

Paddlesports Guide Criteria



OVERVIEW

The ACA's Paddlesports Guide certification courses equip paddlers with a comprehensive set of skills, knowledge, and approaches for planning and leading multi-day trips in remote coastal or river environments. The certification is part of the ACA's Leadership and Guide certification program, and it is appropriate for outfitters and guiding operations that require their staff teams to meet quality standards and have a recognized certification. It may be applicable for adventure camps offering multi-day trips, university outdoor programs, or other paddlers and freelance guides in paddlesport who need a broad skill set to plan and run exciting multi-day paddle trips that venture into remote locations.

Paddlesport Guide courses are delivered in one of two different environments to equip participants to lead in each environment - the Coastal Guide course and the River Guide course. These courses are offered in a Guide Certification course format, which includes training and examination. Once certified, Paddlesport Guides may extend the paddlecraft they guide on by completing the appropriate skills assessment. As a certified Paddlesports Guide, they are able upgrade to an Advanced Paddlesports Guide certification by attaining an L3 or higher skills assessment and successfully completing an Advanced Coastal Guide or Advanced River Guide course, or challenging the exam portion of a course.

COASTAL GUIDE COURSE

Those participating in the Coastal Guide course will be equipped to lead in large lake or coastal waters with exposure to wind and waves. Coastal Guide Candidates paddling kayaks, SUPs, and canoes will focus on developing the competencies necessary to lead multi-day trips that may include participants using varying paddlecraft. Upon successful completion of the course, the candidate is certified as a Coastal Guide whose operating conditions are determined by their level of paddlecraft skills assessment, and the size of the group follows the same maximum ratio for Leader Trainers.

RIVER GUIDE COURSE

Those participating in the River Guide course will be equipped to lead with moving water with rapids. River Guide candidates paddling river canoes, kayaks, packrafts, paddle and oar rafts, and SUPs will focus on the competencies necessary to lead multi-day trips and perform essential swiftwater rescue in Class I-II waters. Upon successful completion of the course, the candidate is certified as a River Guide who can operate in conditions established by their level of paddlecraft skills assessment, and the size of the group follows the same maximum ratio for Leader Trainers.

PADDLESPORTS COURSE PREREQUISITES

ALL ENVIRONMENTS

- ☐ Participants must be an ACA member at the time of the course to participate.
- ☐ All participants must acknowledge personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- ☐ Participants must have a minimum of WFA certification at the time of the course. An exemption may be made if their certification has recently expired.
- ☐ Participants must have documented evidence (i.e. logbook) of a minimum of two trips of 3 days or more in length where at least 2 nights were spent camping during the trips.
- ☐ Wilderness First Aid certification or higher.

COASTAL GUIDE

- ☐ Skill Assessment - L2 or L3 Coastal Skill Assessments
 - ☐ Any ACA L2 “Essentials of” Skills Assessment including Kayak Touring, SUP, Canoe Touring, or Surf Ski (or)
 - ☐ Any ACA L3 Skills Assessment including Coastal Kayaking, Sit-On-Top Coastal Kayaking or Coastal SUP

RIVER GUIDE

- Skill Assessment - L2 Essentials or L3 River Skill Assessments
 - Any ACA L2 “Essentials of” Skills Assessment including River Kayaking, SUP, River Canoeing, Paddle Rafting, Oar Rafting, or River Packrafting.
 - Any ACA L3 Skills Assessment including River Kayaking, River Canoeing, Paddle Rafting, Oar Rafting, or River Packrafting
 - They must have successfully completed a Safety & Rescue Level 2 Essentials of River Safety & Rescue Skills Assessment (or higher.)

RECOMMENDED / SUGGESTED EXPERIENCE

- ☐ Leave No Trace Level 1 Instructor
- ☐ ACA Instructor certification or IDW completion
- ☐ ACA skills training and/or assessment in other paddlecraft.
- ☐ Experience assisting and/or leading multi-day overnight trips.
- ☐ Paddling experience in varied conditions and environments.
- ☐ Food Handler Permit

COURSE FORMATS**For paddlers who have passed an ACA L2 (or higher) Skills Assessment:**

- Guide Training Course - Minimum 3 Days & 1 Night (~28 hours) and Guide Certification Exam - Minimum 2 Days & 1 Night (~20 hours) , OR
- Guide Certification Course - Minimum 5 Days & 3 Nights (~52 hours)

For paddlers who do not have an ACA L2 (or higher) Skills Assessment:

- Hybrid Skills Training and Paddlesports Leader Certification Course Duration - Minimum 7 days (56 hours)

For paddlers already certified as a Paddlesport Leader challenging a different environment:

- Challenge Exam: Certified Guides in one environment may gain certification in the other environment by successfully completing a skills assessment and Guide Certification Exam in that environment.

