

L4

**OPEN WATER TRAINING GUIDE**

**GOAL** To develop safe, effective, and efficient paddlers competent in venturing out in open water sea conditions.

**How** This guidance is structured around preparing paddlers for the Level 4 Open Water Skills Assessment but is open to those who just want to acquire paddling knowledge.

For example, you may want to be a rock star open water paddler, prepare for a trip, or simply have the most fun possible!

**LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

Either way, this guidance recommends skills you should develop as an open water paddler and what meets the standard for these skills for an Level 4 Skills Assessment. Provided are pointers, aspects to consider, and different approaches to developing as an open water sea kayaker. You will find the best solution for your boat/body/paddle combination through training and practice.

Open water paddling skills are built on a foundation constructed at preceding levels and in more protected waters. You are preparing to paddle in rock gardens and sea caves, in the surf, through tide races, or on an expedition in winds that can be as strong as 20 knots, seas and surf up to 4 feet, and tidal currents up to 4 knots. Training to kayak in open water takes many forms, and it is unlikely that you will cover all the material in a single course. You should work with various ACA Level 4 and Level 5 Instructors to combine formal training, structured practice, and time in your kayak exploring destinations near and far! If you plan to participate in an ACA course, you must read and acknowledge the **Essential Eligibility Criteria** before attending.

**CORE SKILLS**

What is at the center of your open water sea kayaking ability? Your mindset? Your ability to move the kayak around? Perhaps it's the rescue skills you have practiced or your ability to roll every time. Maybe it is your understanding of charts and interpretation of weather systems. The answer, they all matter.

The following skills and attributes form the core of your ability to handle open water conditions and are transferable wherever you want to paddle.

No matter where you launch your sea kayak, these skills will serve you well in open water. In an L4 Open Water Skills Assessment, you will be asked to do all of them!

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L4

CORE SKILLS

**BOAT HANDLING** To be an open water paddler, you'll need to use strokes and maneuvers to move purposefully in the surf, tide races, wind, waves, and following seas. Each skill is not separate, and you will blend strokes and link maneuvers to do what is needed at the moment. Support from the blade becomes natural and reflexive, something you do without thinking, as waves, eddylines, and strong winds may require momentary support or roll up spontaneously! Here are some skills to work on while handling your kayak in Level 4 (L4) conditions.

**Make progress and hold your position in wind and waves.** Be able to use forward and reverse paddling to maintain directional control, hold your position relative to a position fix, and accelerate to catch a wave.

- Pay attention to landmarks to the sides, forward, and aft of your kayak. Knowing your current and intended position is critical.
- The forward and reverse strokes you have been practicing and working to increase their effectiveness and efficiency matter in L4 conditions.
- Experiment with varying paddle shaft, blade angle, and stroke timing and cadence.

**Turn upwind and downwind efficiently.** Be able to combine strokes, change speed, and alter edging to make efficient turns in the wind.

- Think about the design of your kayak and how it wants to turn when you paddle in beam seas.
- Explore different placements of rudders at the bow and stern and upwind and downwind sides of your kayak.
- Experiment with varying speeds and accentuating rudders by combining sweep strokes and edging.

**Reach a target using forward and reverse paddling.** Be able to maintain directional control, paddling forward and reverse to reach your intended target.

- Efficient and well-timed strokes can drive you to your target.
- Yes, you can get there going forward. How about in reverse?

**Shape a course and avoid hazards with effective sweep strokes.** Be able to avoid hazards and maneuver around obstacles with a combination of efficient sweep and propulsion strokes.

- Experiment with paddling around obstacles using as few strokes as possible when paddling forward and reverse.
- How many well-timed, well-chosen, and well-placed strokes do you need to make that move?

**BOAT HANDLING** cont'd

**Turn and maintain course by ruddering at the bow, midship, and stern.** Be able to turn both towards and away from the blade using bow and stern rudders

- Be able to maintain your intended direction with rudders at various positions alongside your kayak.
- Explore edging both towards and away from the blade.
- Experiment with rudders at the bow, cross-bow, midship, and stern positions. Vary your shaft and blade angle to achieve different results.

**Move the kayak laterally with static and dynamic draws.** Be able to avoid obstacles and move your kayak sideways to an intended target, both with and without momentum.

- Face your work and look where you want to go! All effective sideways movement involves this simple step.
- Vertical paddle shafts equal movement, but you may need some blade support in bumpy water.

**Maintain stability.** Be able to maintain stability with blade support, recover when stability is lost, and keep your momentum when needing support on the move.

