



Level 3: Sit-On-Top Coastal Kayaking Skills Assessment

Assessment Overview

The Level 3 Sit-On-Top Coastal Kayak kayaker is a competent paddler in coastal waters with regular access to landing areas. They have the judgment to know when they should not paddle and have a plan for when things do not go as expected. The Level 3 sit-on-top coastal kayaker performs safely, effectively, and efficiently in various environments, including small waves and surf, rocky shorelines, or tidal currents. This ACA Skills Assessment course evaluates a participant's ability to perform all the skills listed and demonstrate appropriate knowledge. The assessment course allows the participant to receive documentation of having achieved a Level 3 level of paddling ability.

Note: This course is designed to be delivered by a Level 3 CK Sit-On-Top Instructor or Level 3 Coastal Kayak (CK) Instructor. Level 3 CK Sit-On-Top Instructors can assess only paddlers using sit-on-top kayaks, whereas Level 3 CK Instructors may deliver either type of Level 3 Skills Assessment course.

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 at the assessor's discretion

Course Location / Accessible Venues

Assessors shall choose a location with some exposure to conditions and regular access to landing areas. During the course, the assessor shall keep participants within 1.5 nautical miles of shore. Participants must be assessed while paddling in three of the four conditions below, but all three conditions do not need to be experienced simultaneously.

- Winds 10 - 15 knots
- Waves 1 - 2 feet (0.3 - 0.6 meters)
- Surf 1 - 2 feet (0.3 - 0.6 meters)
- Tidal Current 1 - 2 knots

Venue Choice

In addition to the above, the location chosen by the instructor shall be conducive to assessing all skills in the "Core Skills" categories and the skills in their selected "Venue Specific" category. The venues and associated skills have been set to an equivalent level of challenge, allowing for regional accessibility while maintaining standards.

- Tidal Currents
- Wind, Waves, and Surf
- Rocky Shorelines

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 a Level 3 Sit-On-Top Coastal Kayak Instructor, Level 3 Coastal Kayak Instructor, or any higher-level Coastal Kayak Instructor is qualified to deliver this course.

Succeeding Courses

- Level 3: Coastal Kayak Skills Assessment
- Level 3: Sit-on-Top Instructor Development Workshop

Preparing for the Assessment: The document “Level 3 Coastal Kayak Training Guidance” provides guidance on how to train for paddling in Level 3 conditions and helps prepare kayakers for this assessment course.

Assessor’s Guide and Field Grids: The Level 3 Sit-On-Top Coastal Kayak Assessor’s Guide is the companion to the Level 3 Sit-On-Top Coastal Kayak Skills Assessment document. Assessors shall use the Assessor’s Guide for guidance on delivering the course and ensuring compliance with standards for Level 3 paddlers. Assessor Guides include guidance on what constitutes Exceeds, Meets, and Below for each skill. Also provided are Single-Paddler and Multi-Paddler Field Grids designed for the assessor’s use when delivering this course.

Assessment Competencies and Skills: This assessment contains Paddler Competencies, Assessed Skills, and Developing Skills.

- **Paddler Competencies** – Each category starts with a description of the overall competency that the paddler shall demonstrate. The assessor uses this as an overarching guideline for all skills in the assessment.
- **Assessed Skills** – Assessors must observe the paddler’s performance of all these strokes, maneuvers, rescues, and skills in the appropriate venue. In addition, the paddler must demonstrate the proper level of knowledge for this skill assessment.
- **Developing Skills** – Assessors may observe the paddler’s performance of these strokes, maneuvers, rescues, and skills in the appropriate venue. Successful performance of Developing Skills may add to a “pass,” but unsuccessful performance shall not count against the paddler. Level 3 Developing Skills are among the Assessed Skills at L4.

Level 3 Paddler Core Competencies and Assessed Skills

Assessors shall evaluate the paddler's overall competency in the following categories. Strokes and maneuvers are to be performed on both sides of the kayak but do not need to be equally effective to “meet” the standard at Level 3. Rather, the paddler is to demonstrate their ability to complete objectives using the stroke or maneuver, but some decrease in effectiveness or efficiency is allowed between sides of the kayak.

Core: Strokes and Maneuvers

Level 3 Competency: The paddler uses appropriate strokes and maneuvers to position for optimal performance and moves purposefully in Level 3 conditions. They increase efficiency by edging, keeping the blade fully submerged, being aware of blade angle, and effectively blending strokes. The paddler can effectively use both sides of the kayak, maneuvering both towards and away from the blade.