RE MOTENESS

ALL ENVIRONMENTS

Paddlesport Guide certification courses shall include wilderness and remote locations that have access to rescue services, or evacuation time frames to emergency services, within an 8 hour period. Upon certification as a Paddlesports Guide the remoteness of their subsequent trips will not exceed the scope of their wilderness medical certification.

VENUES / LOCATION

River Course: River Guide Trainers shall choose a location with moving water on rivers including class I-II sections. A rapid class includes rapids at the lower and upper ends of the difficulty range, designated “-” and “+” respectively. Rivers with more difficult rapids may be used as long as they are able to be portaged.

Coastal Course: Coastal Guide Trainers shall choose a location on large lakes or coastal waters with some exposure to conditions and regular access to landing areas and within 1.5 nautical miles (~2.8 km / ~1.75 miles) from shore. Participants must be assessed while paddling in three of the four conditions below, but all three conditions do not need to be experienced simultaneously:

- Winds 10-15 knots (~18-28 kmh / ~11-17 mph)
- Waves 1-2 feet (~ 0.3-0.6m)
- Surf 1-2 feet (~ 0.3-0.6m)
- Tidal Current 1-2 knots (~0.5mps)

CLASS SIZE

6 Guide Candidates: 1 Guide Trainer. The course maximum is 12 candidates and may be achieved by having an additional trainer or qualified assistant (12 Candidates: 2 Trainers.) Certified Paddlesport Guides will also followw these ratios.

The following is a list of the criteria used to evaluate guide candidates. The content and evaluation sequence should be adjusted to fit the participant's needs, class location, and time allowance.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATIONS

- ☐ Be at least 18 years old.
- ☐ Demonstrate general knowledge of ACA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives.
- ☐ Successfully completed a Guide Certification Exam (GCE) Course.
- ☐ Upon successful completion, register with the Safety Education and Instruction Council.
- ☐ Have and maintain requisite First Aid and age-appropriate CPR.
- ☐ Demonstrate a general knowledge of paddlesports and the ACA.
- ☐ Demonstrate the ability to appropriately plan and prepare for a trip, communicate with all trip members, and lead the group balancing support and challenge in the appropriate paddling venues.

CERTIFICATION MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS

- ☐ Lead at least four trips that meet ACA standards within the four-year certification period and properly report the trips using the ACA Course Management System (CMS).
- ☐ Complete an Paddlesports Guide Update during the four-year certification period.
- ☐ Maintain ACA membership and SEIC registration annually.
- ☐ Maintain a minimum of WFA certification and CPR (child-adult) for the duration of certification.

PADDLESPOrts GUIDE REQUIREMENTS

NOTE: The following criteria for the Paddlesport Guide have sections which apply to "All Environments" and sections of specific to each course environment - Coastal, River and Raft. Further descriptions and details are provided in the guidance documents.

PERSONAL PADDLING: COASTAL

- ☐ Able to paddle and maneuver their craft with ease in the coastal course venue.
- ☐ Able to display effective and efficient paddling technique.
- ☐ Able to perform assisted rescues for other craft users (for example: canoe, sea kayak, SUP, surf ski, etc.).
- ☐ Able to perform self-rescues in the coastal course venue that reduce risk, are effective, and efficient.

PERSONAL PADDLING: RIVER

- ☐ Able to paddle and maneuver their craft with ease in the river course venue.
- ☐ Able to display effective and efficient paddling technique.
- ☐ Able to perform swiftwater rescue in the river course venue that includes other craft users.

PADDLESPORTS GUIDE REQUIREMENTS

LEADERSHIP

ALL ENVIRONMENTS

- ☐ Able to identify and utilize opportunities to challenge paddlers and provide individualized support that progress over a multi-day trip.
- ☐ Able to prioritize and address health and safety, enjoyable experiences, and trip logistics when making decisions that involve considering individuals and the whole group.
- ☐ Able to communicate effectively and proactively with the group, individual members, co-leaders, and other users.
- ☐ Able to establish group norms and expectations at the start of the trip and continue to develop and foster a positive social environment during the trip.
- ☐ Able to delegate suitable responsibilities for all members of the trip.
- ☐ Able to include the members of the trip in the decision making process.
- ☐ Able to use a range of leadership behaviors from being directive to facilitating and be able to explain the intentionality behind it.
- ☐ Able to display positive social behaviors and actions even when in challenging circumstances.
- ☐ Demonstrates knowledge of addressing and resolving conflicts and strategy for de-escalation.
- ☐ Able to provide direct instruction and feedback for paddlers on a trip that account for the environment and paddling situations.
- ☐ Basic concepts to make informed decisions / guide decisions for creating and implementing inclusive programming.