- On a wave or crossing an eddyline, more edge means more fun!
- A stout low brace can mitigate even a big wave's impact, but high braces can be safe too.
- Your blade supports you each time it enters the water.

**Roll the kayak from setup and non-setup positions.** Be able to roll your kayak on a preferred side.

- Work from set-up and non-setup positions on both sides, but you'll definitely need to dial in one side.

**What's Next?** Doing all of the above while displaying a significant degree of comfort and efficiency and rolling up on either side of the kayak is the level of skill expected of Level 4 Trip Leaders and Instructors. Not a professional? That's okay; it means you're on your way to the next step – Level 5 Advanced Open Water!





**RESCUES & TOWING** A paddler who has honed their rescue skills is an asset to their team. You have been working to develop a quiver full of rescues and towing configurations, and now it is time to draw the most effective one when it matters! What is a good choice for someone capsized in the surf versus inside a sea arch? And what happens when you come out of your kayak in dynamic water? Here are the rescue and towing skills you should work on to be an asset to other paddlers in Level 4 conditions.

**Know the rescue priorities and apply them**

**appropriately Know** the priorities and sequence of rescuing a swimmer.

- The priority is the paddler; make sure they are “ok” and they are safe. Once the paddler is safe, retrieve their kayak, followed by their gear.
- Knowing the sequence of rescue options will increase your safety.
- Know the mantra “talk, reach, throw, row, go.”

**Help an able swimmer re-enter their kayak with a Side-by-Side, Scoop, Swimmer Carry, or T-Rescue. Be able to**

perform a rescue appropriate for the situation and move the rescue to a position of less risk when necessary.

- You should be familiar with all of these rescues and able to use one of them effectively in L4 conditions.
- Keeping the swimmer connected is critical.
- Stay aware of what’s happening around you and decide if you need to move the rescue to a less dynamic area such as an eddy, safe zone, or outside the break.

**Put an impaired swimmer back into their kayak with a Scoop, Unresponsive Paddler, or Swimmer Deck Carry Rescue. Be able to**

perform a rescue appropriate for the situation and move the rescue to a position of less risk when necessary.

- You should be familiar with all of these rescues and able to use one of them effectively in L4 conditions.
- Each of these techniques will help you in different situations. Practice them all to be prepared for what comes your way.

**Get back into your kayak unassisted with a Re-Enter and Roll, Paddle Float, or Scramble**

**Rescue. Be able to** re-enter your kayak without the assistance of another paddler and then move to a place where you can get sorted out.

- You should be familiar with all of these rescues and able to use one of them effectively in L4 conditions.
- Staying connected to your kayak and gear and moving intentionally is critical. Remember, slow is steady, and steady is smooth.
- Stay aware of your surroundings. Move to a less dynamic area such as an eddy, safe zone, or outside the break.

**Be an active swimmer – help them help you when you come out of your kayak. Be able to**

maintain contact with your kayak and paddle, flip your kayak right-side up for the rescuer, move to the bow of your kayak, and await the rescuer’s instructions.

- Ensure any gear on your deck or in your cockpit is secured. When you come out of your kayak, you only have to keep a hold on your kayak and paddle.
- Re-enter your kayak or look for a teammate. When a teammate approaches, flip the kayak upright and help them make contact with your kayak.
- Work actively to be part of the solution.

**RESCUES & TOWING** cont'd**Position or reposition a kayak using your towline with an In-Line, Rafted In-Line, or Anchor Tow. Be able to**

set up a towing configuration appropriate for the situation and move the kayaks to a position of less risk.

- You should be familiar with all of these towing configurations and able to use one of them effectively in L4 conditions.

**Move a kayak using a Contact Tow, Bulldozing, or Toggle Tow without your towline. Be able to**

choose an appropriate technique for the situation and move the rescue to a position of less risk.

- You should be familiar with all of these techniques and able to use one of them effectively in L4 conditions.

**Manage your tow system before, during, and after towing. Be able to**

deploy your tow system cleanly, maintain personal safety, release your tow system while underway, and quickly stow your tow line.

- Bring the kayak to be towed under control, connect securely, and quickly move away to engage the rope and get clear of the towed kayak(s).
- Deploy a proper amount of line for the conditions. You'll want less rope when towing into the wind and more when paddling in the seas.
- Be prepared to release the tow system when it presents a high risk to you. Once towing is completed, stow your rope quickly and in a manner that it will release cleanly in the future.