Assessed Skills:

- **Forward Paddling:** Moves their kayak 200 yards/meters maintaining a reasonably straight course.
- **Reverse Paddling:** Moves the kayak 50 yards/meters paddle with reasonable control.
- **Stopping:** Stops the kayak from a good speed (2 to 3 knots), forward and reverse, within one kayak length.
- **Forward and Reverse Sweep:** Turns the kayak smoothly while moving forward or in reverse without losing momentum.
- **Rotate in Place 360°:** Spins the kayak in place smoothly with minimal forward or reverse movement.
- **Turning on the Move:** Maneuvers the kayak smoothly around obstacles or to a target without losing momentum.
- **Draw Sideways:** Moves the kayak sideways 15 feet (4.6 meters) from a static position.
- **Draw Sideways on the Move (Sideslip):** Moves the kayak sideways 10 feet (3.3 meters) with momentum.
- **Ruddering (Bow and Stern):** Uses bow rudder to turn toward the blade side of the kayak. Uses stern rudders to turn both toward and away from the blade side of the kayak, and to maintain a straight course.
- **Linked Maneuvers:** Paddles a course requiring various turning maneuvers safely, effectively, and efficiently.

Developing Skill - Equal effectiveness on both sides of the kayak: Demonstrates a high level of effectiveness and comfort working on both sides of their kayak in Level 3 conditions.

Core: Edging and Support

Level 3 Competency: The paddler comfortably and effectively uses edging to facilitate maneuvering. They are consistent and stable when edging their kayak and use the blade effectively when needed. They can recover when out of balance.

Assessed Skills:

- **Low Brace Recovery:** Prevents capsizes when off balance.
- **Low Brace Turn:** Makes a turn of at least 90 degrees.
- **Edge Control:** Edges with purpose and consistency during strokes and maneuvers.

Developing Skills:

- **High Brace Recovery:** Prevents capsizes when off balance.

Core: Rescues and Towing

Level 3 Competency: The paddler demonstrates competent rescue and towing skills in Level 3 conditions. They choose rescues and towing configurations appropriate for the conditions (for example, what is most appropriate for capsize in breaking waves or in current). They also demonstrate the ability to be an active and safe swimmer when being rescued.

Assessed Skills:

- **Capsize and Wet Exit:** Performs a controlled exit while maintaining contact with kayak and equipment.
- **Assisted Rescue with an Able Swimmer:** Performs one or more of the following assisted re-entries with an able swimmer: Side-by-Side and T-Rescue (blown hatch)
- **Impaired Swimmer Rescue:** Performs the following assisted re-entries of an impaired swimmer: Sling and Unresponsive Paddler
- **Self-Rescue:** Performs one or more self-rescues: Paddle Float rescue (with or without a sling), and Scramble.
- **Active Swimmer:** Demonstrates the role of an active and effective swimmer when rescued.
- **Towing Using a Tow Line:** Demonstrates one or more towing strategies with a towline: In-Line Tow, Rafted In-Line Tow, and Anchor Tow.
- **Moves a Kayak Without a Tow Line:** Demonstrates one or more strategies: Contact Tow, Bulldozing, Toggle Tow, and Throw Bag Rescue.
- **Paddler Separated from Kayak:** Can rescue a swimmer separated from their kayak and reconnect the swimmer to their kayak.

Developing Skill: Deploys multiple techniques and strategies for the above rescues.

Core: Awareness and Seamanship

Level 3 Competency: The paddler has a heightened awareness of the environment and paddler performance, adapts plans accordingly, and communicates clearly with the group to make necessary changes. They are properly equipped for the conditions and use equipment appropriately to maintain personal and group comfort.

Assessed Skills:

- **Awareness:** Understands personal and group capabilities relative to the environment.
- **Leave No Trace (LNT):** Demonstrates appropriate interactions with ecosystems and wildlife.
- **Kayak:** Has a working knowledge of types of SOT kayaks suitable for paddling in Level 3 conditions.
- **Equipment:** Maintains a properly outfitted kayak and has a working knowledge of paddling equipment.
- **Packing the Kayak:** Demonstrates the knowledge of how to pack and properly trim their kayak.
- **Kayak Repair:** Can perform field repairs allowing for a safe paddle to an accessible area.
- **Hypothermia and Cold-Water Shock:** Understands the causes, prevention, recognition, and treatment of cold-water shock and hypothermia.
- **Hyperthermia:** Understands causes, prevention, recognition, and treatment of heat-related issues and hyperthermia.
- **Knots:** Can tie Bowline, Clove Hitch, Figure 8, and Trucker's Hitch knots.

Core: Incident Prevention and Management

Level 3 Competency: The paddler has an incident prevention mindset on and off the water. They make good choices and demonstrate competent decision-making. They can lead and assist with incidents in Level 3 conditions and identify areas of less risk and work with other paddlers to move the group into safety.

