and paddle recovery	
Swimmer rescue: stern toggle tow / bow push / back-deck	
Perform a successful unresponsive paddler rescue (i.e., Hand of God rescue)	
Successfully empty water from the boat (on shore, bailers, pumps, sponges, etc.)	
Kayak roll	
Re-enter and roll	

Kayak tripping: show evidence of at least three or more day-trips of at least 12-15 nautical miles in various conditions

Multi-Day Trips: Show evidence of at least one multi-day journey involving overnight camping.

Final Assessment
Pass or Needs More Work (circle one)
Assessor Name:
Assessor Signature:
Assessor ACA Number:
Course Conclusion Date:
Comments:

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<https://americancanoe.org>

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](#).