



Whitewater Raft Guide - Oar and Paddle

Certification Criteria

Certification Overview: This whitewater raft guide certification exam is intended to provide evidence of the **minimum** skills required to be a professional raft guide. It is based on national and international industry standards. The Guide Certification Criteria establishes standards in the topics of paddling and/or rowing, identifying hazards & routes in swift current, and an ability to safely captain a whitewater oar or paddle raft with participants. Difficulty levels correspond with the ACA Rafting skills and assessment curriculum of Levels 2 to 5 ranging from class I to IV whitewater.

The ACA guide certification complements any additional required training and or licensing. ACA certified guides must also comply with local, state or federal certification and licensing requirements for raft guides on any given country, state, river, or waterway.

Course Prerequisites: All participants must:

1. Acknowledge personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#)
2. Have an ACA Membership
3. Have completed one of the following;
 - a. ACA rafting skills and/or assessment course for desired level of certification or
 - b. Resume & river log documenting equivalent experience.
4. Have completed an ACA Swiftwater Rescue course or equivalent within the past three years.
5. Have current first aid/CPR

Course Location / Venue: Sections of river appropriate to the level of certification participants are seeking. May not exceed class IV. *In consistency with ACA language- L2 is conducted in class I water, L3 is conducted in class II water, L4 is conducted in class III water and L5 is conducted in class IV water. (A rapid class includes rapids at the lower and upper ends of the difficulty range, designated “-“ and “+” respectively.)*

Examiner: Certified L4 or L5 ACA Raft Instructor, Instructor Trainer or Instructor Trainer Educator with the Guide Certification Examiner Endorsement. (Only L5 examiners can certify guides at L5. Examiners can only certify guides in disciplines [paddle/oar] they are certified as L4 or higher in.)

Course Ratio: 6 students: 1 Instructor; with an additional instructor or qualified assistant the ratio can be 12 : 2, etc...

Certification Maintenance Requirements:

- Maintain annual ACA membership
- Maintain First Aid, CPR & SWR credentials

Course Content:

The sequence of examination and level of certification should be adjusted to best fit the participant’s needs, class location and time allowance.

Introduction, Expectations, & Logistics

- Welcome, introductions, paperwork
- Student & instructor course expectations and limitations
- Course itinerary & site logistics
- Review waiver, assumption of risk, challenge by choice, medical disclosure



Whitewater Raft Guide - Oar and Paddle

Certification Criteria

- About the ACA
- PFD policy (always wear on the water)
- Appropriate personal behavior
- No alcohol/substance abuse
- Proper etiquette on & off the water
- Respect private property
- Practice Leave No Trace ethics



Whitewater Raft Guide - Oar and Paddle

Certification Criteria

Raft Guide Certification Examination (RGCE)

Participant: _____ **ACA #** _____ **Date:** _____

Location and venue: _____

Rating: ✓ or *P - Passing, F - Fail/ Not Passing*

Guide Certification Candidates must be able to perform all strokes, maneuvers, rescues, and skills in the appropriate venue for up to 8 hours per day. In addition, the candidates must demonstrate the appropriate level of knowledge for this skill assessment level.

Guide exam does not need to be part of a guide school or used in conjunction with ACA Skills or Assessment Curriculum and can be run entirely as a stand-alone exam. It also can be given to any number of individuals from 1:1 all the way up to the ratios listed above.

During the entirety of the exam, Guide Certification Candidates must be consistently professional and demonstrate:

- Punctuality
- Courteousness
- Appropriately dressed and prepared
- Initiative
- Appropriate use of language/communication
- Strong work ethic
- Openness to learning & collaboration
- Appropriate personal behavior
- Etiquette on and off the water
- Sobriety/ no use of alcohol or drugs

Inability to manage oneself in a professional way will be cause for dismissal and exam failure.

Exam Checklist:

1. This form can be used for all Guide Certification Exams for Paddle and Oar. Not all tasks are required for both Oar and Paddle and are blacked out if not required.
2. This form can be used for all Guide Certification Exams for exam levels 2-5. Exams must be given in the appropriate venue. (eg: L4 = class III unless otherwise specified.)
3. The exam checklist contains information and tasks required of the guide candidate to pass the exam.
4. The exam checklist must be followed to ensure consistency across all exams and levels/classification.
5. Each requirement may be demonstrated through action, verbally or written assessments at the discretion of the examiner.