TRIP PLANNING & DELIVERY

- ☐ Able to source and collate relevant and supplementary information for planning a multi-day trip and gather up-to-date information during the trip.
- ☐ Able to develop a comprehensive trip plan that includes phased contingencies.
- ☐ Able to develop a detailed daily plan while on an multi-day trip that accounts for ongoing adjustments.
- ☐ Able to provide clear and effective communication in advance of, and if needed during, the trip to individuals, the whole group, and external entities, such as land management agencies.
- ☐ Able to prepare relevant gear and equipment for paddling, camping, first aid, equipment repairs, emergency communication, etc. for the trip and communicate individual needs to trip members.
- ☐ Able to gather, and maintain confidentiality, relevant medical, health, and personal identification information from trip members.
- ☐ Able to conduct individual and group reviews during the trip and at the culmination.
- ☐ Able to set personal goals for a multi-day trip, conduct an assessment during the trip, and conduct a post-trip reflection for continued development.
- ☐ Able to conduct routine wellness checks with all members during a multi-day trip.

PADDLESPORTS GUIDE REQUIREMENTS cont'd**TRIP SKILLS**

- ☐ Able to develop a nutritionally balanced menu for the trip.
- ☐ Can explain and is able to perform trip food handling practices and personal health and hygiene.
- ☐ Can explain and demonstrate proper use of more than one backcountry cooking method and equipment.
- ☐ Able to monitor food intake appropriate to the schedule of the trip and prepare a nutritious meal.
- ☐ Can explain and demonstrate how to source water, methods for purifying, and storage.
- ☐ Can explain and is able to perform LNT principles and practices on a trip, especially: traveling and camping on durable surfaces, disposal of waste properly, minimizing campfire impacts, and respecting wildlife.
- ☐ Able to erect shelters during a trip for comfort and security that accounts for the environment and available supplies.
- ☐ Able to manage group launches and landing in day and twilight conditions.
- ☐ Able to use several methods to determine the approximate location of the group regularly.

RISK & RESPONSE

ALL ENVIRONMENTS

- ☐ Able to conduct a risk assessment and area familiarization of the planned trip.
- ☐ Able to identify hazards, determine potential risks, and explain their plan of action.
- ☐ Able to conduct dynamic risk assessments under time constraints that incorporate the group as a whole, individuals of the group, and purpose of the trip.
- ☐ Able to recognize and respond to simple and complex incidents both on and off the water.
- ☐ Able to facilitate extended care of an individual and manage the group.
- ☐ Able to coordinate rescues and evacuations that incorporate the group appropriately that reduce overall risk, are effective, and efficient.
- ☐ Able to communicate with group members, and outside parties if required, both during an incident and following.

EQUIPMENT

ALL ENVIRONMENTS

- ☐ Able to conduct suitable repairs of paddling equipment while onshore and basic repairs on-the-water.
- ☐ Knowledgeable of core paddling equipment with working knowledge of extraneous equipment.
- ☐ Able to conduct suitable field repairs of general camping equipment and troubleshoot alternatives if irreparable.
- ☐ Knowledgeable of core camping equipment with working knowledge of extraneous equipment.

PADDLESPORTS GUIDE REQUIREMENTS cont'd**ENVIRONMENTS**

ALL ENVIRONMENTS

- ☐ Able to identify relevant and minor factors in the paddling environment and explain potential impacts to the group.
- ☐ Able to identify relevant and minor factors in the camping environment and explain potential impacts to the group.
- ☐ Able to be proactive in preparing the group for changes in weather and/or conditions from observations and forecasts.
- ☐ Able to establish expectations and guidelines for Leave No Trace principles and practices to reduce impacts for both paddling and camping.

ACA KNOWLEDGE AND PROFESSIONALISM

- ☐ General knowledge of the history, mission, and philosophy of the American Canoe Association.
- ☐ Able to explain the purpose and mission of the ACA Safety, Education, and Instruction Council (SEIC) and the Safety, Education, and Instruction (SEI) Department.
- ☐ Familiar with the Course Management System (CMS), use of the “test system,” dashboard, uploading of credentials, registering a trip with and without insurance, reporting trips, trip evaluations, and completing and submitting an ACA Waiver.
- ☐ Knowledgeable of their ACA trip leader certification remit and requirements for maintaining their certification.
- ☐ Able to explain the purpose and use of ‘assumption of risk and release of liability’ waivers and public liability insurance.