**Reconnect a paddler separated from their kayak. Be able to**

connect a swimming paddler to their kayak if they become separated.

- Move with awareness and a sense of urgency. Kayaks and swimmers quickly separate in L4 conditions.
- Connecting the kayak to the paddler is generally quicker and easier than the other way around.

**Assist a paddler's recovery from capsize by presenting your kayak or paddle. Be able to**

move your kayak into position and maintain position while the paddler uses your kayak or paddle to right themself.

- Move with a sense of urgency and an awareness of the paddler's position. Waving hands means they are ready for you.
- Approach under control and connect your kayak or paddle shaft with their hand.
- Any part of your kayak, as well as a properly placed paddle shaft, can be used by the paddler to right themself. Once you make contact, stay connected until they are sorted and ready to go.

**What's Next?** The above, while maintaining presence of mind and flexibility to adapt to the situation, is what is expected of Level 4 Trip Leaders and Instructors. Level 4 professionals own more than one technique for rescue and towing situations. Not a professional? That's okay; it means you're on your way to the next step - Level 5 Advanced Open Water!



**AWARENESS & SEAMANSHIP** Paddling on exposed coastlines requires a high level of knowledge and awareness. As you venture into dynamic waters, you will be presented with decisions affecting the safety and well-being of yourself and your group. Your skills and knowledge will keep you safer. Your interpersonal skills will keep you connected to other paddlers. Your equipment should let you go farther and play harder. Here are the awareness and seamanship concepts you should develop to be an asset to other paddlers in Level 4 conditions.

**Understand how your outing will be affected by the interaction between conditions and land masses.** **Know** how wind, waves, tides, and currents will increase the level of challenge when they interact with the seabed and shoreline.

**Treat the environment with respect by following LNT Principles and marine wildlife viewing guidelines.** You follow best practices as outlined in the [Leave No Trace Principles](#) and the [NOAA Marine Wildlife Viewing Guidelines](#).

**Know the causes, prevention, recognition, and treatment of health issues created by exposure to cold.** **Know** how to prevent hypothermia. When you see signs and symptoms, treat them if you can. Know when and how to call Emergency Medical Services.

**Know the causes, prevention, recognition, and treatment of health issues created by exposure to heat.** **Know** how to prevent hyperthermia and various heated related illnesses. When you see signs and symptoms, treat them, and know when to call Emergency Medical Services.

**Make decisions based on the capability of the group.** **Know** your limits and the limits of those you are paddling with. Your route choices and trip decisions should keep everyone within their limitations.

- Open water is a dynamic environment. Conditions will change based on the water's height, current speed, wind direction, wave period, and a host of other factors. Spend time on the water with those who have been there and done that. Let their experience build your knowledge.
- Learn what the surface of the water is doing and how the surface changes as the environmental conditions change. Note how the changes in wind, waves, tides, currents, and the shore nearby change, as any of these conditions' changes. How do they change over time?
- Familiarize yourself with both of these guidelines, easily found online.
- Be an ambassador for sea kayaking, providing a stellar example and raising awareness with others.
- Familiarize yourself with cold-related health issues common to sea kayaking. Taking a wilderness medical course is a great way to obtain experience with these issues.
- Warm sugary drinks, a quick snack, and storm cags have helped many sea kayakers stave off hypothermia. A change of clothing at the ready is also a top priority.
- Familiarize yourself with heat-related health issues common to sea kayaking. Taking a wilderness medical course is a great way to level up.
- Make sure you and those you paddle with stay hydrated. Plan a route that provides rest breaks in the shade. Use sunblock, appropriate clothing, sunglasses, and a wide-brimmed hat to provide protection.
- You need a solid team to paddle safely in L4 venues and conditions. Know your teammates' strengths and areas needing support. It's only fun if everyone is having fun.
- Make decisions that have you returning home happy and healthy. There's more fun to be had on the next trip.

**AWARENESS & SEAMANSHIP** cont'd**Paddle as a cohesive member of the group.**

**Be able to** position yourself in a place that is useful to the group, maintain line-of-sight with group members to the extent possible, stay aware of hazards, and communicate effectively.

**Keep your kayak in proper working order and**

**know how to use your kit.** Your kayak should be well-maintained for paddling on exposed coastlines and have proper decklines and rigging.

**Know how to pack your kayak so it is trimmed**

**properly.** Your kayak should be packed in a manner that allows easy access to what you may need while paddling and trimmed so that it does not negatively affect your performance.