Assessed Skills:

- **Kayak Transport:** Safely transports, unloads, and carries kayaks at the launch site.
- **Pre and Post-Trip Discussion:** Actively participates in pre-trip and post-trip debriefing sessions.
- **Launching and Landing:** Launches and lands in a safe manner.
- **Teamwork:** Works with others to perform rescues and other essential team maneuvers and tasks. Can move the group to an area of less risk.
- **Communication:** Communicates clearly and effectively. Can direct others calmly, such as when called to execute a rescue.
- **VHF Radio:** Demonstrates proper use of a VHF radio.
- **Distress Calls:** Demonstrates knowledge and ability to request appropriate resources.
- **Signaling Devices:** Carries appropriate visual and auditory signaling devices and understands their use and limitations.
- **Float Plan:** Files a complete and accurate float plan with an appropriate point of contact.

Core: Trip Planning and Navigation

Level 3 Competency: The paddler successfully plans and executes routes in Level 3 conditions and venues, considering basic safety and location-specific issues. Their planning includes considering tides, currents, weather forecasts, and the makeup of their group and group members' equipment. They carry a compass and an appropriate map or chart for the area and use them to navigate from point to point in Level 3 venues effectively.

Assessed Skills:

- **Forecasts:** Gathers, understands, and utilizes appropriate weather and marine forecasts.
- **Trip Planning:** Demonstrates use of charts, forecasts, and knowledge of the paddling group when route planning.
- **Trip Planning:** Incorporates wind, waves, and swell into route plans and trip choices.
- **Tidal Planning:** Demonstrates ability to calculate stages of tide, depth, and current over time and incorporate this knowledge into route plans and trip choices.
- **Chart Use and Route Finding:** Demonstrates the ability to identify their location at all times.
- **Compass Use:** Demonstrates using handheld and deck-mounted compasses to take bearings, determine location, and maintain a course.
- **Nautical Rules of the Road:** Understands the Nautical Rules of the Road and demonstrates safe paddling in relation to boat traffic.
- **Navigate from Point to Point:** Understands drift caused by wind or current and can compensate for drift using ranges and ferry angles in Level 3 conditions.

Level 3 Paddler Venue Specific Competencies and Assessed Skills

Assessors shall evaluate the paddler's overall competency in one of the following "Venue Specific" categories. The choice of assessment venue shall enable the assessor to see all the assessed skills for the chosen category.

Venue Specific: Tidal Currents

The paddler demonstrates an understanding of tidal currents with Level 3 conditions in various coastal settings. They can paddle through currents in control. The paddler understands the challenges of paddling in areas of current and positions themselves appropriately. They can identify eddy lines, understand ferry angles, and demonstrate rescues and towing to move into a safe area.

Assessed Skills:

- **Awareness:** Demonstrates an understanding of tides and currents.
- **Reading Water and Boat Control:** Identifies the direction of flow and eddies. Paddles through currents in control.
- **Hazards:** Identifies hazards and positions themselves to avoid hazards.
- **Rescues:** Performs a self-rescue, an assisted rescue, and contact towing in current.

Venue Specific: Wind, Waves, and Surf

Level 3 Competency: The paddler understands the "why" behind increasing sea state (fetch, direction, duration, intensity) and how onshore and offshore winds affect paddling conditions. They can launch, land, and paddle under control through Level 3 wind, waves, and surf. They can self-rescue in the surf zone, perform assisted rescues, and tow where and when appropriate.

Assessed Skills:

- **Awareness:** Understands how onshore and offshore winds affect paddling conditions.
- **Tactics:** Applies strategies for paddling at various angles to the direction of the wind, waves, and surf.
- **Boat Control in Wind:** Can control their direction and maintain stability in wind.
- **Boat Control in Waves:** Can control the direction and maintain stability in waves.
- **Boat Control in Surf:** Can control their direction and maintain stability in the surf.
- **Rescues:** Performs a self-rescue, an assisted rescue, and contact towing in wind and waves.

Venue Specific: Rocky Shorelines

Level 3 Competency: The paddler understands the interaction of wind, waves, and current on immovable objects, hard surfaces, caves, and rocky shorelines and can assess associated risks. They maneuver around immovable objects (arches, buoys, pilings) in forward and reverse in Level 3 Conditions. They choose appropriate landings in rocky environments and perform appropriate rescues.

Assessed Skills:

- **Awareness:** Identifies hazards and landing areas on a map or chart.
- **Tactics:** Chooses appropriate landings and areas to play in the rocks.
- **Boat Control:** Maneuvers along rocky shorelines safely, effectively, and efficiently.

- **Rescues:** Performs a self-rescue, an assisted rescue, and contact towing close to rock features.

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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](#).