



Level 3: Sit-On-Top River Kayaking Skills Course

Course Overview

The Sit-On-Top River Kayaking course is a program emphasizing safety, enjoyment and skill acquisition for entry-level through intermediate individuals in public, private and commercial settings.

Note: This course is designed for sit-on-top (SOT) kayaks only and this curriculum is meant to highlight this design. Participants should understand that paddling and rescuing decked kayaks requires additional and separate instruction. Bulkheads are not required; however, some form of flotation must be present to keep the kayak from sinking such as flotation built within the kayak's hull.

Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- No prior paddling experience or training is required to participate in this course.

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

Sections of rivers rated up to and including class I-II, where limited maneuvering in current is required to avoid obstacles.

A rapid class includes rapids at the lower and upper ends of the difficulty range, designated "-" and "+" respectively.

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: Sit-On-Top River Kayaking or Level 3: River Kayaking (or higher) ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

Succeeding Courses

- Level 3: Sit-On-Top River Kayaking Skills Assessment
- Level 3: River Kayaking Skills Course

- Level 2: Essentials of Sit-On-Top Kayak Touring Skills Course
- Level 3: Sit-On-Top Coastal Kayaking Skills Course

Course Outline

The following is a general summary of course content for the Sit-On-Top River Kayaking skills course. The content covered and sequence of instruction should be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location and time allowance.

Introduction, Expectations, and Logistics

- 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

Paddling Environment

- Wind
- Waves
- Weather
- Water

Personal Preparation

- Personal ability
- Swimming ability
- Water comfort and confidence
- Fitness, conditioning, and warm up
- Safe paddle and boat handling
- Safety and rescue considerations
- Personal equipment (reviewed by Instructor)
- Judgment. In addition to learning hard skills, the importance of developing personal judgment and group responsibility increases on more difficult paddling venues.

Getting Started

- Launching, carries, landing
- Securing kayak for transport using proper tie downs, straps, or knots (figure 8 or bowline, truckers hitch, and 2 half hitches)
- The terminology of paddling (frequently blended in with stroke instruction)
- Types of strokes: power, turning and bracing
- Stroke components: catch, propulsion, recovery, control, and correction
- Effective body usage and biokinetics
- Use of larger torso muscles
- Arms as struts connecting paddle to torso
- Avoidance of positions that contribute to shoulder injury or dislocations

River Reading

Fundamentals of River Currents

- Current speed, direction and changes caused by streambed features
- Downstream and upstream V's / chutes
- Eddies / eddy lines
- Waves / wave holes
- Bends
- Effects of obstacles
- Ledges / horizon lines
- Strainers and sieves
- Rocks / pillows
- Holes / hydraulics
- Other hazards
- Power of the current / river level
- Cold water
- Dams, flow diversion structures, pipelines
- Undercut rocks / ice
- International Scale of River Difficulty (handout: American Whitewater Safety Code)

River Running

- Strategies for running rivers
 - How to paddle in current
 - Spacing / avoid "tunnel vision"
 - Scouting

- From boat / from shore
 - How to establish the "best" route/ "Plan B"
- Portaging hazards
- Group organization on the river
 - Group cohesiveness (lead, sweep boats, etc.)
 - Universal River Signals System
- Emergency procedures

Equipment

- Life jackets (PFDs): types, fit
- Helmet: types, fit
- Kayak: types, materials, flotation, parts (including safety features: walls, foot braces, grab loops)
- Kayak outfitting: comfort and safety; back rests, thigh straps, foot braces
- Paddle: types, parts, length, blade size and shape, fitting, hand position
- Care of equipment
- Personal equipment: water, food, shoes, sunscreen, bug spray, sun glasses, eyeglass straps, protective clothing for heat or cold, sponge, hat, foot protection, whistle
- Car topping: loading and unloading, racks, tie down

Safety and Rescue

- Principles of Rescue
 - Use of safe rescue strategies such as T-RETHROG (Talk, Reach, Throw, Row, Go)
 - Rescue priorities: people, kayak, paddle, gear
 - Responsibilities of: rescuer, group, swimmers
- Shoreline rescue - extension rescues
 - Pinned craft

Swimming and Wading Skills

- Understand the risks associated with standing and walking in the types of environments mentioned above (including entanglement and environmental hazards)
- Strategies to minimize risk of foot entrapment
- Strengths, limitations, advantages, disadvantages, and risks of wading techniques
- Actively participate in scenarios that apply wading skills for rescues
- Defensive and aggressive swimming positions, and transitions
- Techniques for successful exits from current to eddies
- Self-rescue: swimming with equipment
- Strategies to conserve energy

- Techniques for successful downstream swim of a rapid
- Swimming techniques for: waves, hydraulics, and drops
- Strategies for managing strainers in the appropriate venue

Kayak-based Rescues

- Advantages and disadvantages during rescues of various kayaks (e.g., sit-ins, sit-on-tops, recreational kayaks)
- Calmly exit the kayak after capsize, using proper body position and contact with the kayak and paddle
- Paddle recovery options
- Strategies for kayak recovery
- Swimmer tow options
- Swimmer re-mount techniques (e.g., perpendicular entry, rescue sling, paddle float)
- Kayak bumping / bulldozing
- Kayak towing
- Kayak specific rescues (e.g., boat over boat, boat to boat, scoop)
- Unresponsive paddler rescue
- Emptying water from kayak (e.g., scupper holes, on shore, bailers, pumps)
- A safe and effective self-rescue with re-mount in class I-II while remaining in current

Throw Rope Skills

- Throwing techniques
- Receiving techniques
- Belaying techniques
- Rope management and safety strategies
- Rope coiling methods and throwing techniques

Maneuvers

- Spins (onside and offside): kayak pivots in place
- Forward: kayak moves in reasonably straight line
- Reverse: kayak moves in a reasonably straight line
- Stopping: kayak stops within a reasonable distance
- Turns: kayak turns in broad arc made while underway
- Veering and carving
- Abeam: kayak moves sideways without headway
- Sideslips: kayak moves sideways with headway

Strokes

- Forward sweep (aggressive and reactive techniques)
- Reverse sweep
- Stern draw
- Bow draw
- Forward
- Back
- Low and high braces
- Bow draw
- Stationary draw
- Draw and sculling draw

Whitewater Practice

- Ferries
- Eddy turns
- Peel outs
 - Wide (exit wide from eddy line)
 - Shallow (exit close to eddy line)
- Sequences of Maneuvers
 - C-turns (peel-out and eddy into same eddy)
 - S-turns (peel-out one side and eddy into opposite side)
- Surfing (for whitewater course only)

Conclusion and Wrap Up

- Group debrief / individual feedback
- Course limitations
- Importance of First Aid and CPR
- Importance of additional instruction, practice, and gaining experience
- Importance of appropriate level of safety and rescue training
- Life sport / paddling options
- Local paddling groups / clubs
- Handouts / reference materials
- Participation cards
- ACA membership benefits and join process

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