



Level 2: Essentials of River Kayaking Skills Course

Course Overview

The Essentials of River Kayaking course is designed to teach beginner paddlers to safely and enjoyably kayak on gentle rivers.

Note: This course outline may be used for both spray skirted kayaks as well as non-spray skirted kayaks. Skills not applicable to non-spray skirted kayaks are followed by the notation: *

Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- No prior paddling experience or training is required to participate in this course

Course Duration

The course duration should be adjusted to best fit the needs and goals of the participants. One day (8 hours) or more.

Course Location / Accessible Venues

Moving water on rivers rated up to and including class I. *A rapid class includes rapids at the lower and upper ends of the difficulty range, designated “-” and “+” respectively.*

Course Size

5 Participants : 1 Instructor; with an additional qualified assistant, the ratio can be 10 : 2.

For additional details, see [SEIC Policy Manual Chapter 6](#).

Instructor

This course may be offered by Level 2: Essentials of River Kayaking (or higher) ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

Succeeding Courses

- For all kayaks:
 - Level 2: Essentials of River Kayaking Skills Assessment
 - Level 2: Essentials of River Kayaking Trip Leader Skills Assessment
- For kayaks with spray skirts only:
 - Level 3: River Kayaking Skills Course and/or Skills Assessment
 - Level 4: Whitewater Kayaking Skills Course and/or Skills Assessment

- Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Kayaking Skills Course and/or Skills Assessment

Course Outline

The following is a general summary of course content for the Essentials of River Kayaking skills course. The content covered and sequence of instruction should be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location and time allowance.

Introduction, Expectations, and Logistics

- Welcome, introductions, paperwork
- Student and Instructor course expectations and limitations
- Course itinerary and site logistics
- Review waiver, assumption of risk, challenge by choice, medical disclosure
- About the ACA
- PFD policy (always wear on water)
- Appropriate personal behavior
 - No alcohol / substance abuse
 - Proper etiquette on and off the water
 - Respect private property
 - Practice Leave No Trace ethics

Paddling Environment

- Wind
- Waves
- Weather
- Water

Personal Preparation

- Personal ability
- Swimming ability
- Water comfort and confidence
- Fitness, conditioning, and warm up
- Safe paddle and boat handling
- Safety and rescue considerations
- Personal equipment (reviewed by Instructor)
- Judgment. In addition to learning hard skills, the importance of developing personal judgment and group responsibility increases on more difficult paddling venues.

Getting Started

- Warm-up and stretching
- How to pick up a kayak safely
- Car topping: loading and unloading, racks, straps
- Launching and landing
 - Boarding, three points of contact, weight kept low, etc.
 - Posture, safety, comfort, effectiveness, rocking, balance
- Water comfort and confidence
- Basic terminology
- Types of strokes: power, turning
- Stroke components: catch, propulsion, recovery (CPR), control, correction
- Safe and effective body usage

Equipment

- Life jackets (PFDs): types, fit
- Kayaks: types, materials, parts (including safety features such as flotation)
- Paddles: types, materials, parts, length, blade size and shape, hand position.
- Spray skirts: types and material, grab loop*
- Care of equipment
- Personal equipment: water, food, shoes, hat, sunscreen, bug repellent, sun glasses, eyeglass straps, protective clothing for heat or cold, sponge, bailer/pump, whistle, knife, light
- Optional equipment and outfitting

River Reading

- Current (cfs), volume, direction, and changes caused by streambed features

Safety and Rescue

- Exercising judgment, safety as a state of mind
- Principles of Rescue
 - Use of safe rescue strategies such as T-RETHROG (Talk, Reach, Throw, Row, Go)
 - Rescue priorities: people, kayak, paddle, gear
 - Responsibilities of: rescuer, group, swimmers
- Shoreline rescue: extension rescues

Swimming and Wading Skills

- Understand the risks associated with standing and walking in the types of environments mentioned above (including entanglement and environmental hazards)
- Strategies to minimize risk of foot entrapment

- Defensive and aggressive swimming positions, and transitions
- Techniques for successful exits from current to eddies
- Self-rescue: swimming with equipment
- Strategies to conserve energy
- Strategies for managing strainers in the appropriate venue

Kayak-based Rescues

- Advantages and disadvantages during rescues of various kayaks (e.g., sit-ins, sit-on-tops, recreational kayaks)
- 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 spray skirt off the hip
- Paddle recovery options
- Strategies for kayak recovery
- Swimmer tow options
- Swimmer re-entry / re-mount techniques (e.g., stern entry, heel hook, rescue sling, paddle float)
- Kayak bumping / bulldozing
- Kayak towing
- Kayak specific rescues (e.g., boat over boat, boat to boat, scoop)
- Unresponsive paddler rescue
- Emptying water from kayak (e.g., on-shore, bailers, pumps)

Throwable Floating Aid / Throw Rope Skills

- Throwing techniques
- Receiving techniques
- Belaying techniques
- Rope management and safety strategies
- Rope coiling methods and throwing techniques

Maneuvers

- J-lean / heeling the kayak
- Paddling in a reasonably straight line
- Spins
- Stopping
- Ferries
- Eddy turns
- Peel outs
- Moving abeam

Strokes

- Forward
- Back (stopping)
- Draw
- Sculling draw
- Sweep (including stern draw)
- Reverse sweep
- Rudder (stern)
- Low brace

Conclusion and Wrap Up

- Group debrief / individual feedback
- Course limitations
- Importance of First Aid and CPR
- Importance of additional instruction, practice, experience
- Importance of appropriate level of safety and rescue training
- Life sport / paddling options
- Local paddling groups / clubs
- Handouts / reference materials
- ACA membership forms
- Course evaluation
- Participation cards

* Skills not required for those participants paddling a kayak without a spray skirt.

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Date of last revision: 12/31/2023

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This curriculum is managed by the ACA River Kayaking Committee. To connect with the leadership of this committee, please view the SEIC Committee rosters on [the ACA website](#).