**Perform repairs so you can paddle back to the**

**landing.** You should have a repair kit with the items you may need to perform field repairs and potentially catastrophic repairs on the water.

**Carry appropriate signaling devices.**

You should carry the signaling devices required by the Coast Guard. Required means mandatory.

**Tie some “go-to” knots.**

You should be able to tie a Bowline, Clove Hitch, Figure 8, and Trucker’s Hitch.

- What started in mountaineering has gained acceptance in sea kayaking – C.L.A.P. Communication, Line of Sight, Awareness, and Positioning. Learn how it applies to groups on the sea.
- Paddling formations and positions of usefulness are dependent on the situation, place, and people. Cohesive means connected and unified as a team.
- Your kit should be accessible and the right choice for what you may need to do on the water.
- Your kayak should be in good condition, with floatation, lines, fittings, and rigging in good order.
- You should have access to the gear you may need and your water, without opening the bow and stern hatches.
- You should have the proper amount and distribution of equipment in your kayak.
- Equipment placement allows quick access to gear needed on the water and does not hinder your ability to maneuver the kayak.
- Small waterproof containers and water bottles make great homemade repair kit and first aid kit housings.
- Have what you need to fix your rudder or skeg, replace a blown hatch, make simple structural repairs, and adjust a seat back and foot pedals. Don’t forget to have what you need to repair gaskets or other damage to your outerwear. Be able to make simple “people repairs” in your first aid kit.
- VHF radio
- Whistle
- White light
- Mirror
- Flares
- Know how to use these signaling devices properly.
- Know how to call and signal another vessel during the day or night.
- Do not tie a lot because you are clueless about (basic) knots! Written and visual tutorials are available from a wide variety of sources.

**What’s Next?** Level 4 Trip Leaders have a high level of awareness and put their seamanship to use leading others on paddles in Level 4 conditions. Level 4 Instructors use their wisdom to teach and develop other open water sea kayakers. Not a professional? The more you know, the safer you are and the more fun you can have!



**INCIDENT PREVENTION & MANAGEMENT** Does stuff happen? Not if you can help it. You know that staying safe is a mindset, and most issues can be prevented before they become an incident. Your approach to safety starts before you get to the water and continues until you return home. In case of an emergency, you have a quiver of rescue skills, are calm under pressure, and work with your team to solve the problem. Here are the skills needed to keep your plan on track and prepare for when things go wrong.

**Safely transport and carry your kayak. Know** how to properly secure your kayak to a vehicle's roof rack or a trailer. You unload and carry kayaks in a manner that keeps you and others safe.

- You could kill someone with that kayak. Have a properly secured roof rack or trailer, and use good straps or rope with well-tied knots. Always, always, always use bow and stern lines on rooftop kayaks.
- Load and unload your kayak in a way that does not ruin your day, your auto, your body, your friends, or innocent by-standers.

**Participate in pre and post-trip debrief sessions. Be** engaged in planning your day on the water and active and supportive in wrapping up the day

- Participate in planning the day. Contributing group members are well familiar with the planned trip details and do not rely on a leader for information.
- Debriefing the events that happened during your trip is an essential part of growth and development for you and your paddling team.

**Launch and land in a safe manner. Be able** to launch and land in L4 conditions.

- Practice launching in challenging conditions - surf, rocky shorelines, and current.
- Emphasize safe positioning of your body to the seaside of the kayak when near shore.

**Communicate with a calm demeanor. Be able** to keep a cool head and communicate in a well-received manner that promotes an efficient rescue.

- How you communicate is essential. Does your style of communication facilitate an effective solution to the problem at hand? If so, good. Is everyone still friends at the end of the day? If so, good.

**Work as part of a team to perform rescues. Be** actively engaged in the rescue effort, whether taking direction or leading the team.

- You may be called to take the lead or support the team. Whatever the case, be a part of the solution and work together to get it done.
- You are solution-oriented, and capable, and help move the rescue to an area of less risk when necessary.

**Use a VHF radio to hail another vessel or the Coast Guard. You should Know** how to check the weather and use proper etiquette and language when communicating with a VHF radio.

- Have access to your VHF radio when on the water.
- Know how to switch channels and use the features (for example, scanning and weather watch) of your radio.
- Know how to contact another vessel or the Coast Guard and when, and how, to make "securite," "pan-pan," and "mayday" calls.