Exam Scoring -

1. Successful candidates must pass a minimum of 24 skills at a specific level in the discipline they are being evaluated in (oar/paddle) to receive certification at that level in that discipline.
 - a. More than four fails at any one level with passes at a lower level may qualify for certification at lower level.



Whitewater Raft Guide - Oar and Paddle

Certification Criteria

- b. More than four fails without passes at a lower level results in exam failure.
- c. The exam may be re-taken to re-attempt certification or certification at a higher level.

Exam Checklist:

Strokes & Maneuvers						
Oar	Paddle	Requirements - The following should be demonstrated consistently according to level of certification.	L2	L3	L4	L5
Stroke Demonstration						
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Crew Strokes: forward paddle, back paddle 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guide Strokes: draw 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guide Strokes: pry 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guide Strokes: sweep 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guide Strokes: rudder 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guide Strokes: raft J-stroke 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guide Strokes: push 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guide Strokes: pull 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guide Strokes: single oar turn 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guide Strokes: two oar turn 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guide Strokes: proper oar shipping (blades forward) 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Downstream oar awareness and management 				
Maneuver Demonstration						
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build and maintain momentum 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Slow, stop/reverse boat momentum 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish and maintain angles 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Execute basic maneuver: ferry 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Execute basic maneuver: eddy catch/peel out 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Execute basic maneuver: changing currents 				
Safety & Rescue						
Oar	Paddle		L2	L3	L4	L5
Raft Flip, Recovery & Swimming						
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rescue Priorities: locate & count guests, prioritize and coach to safety 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recover a flipped paddle raft in 90 seconds: timer starts when candidate touches/retrieves capsized raft (test can be conducted in moving current or flat water.) 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recover an oar raft*: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Swim boat to shore ○ Bulldoze boat shore (optional) <p>*Boat does not need to be flipped; if flipped it should be unloaded to minimize potential for injury</p>				



Whitewater Raft Guide - Oar and Paddle

Certification Criteria

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Swim with another swimmer to simulate downstream containment of a guest, coaching/assisting to safety (Venue should be a chute of water with deep, clean wave action, well-defined eddy lines and no immediate hazards or risks below.) 				
Pre-Trip Preparation						
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> River readiness: dress to swim/rescue: proper types and fit of PFD and helmet 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commercial Standard Safety Speech: know all parts and/or present to a group 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give a boat/paddle talk: teamwork & professional communication (paddling, paddle commands, highside, lean in/left/right, get down, etc...) 				

Hazard Evaluation and Judgment						
Oar	Paddle		L2	L3	L4	L5
Hazard Evaluation						
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and avoid <u>objective hazards</u> (e.g. strainers, sieves/undercuts, dangerous hydraulics, other boats, etc). 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and manage <u>subjective hazards</u> (e.g. proper use of personal safety equipment, human behaviors, playboating [i.e. rock splats,] sober boating, etc...) 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land Scout Rapids using a clear method – e.g. FORMS, WORMS, top-down/bottom-up 				
Judgment & Decision Making						
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Route Selection: Can identify low consequence vs high consequence routes for self and others 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timely Effective Appropriate: whistle, verbal, hand signals 				

Technical Knowledge & Skills						
Oar	Paddle		L2	L3	L4	L5
Technical Knowledge						
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Terminology: equipment, river orientation (e.g. river left, river right,) river features, strokes & maneuvers, etc... 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raft inflation & materials/design: equalizing baffles, atmospheric pressure changes due to sun, temps and elevation 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rigging to flip & minimizing entrapment 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lifting, carrying & stacking rafts 				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knots & Hitches: Securing raft to shore and trailer 				



Whitewater Raft Guide - Oar and Paddle

Certification Criteria

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bowline ○ Figure 8 on a bite & follow-through ○ Half hitch ○ Trucker's hitch 				
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Participant: _____ **ACA #** _____

Participant Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Location and venue: _____

FINAL ASSESSMENT		COMMENTS Areas of improvement and NEXT STEPS (Attach additional documents as needed)
Oar Level Assessed:	L2 L3 L4 L5	
POINTS:	PASS / FAIL	
Paddle Level Assessed:	L2 L3 L4 L5	
POINTS:	PASS / FAIL	
ASSESSOR		
<i>Assessor must be a currently certified ACA Instructor at or above this level.</i>		
IT or Instructor: _____		
Signature: _____		
ACA #: _____ Date: _____		
Assisting IT or Instructor: _____		
ACA #: _____		