



L5

ADVANCED OPEN WATER KAYAKER OVERVIEW

LEVEL 5 ADVANCED OPEN WATER KAYAKER is a competent paddler in incredibly dynamic environments exposed to difficult sea conditions. They can perform all of the following safely, effectively, and efficiently in a range of coastal environments including surf zones, rock gardens, sea caves, and areas with strong tidal currents with limited access to landings.

HANDLE THEIR KAYAK

Advanced open water kayakers can launch and land from a dock, beach, or rocky shore that might include high surf, winds, and waves. They can make progress, hold position, and turn upwind and downwind. They use strokes and maneuvers to make moves, shape courses, avoid hazards, and establish position. They fluently incorporate blade support and edging while performing in dynamic water and can consistently roll from set-up and non-setup positions.

RESCUE THEMSELVES AND ASSIST OTHERS BACK INTO THEIR KAYAK

Advanced open water kayakers can re-enter their kayak both assisted and unassisted. Solutions for unassisted deep water re-entry work in conditions and, when necessary, they can swim their kayak to an area of less risk. They are an active part of the solution, their choice of rescue is appropriate for the conditions, and they efficiently reassemble the paddling group.

TOW ANOTHER KAYAKER

Situations might include quickly moving a paddler to a safe zone, anchoring a kayak or a paddler in a safe zone, towing an incapacitated paddler in their kayak and over a distance, or towing a paddler who needs directional assistance.

HAVE A GENERAL KNOWLEDGE & UNDERSTANDING OF:

- **Awareness and Seamanship:** Advanced open water kayakers choose appropriate venues that are within the limits of the skills and experience of the group. They are aware of changing environmental conditions, other group members, and potential hazards and adapt plans as necessary. Advanced open water kayakers can lead when necessary, work proactively to support other leaders, and communicate with the group to make essential changes. They are properly equipped with a well-maintained sea kayak and the equipment to perform rescues and towing. They carry and know how to use equipment required to repair other people and their kayaks..
- **Incident Prevention and Management:** Advanced open water kayakers have an incident-prevention mindset on and off the water. They make good choices, communicate calmly, and work as part of a team. They know how to use a VHF radio to communicate with other vessels and hail the Coast Guard or other services when necessary.
- **Trip Planning and Navigation:** Advanced Open water kayakers successfully plan, plot, and paddle appropriate routes in L5 conditions and venues. They are comfortable navigating by chart and compass and have pulled together all the necessary forecasts to help them understand the conditions before they launch. They can plan for tidal waters and incorporate wind and waves into their trip plan. Advanced open water sea kayakers are well familiar with aids to navigation and the Nautical Rules of the road and paddle safely through areas of boat traffic.



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VENUES Advanced open water kayakers are exploring, learning, and playing in a wide variety of locations offering incredibly dynamic paddling environments with exposure to difficult sea conditions. They are able to develop skills in nearby waters to prepare them for taking an expedition, paddling in tide races, surf, or rock gardens and sea caves. **Paddlers who take an Level 5 Skills Assessment will be evaluated in two of the following venues:**

EXPEDITION

They can plan a multi-day trip on exposed coastlines, make appropriate decisions during the trip, and can perform skills in a laden kayak.

TIDE RACES

They know the features of a tide race, can perform rescues in the tide race, paddle through the race under control, and surf or play on tide race features.

SURF ZONE

They know the features of a surf zone, know the types and parts of a wave, can perform rescues, paddle through the surf zone in control as well as make dynamic surf maneuvers.

ROCK GARDENS AND SEA CAVES

They know the zones of a rock garden, can perform rescues and towing, paddle through rock gardens and sea caves in control, and make moves on dynamic features.

LEARN MORE

Want to learn more about kayaking in advanced venues and conditions?

- [ACA website](#)
The Education tab, can assist in finding courses (“Course Calendar”) and instructors (“Find an Instructor”).
- [ACA Level 5 Training Guidance resource](#)
gives suggestions on developing the skills of an open water kayaker.
- [ACA Level 5 Open Water Skills Assessment](#)
measure your progress as a paddler or qualify for a Level 5 Trip Leader training or Level 5 Instructor training.