**TRIP PLANNING & NAVIGATION** Plan your paddle and paddle your plan. Paddling along exposed coastlines in Level 4 conditions is no simple matter. To be successful you must keep all the factors in mind. Here are the trip planning and navigation skills you should be comfortable with when planning an open-water trip.

**Gather and utilize appropriate forecasts. Be able to gather pertinent weather, surf, and tidal data.**

- Know what resources are useful for the location and gather important information, such as wind direction and speed, swell height and period, surf height, high and low water times, max and slack times, rate of tidal flow, and general weather forecast information.
- Have the information at hand – remember it or write it down on waterproof paper or your deck.

**Combine chart work and weather forecast information to plan a trip. Be able to pull together pertinent weather, surf, and tidal data and factor the information into your trip plan.**

- Use your chart, local knowledge, and the data you have gathered to build a forecast model of conditions you will likely experience along your route.
- Let the data and your forecast model inform your trip planning choices.

**Incorporate wind, waves, and swell into your trip plan. Be able to use wind, swell, and surf forecasts when planning a trip and then adjust your plan based on actual conditions.**

- Understand how wind direction and speed, and swell direction, height, and period will likely affect conditions along your planned route.
- Make good decisions based on your planning and what you are experiencing while on the water.

**Figure out the depth of the water along your route. You should know how to determine the water depth using soundings on a nautical chart and tide chart/log.**

- Tide apps are cool but also learn how to use the “Rule of Twelfths” to be a true master of open water navigation.
- Understand how the water’s depth will change the conditions’ character at various points along your route.
- Make good decisions based on your planning and what you are experiencing while on the water.

**Figure out the amount of tidal drift you’ll experience along your route.**

**You should know** how to figure out how much you will drift when paddling with, against, or across tidal current over a specified amount of time.

- Tide apps are cool but also learn how to use the “Rule of Thirds” to be a true master of open water navigation.
- Combine dead reckoning with drift calculations to reach intended locations along your paddling route.
- Make good decisions based on your planning and what you are experiencing while on the water.

**TRIP PLANNING & NAVIGATION** cont'd

**Navigate by chart and compass to paddle a course.** Be able to paddle your planned route using a chart and compass.

- You've done all the planning; now transfer the planning to your desktop chart.
- Use deck-mounted and handheld compasses to find your way.
- GPS is a fine tool but only as a backup to navigating by chart and compass.

**Know your location at all times.**

You should **always** know where you are.

- If you have to figure out your location, you do not know where you are.
- Be future-minded about the position fixes ahead and how long it should take to reach those points.

**Know the signs and know the rules.**

You should know the system of buoyage, common aids to navigation, Nautical Rules of the Road, and how to paddle safely in boat traffic.

- Familiarize yourself with the system of buoyage and symbols on your chart. If something is unfamiliar, look it up.
- Familiarize yourself with how to paddle in relation to aids to navigation and other boats. The "rule of gross tonnage" and a "defensive paddling" mindset are critical.

**What's Next?** Level 4 Trip Leaders are expected to use these skills to lead a group in open water successfully. Level 4 Instructors are expected to be able to teach these skills to paddlers. Not a professional? That is okay; there is more to learn on your way to Level 5 Advanced Open Water. Paddling in fog, navigating in darkness using aids to navigation, and planning more complex crossing of tidal waters are skills to work on as you level up!

**VENUE SPECIFIC SKILLS**

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**WHERE ARE YOU PADDLING?** It's a big, wonderful world full of fascinating places to take a sea kayak. When you have a solid core of skills and knowledge, the seas are full of oysters. We learn to kayak for various reasons, and we have our motivations to venture into dynamic waters. For some, the thrill of riding a wave cannot be beat. Some are entranced by the pulse of the tides textured by waves and wind. For others, it is the adventure of loading up our kayak with the gear that would have gone into our backpacks and setting off to escape it all. No matter your preference, proficiency in any of the four venues makes you an open-water sea kayaker. If you take an Level 4 Skills Assessment, you will be tested in one of these four content categories.

