



Level 3: Surf Kayaking Skills Course

Skills Course Overview:

The Surf Kayaking Skills course is designed for paddlers with previous flat water or whitewater or surf experience wishing to experience surf kayaking using smaller, more maneuverable, and venue appropriate boats including sit-on-top kayaks (with or without thigh straps), whitewater kayaks, surf-specific kayaks, and wave-skis. The course introduces paddlers to the essentials of surf kayak technique and ocean safety considerations with an emphasis on fun.

Coastal kayaking surf skills are included in ACA Coastal Kayaking curriculum.

Course Objectives:

- Safety – Learn about the surf zone environment, surf etiquette, self-rescues and assisted rescues
- Skills – Introduce paddle strokes and techniques to catch and ride waves safely
- Fun – To promote the inherent enjoyment and rewards of paddling in the surf zone

Course Prerequisites:

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#)
- Completed a Level 2: Essentials of River Kayaking, Level 2: Essentials of Kayak Touring, or Level 2: Essentials of Surf Kayaking skills course, or possess equivalent skills and experience.

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

Sandy beach with moderate surf, mostly spilling waves with occasional steeper (plunging) waves during sets, with access to flat, protected water.

- Winds, if cross-shore or off-shore less than 10 knots, if on-shore less than 15 knots
- Waves less than 4 feet (1.2 meters)

Note: When selecting a venue, careful consideration should be given to hazards including other surfers, rip currents, long- shore drift, rocks, and human-made structures.

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 3: Surf Kayaking (or higher) ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

Succeeding Courses

- Level 4: Performance Surf Kayaking Skills or Certification Course.

Course Outline

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

- 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
- Life jacket 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

Personal Preparation:

- Swimming ability, water comfort and confidence
- Fitness, conditioning, and warm up including stretching

Equipment:

- Safe boat lifting, loading / unloading transport, and handling to and from water
- Surf kayak and wave-ski types, materials, outfitting, and nomenclature
- Kayak paddle design, selection and hand placement
- Personal thermal / uv protection and fit (wetsuit / dry suit, paddle jacket / dry top / paddle shorts / rash guard)
- PFD (life jacket) types and fit
- Helmet types and fit
- Group gear: first aid kit, throw rope, shelter

Essential Paddling Skills:

- Forward stroke: move kayak forward 200 yards maintaining a reasonably straight course
- Reverse stroke: paddle backwards over small waves with reasonable directional control

- Stopping strokes: stop the kayak from a good speed within one kayak length
- Forward and reverse sweeps: turn the kayak smoothly without losing momentum
- Edging: use edges with purpose and consistency during strokes and maneuvers
- Low brace: prevent capsize when off balance
- High brace: prevent capsize when off balance
- Stern rudder: use stern rudder to turn both toward and away from the blade side of the kayak to maintain a straight course
- Low brace turn: makes a turn of at least 90 degrees

Surf Zone Environment:

- Wave dynamics and beach characteristics
- Anatomy of surf zone and terminology: swash/backwash, soup zone, impact zone, outside
- Surf break – type of waves, height, period, wind effect, tide effect, sets, and lulls
- Weather, wind, water, and air temperature

Surf Zone Safety:

- Beach suitability: identify hazards including rips, longshore currents, other surfers, swimmers, other beach users
- Surf area, beach positioning, setting boundaries
- Introduction to surf etiquette and collision avoidance
- Surf zone safety skills: wet exits, swimming in surf, separation from kayak, control of free boat and use of grab loops / webbing tails, always staying ocean side of kayak
- Use of leashes – pros and cons

Surfing Skills and Techniques:

- Launching: positioning and timing, depth of water, side saddle technique (Sit-On-Top Kayaks)
- Holding position in the soup: bow to the waves, stern to the waves, parallel to the waves – bracing
- Paddle out: timing, reaching over the back of the wave, paddle position when punching through waves, using a rip
- Positioning: drift, sets, reading the water - previous waves, observation of other surfers
- Take off: waiting for waves, timing, upright posture, power forward stroke, straight / angled take off, late take off
- Riding the wave: diagonal run, stern rudder, changes of direction (head, torso, paddle, edge), prepare for broach
- Bottom turn (developing)
- Side surfing with intention and control

Conclusion & Wrap Up:

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

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