



Level 5: Advanced Performance Surf Kayaking Skills Course

Skills Course Overview:

The Advanced Performance Surf Kayaking course is designed for experienced kayakers seeking to develop their skills in dynamic surf using surf-specific kayaks and wave-skis. The focus is on safety and performance with the aim of maximizing fun and enjoyment.

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 4: Performance Surf Kayaking skills course or possess equivalent skills and experience.
- Having a reliable combat roll is strongly recommended.

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 break with significant surf, a mix of peeling waves and steep (plunging) waves during sets, with access to flat, protected water (if available).

- Winds, if cross-shore or off-shore less than 10 knots, if on-shore less than 20 knots
- Wave faces greater than 3 feet (1 meter) and less than 5 feet (1.5 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 5: Advanced Performance Surf Kayaking ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

Succeeding Courses:

- None

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 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
- Rolling: from non-set-up position
- Draw strokes: move kayak sideways with in-water and out-of-water recovery

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:

- Independent launching: positioning close to rip, timing sets and reach of swash / backwash Paddle out: “bunny hops”, using a rip, duck dive – rolling under (largest) waves
- Positioning: monitoring drift – use of ranges, sets, reading the water – traces from previous set waves, observation of other surfers
- Take off: wave selection, timing, sinking stern, straight/angled/late/faded take offs
- Riding the wave: staying close to power pocket: stalling, trimming, staying high
- Bottom turns: paddle out of the water
- Top turns: paddle on down wave side; head and body position, hull to the lip of the wave Roundhouse cut backs: head, torso, paddle, edge to edge, ramping off foam pile
- Re-entries: wave selection, timing, body and paddle position

- Floaters, aerials (set up)

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

© American Canoe Association

Date of last revision: 6/19/2024

<https://americancanoe.org>

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](#).