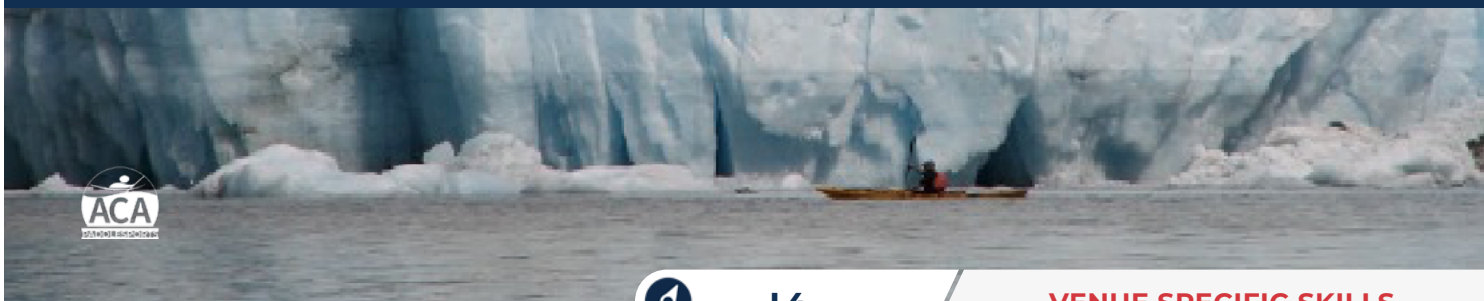
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## VENUE SPECIFIC SKILLS

**EXPEDITION PADDLING** Use your knowledge and experience to plan a journey grappling with the elements - wind, waves, surf, or tide races. Landings are not constantly available, but you choose the ones that set you up for success when it's time to launch on the next day. You understand that your approach to the day affects how you feel on the days ahead and you adjust the plan when necessary. Here are the skills and concepts to develop to journey on exposed coastlines comfortably.

**Gain experience with overnight kayaking trips.**

**You should have** prior experience with kayak camping trips. The more trips you have done, the better. The more places you've paddled, the better. The wider variety of conditions you have experienced, the better.

- While not required, keeping a paper log or online journal of your expeditions is a fun way to remember your trips and measure your progress as an expedition sea kayaker.
- How you approach your time in camp is critical to the success of your trip. Your camping equipment, food, amount of rest, efficiency of set-up and tear-down, and loading of kayaks all affect how you perform on the water.

**Plan a multi-day trip along an exposed section of coastline. Be able to** pull together planning resources pertinent to the trip. Consider the breadth of the trip in your plan.

- Times and distances should be within the collective capabilities of the group.
- You are paddling on a coastline exposed to the full elements of the sea so you should have "go, no go" decision points and contingency plans.
- The places you choose to land should set you up to successfully launch the next day.

**Make appropriate decisions during the trip.**

**Be able to** Make a route plan that is realistic for all members of the group, and you should make decisions that keep the whole group safe.

- Efficient and well-timed strokes can drive you to your target.
- Yes, you can get there going forward. How about in reverse?

**Shape a course and avoid hazards with effective sweep strokes. Be able to** avoid hazards and maneuver around obstacles with a combination of efficient sweep and propulsion strokes.

- Become observant of changes. Changes in the environment, as well as changes in the group members. What are the changes telling you? You may need to re-think your plans, and alter if necessary by making and understanding these observations.
- When you made the trip plan, you should have made a "plan B", maybe a "plan C" or more. It is better to make such contingency plans before they become necessary.

**EXPEDITION PADDLING** cont'd**Have the right equipment.**

**You should have** the appropriate equipment to take care of yourself on and off the water.

- Having the proper, well-maintained equipment in your “kit” is vital to a safe and successful expedition.
- Knowing how to use that equipment properly and having it accessible when you need it, is just as important as having the equipment.

**Perform in L4 conditions with a heavy kayak. Be able to** handle your kayak, perform rescues, and tow with a fully laden kayak.

- Before heading out on an expedition, practice paddling in conditions with your kayak fully loaded. Perform all the strokes, maneuvers, rescues, and towing. Now is the time to take note of the difference in performance.
- While you are practicing the paddling of your packed kayak, note the trim. Is it different from paddling without your gear? Is it off balance? Now is the time to sort these things out.

**What's Next?** Level 4 Trip Leaders use these skills when guiding or leading others on a trip. Level 4 Instructors are expected to be able to teach these skills to other kayakers. Not a professional? That is ok; you now know how to prepare to be an open-water expedition paddler.





**TIDE RACES** Watching the videos of kayakers gliding through moving water produces a “wow” factor in many of us. Their ability to control their path in a tide race or current comes after developing a solid knowledge and skill set. Here are the skills and concepts to develop your journey in moving waters on the seas.

**Know features found in tide races.**

**Be able to** identify areas of downstream flow, eddies, eddylines, and waves.

- How does the race work on the ebb versus the flood, and how does it change as it goes from slack to max flow?
- While each tide race is unique, they all share common features. What is the direction of flow, and where does that flow become obstructed?

**Paddle a downstream course through**

**the tide race. Be able to** maintain control paddling down the tide race, using eddies to control your descent.

- Become reflexive in your movements.
- Use the features presented to you to paddle down a tide race in control.

**Paddle back to the top of the race.**

**Be able to** choose a route back to the top of the race.

- Your route should use upstream flow in eddies and surfing to move upstream efficiently.
- Know your tide times and how they will affect the flow.
- The features you used paddling downstream are still there; use them to paddle upstream.

**Break in and out of eddies. Be able**

**to** maintain control and stability when performing eddy turns.

- Visualize your line. Where do you want to cross the eddyline, and where should you be to make that happen?
- Your angle of approach helps determine how quickly you turn.
- How fast is the current moving? How fast should you be moving?

**Ferry into another eddy or to a target.**

**Be able to** maintain your angle and reach the target.

**Perform rescues and towing and move the rescue when necessary**

**Be able to** reach the rescue and perform the rescue efficiently.

- In the event of self-rescue, get it done. Now move the rescue into the closest eddy so you do not float out to sea.
- Use a progression to develop your rescue and towing skills in tide races and currents.
- Practice, practice, practice! Remain comfortable, confident, and in control.

**What's Next?** Play! You have moved through the race in control; now it is time to amp up the fun and surf those beautiful race waves. Make attainment moves! You must dial in your angle, speed, and stroke choices and use some fancy timing to surf a wave upstream to the next eddy. A reverse ferry glide is a fun and tricky skill to practice. Dial in these skills, and you are stepping up towards Level 5. Level 4 Trip Leaders and Instructors - you should have these tide race skills dialed in!



**SURF ZONE** Remaining in control in the surf zone requires comfort and confidence. Here are some of the skills and concepts that will aid you in developing your surf zone skills.

**Know the features of the surf zone. Be able to** identify the soup zone, impact zone, the outside, rip currents, and longshore currents.

- The “surf zone” contains many features. Learn to recognize them and what their effects are on your paddling within them.
- Starting in L3 surf, practice capsizes and rescues in the various surf zones.
- After becoming confident in the L3 surf, progress in increments until you are at the upper limit of the venue for L4. Practice until you are comfortable and confident of your ability to paddle in the surf zone.

**Know the types and parts of the wave.**

**Be able to** tell the difference between spilling and dumping waves and identify the wave’s trough, face, and crest.

- Using mild waves, become knowledgeable about waves. Be able to identify the types of waves and the parts of a wave.
- Practice paddling in smaller waves, in different types of waves, and the different parts of a wave. Take note of the effects that different waves and places on the wave have on your paddling. Learn where you want to be and where you do not want to be.
- After practicing in smaller waves, progress to larger waves in increments until you are at the upper limit of the venue for L4. Practice until you are comfortable and confident of your ability to paddle in the surf zone.

**Be familiar with surf etiquette and be polite to other surfers. Know how to**

behave in the surf zone and ensure the safety of others with your actions.

- There are likely to be others surfing the waves with you. Everyone has the right to be there whether a board surfer, SUP surfer, or kayak surfer. Respect begets respect.
- If you are new to the area, observe the etiquette displayed by those present. Do the board surfers have an area separate from the kayak surfers? Respect the established protocols.

**Launch and land in control. Be able to**

Independently launch in control and land without surfing.

- In launching and landing, timing is critical. Do not rush it. Take the time to learn the wave pattern. Waves are somewhat predictable. Observe before doing.
- Observe what the others are doing and with what results.
- Practice small and increase the size as you become comfortable and confident.

**SURF ZONE** cont'd

**Paddle a route from the beach to the outside. Be able to** identify a route and use appropriate timing to paddle through the surf zone to the outside.

- Identify larger sets of waves to avoid and time your route to make your run on a smaller set.
- Observe what other users are present on the water and along the shore, and plan your route to avoid close contact with them.
- Consider staying seaside of the crest, paddling in on the back of the wave. This is a valuable skill for paddling powerful waves. Paddling on the back of a wave will keep you in control and lessen the likelihood of a capsize.

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**Maintain control when side surfed.**

**Be able to** maintain balance and control so you do not run into another person.

- You have ended up parallel to the wave. Your ride could have been better but now you have to regain control. Be present, establish your edge, and try to gain forward momentum.
- Practice side-surfing on small waves at a nice sandy beach. Start small and grow your comfort and confidence. Progress up the ladder to larger waves as your skill advances.
- If you become a hazard to other kayakers and beachgoers, capsize. When you capsize, you most likely will fall off the wave face.

**Choose your direction of travel on a wave and exit it under control. Be able to** establish a position high on the wave, choose which direction you will move, and exit the wave before being broached.

- Before heading out on an expedition, practice paddling in conditions with your kayak fully loaded. Perform all the strokes, maneuvers, rescues, and towing. Now is the time to take note of the difference in performance.
- While you are practicing the paddling of your packed kayak, note the trim. Is it different from paddling without your gear? Is it off balance? Now is the time to sort these things out.

**What's Next?** Play! You have moved through the surf zone in control. Now it is time to amplify the fun and surf those beautiful spilling waves. Dial in these skills, and you are stepping up towards Level 5. Level 4 Trip Leaders and Instructors - you should get these surf zone skills dialed in!



**ROCK GARDENS & SEA CAVES** Remaining in control when paddling in rock gardens and sea caves is, in many ways, the ultimate in paddling in unfriendly, yet exciting environments. Doing so requires the ultimate comfort and confidence in a challenging paddling environment. Here are some of the skills and concepts that will aid you in developing your rock garden and sea cave skills and increase your comfort and confidence.

**Know the zones and features of a Rock Garden.**

**Be able to** identify safe zones, transition zones, danger zones, and play features.

- in the preceding venues, there are safe, transition, danger, and playtime zones (features)! Take the time to study the charts of the area to identify potential areas where rock gardens may be located. By identifying these areas on the charts and overlaying them with the effects of the wind, wave, and tidal forecasts, you will develop an idea of what they may look like at a given time. Be sure to look at the water depths and how they may change with the ebb and flood of the tide.
- When available, consult with local knowledge to validate your predictions on what are likely to be the conditions for the areas you have identified.
- Is this your first time paddling in a particular area? If so, do a scouting paddle to the area to check things out. Make a note of the conditions present, particularly the wind and tidal status at the time of your observations.

**Be appropriately equipped for rock gardening.**

**You should have** a kayak and gear setup must be suitable for paddling rock gardens. Your kayak should be one you know very well and are comfortable using in challenging conditions. And one that you have a mastery of skills in.

- Other equipment necessary for rock gardening includes appropriate paddles. Your paddles should be ones that you are familiar with, and have the proper degree of ruggedness to serve you while paddling in the rock garden; your spare should be just as good as your primary. Wearing a helmet is very important. And having the proper rescue, towing, first aid, and repair kits are necessary as well.

**Traverse rock garden zones safely. Be able to** paddle through the zones of a rock garden and utilize timing, strokes, and features to stay on your intended course.

- From the safe zone, observe the flow through the playtime zone. Note the timing of the water flowing through and where it “flushes” to. Ask yourself, “what happens if I capsize?” If I lose contact with my kayak, where does it “flush” to? Will I be able to regain contact on my own, or will I need an assist from one of my teammates?

**Run play features. Be able to** choose features with a high level of reward and a low level of risk and run those features in control of your kayak.

- Begin with the simple features, and gain confidence in your ability and that of your team. Having this confidence will increase your comfort, making you less tense, which enables you to control your kayak better.
- Work your way up to the more challenging features. If not today, the next time after getting warmed up.
- Have fun!!!



**ROCK GARDENS & SEAS CAVES** cont'd

**Explore sea caves. Be able to** decide if a cave is suitable for exploration.

- Take into consideration all the features of the cave, as well as the environment. Waves and tides are significant factors to consider. Knowing what you know from your study of the information available (charts, tide tables, weather forecasts, and what the “locals” are telling you), you will need to make a “go/no go” decision.
- Error on the side of caution! The last place you want to be is in a sea cave with a low roof at slack tide plus 2 hours when the tide is flooding. Or, when a huge wave comes rolling in.

**Perform rescues and towing and move the rescue when necessary. Be able to** reach the rescue and perform the rescue efficiently.

- If a self-rescue, get it done.
- You must understand when the risk exceeds the reward and make the right choice.

**What's Next?** Play! You have paddled to the rock garden, and a couple of sea caves are nearby! Now it is time to amp up the fun and paddle with these wonderful features that mother nature, at her best, has provided! Dial in these skills, and you are stepping up towards Level 5. Level 4 Trip Leaders, you are leading along rocky coastlines. Level 4 Instructors - You teach the foundation concepts and skills for rock gardening success!

