

Paddlesports Leader Criteria



OVERVIEW

The ACA's Paddlesports Leader certification courses equip paddlers with the trip planning and leadership skills to provide safe and enjoyable day trips in coastal or river environments. The certification is part of the ACA's Leadership and Guide certification program, and it is appropriate for paddlers who are seeking development and certification as paddlesport leaders. This may include paddle club and meetup leaders, camps offering day trips, university trip leaders, guides working for outfitters or any other paddler who wants to safely lead others on day trips that may progress beyond sheltered waterways.

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

COASTAL LEADER COURSE

Those participating in the Coastal Leader course will be equipped to lead in moderate conditions on gently flowing rivers, lakes, and coastal waters. Leader Candidates paddling canoes, kayaks, sit-on-tops, SUPs, and surfskis will focus on developing the competencies necessary to lead day trips that may include participants using varying paddlecraft. Upon successful completion of the course, the candidate is certified as a Coastal Leader 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 LEADER COURSE

Those participating in the River Leader course will be equipped to lead on flatwater to mild whitewater conditions. Leaders candidates paddling river canoes, kayaks, packrafts, rafts, SUPs, and sit-on tops will focus on the competencies necessary to lead 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 Leader 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 \(EEC\)](#).
- ☐ Urban First Aid & CPR (or higher.)

COASTAL LEADER

Skill Assessment - L2 Essentials or higher

Any ACA L2 “Essentials of” Skills Assessment including Kayak Touring, Sit-on-Top Kayak Touring, SUP, Canoe Touring, or Sit-on-Top Surf Kayaking

RIVER LEADER

Skill Assessment - L2 or higher

Any ACA L2 “Essentials of” Skills Assessment including River Kayaking, Sit-on-Top River Kayaking, SUP, River Canoeing, Paddle Rafting, Oar Rafting, or River Packrafting

RECOMMENDED / SUGGESTED EXPERIENCE:

- ☐ Active personal paddler with experience in varied conditions and environments.
- ☐ Been both a participant and held some leadership responsibilities on paddle trips.
- ☐ Leave No Trace Workshop completion or higher.
- ☐ Skills training in other ACA paddle craft.
- ☐ Safety & Rescue skills of Level 3 Essentials of River Safety & Rescue
- ☐ Attendance of an ACA Instructor Development Workshop in the capacity of a practice student or candidate.

COURSE FORMATS

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

- Paddlesports Leader Training Course - Minimum 2 Days (16 hours) and Paddlesports Leader Certification Exam - Minimum 1 Day (8 hours), OR
- Paddlesports Leader Certification Course - Minimum 3 Days (24 hours)

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

- Hybrid Skills Training and Paddlesports Leader Certification Course Duration - Minimum 5 days (40 hours)

COURSE FORMATS

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

- Challenge Exam: Certified Leaders in one environment (for example, a River Leader) may gain certification in another environment (for example, a Coastal Leader) by successfully completing a prerequisite skill assessment and Leader Certification Exam in that environment.

PADDLESPORTS COURSE VENUES / LOCATION**RIVER COURSE**

River Leader Trainers will choose an appropriate location with moving water on rivers that includes class I-II sections. A rapid class includes rapids at the lower and upper ends of the difficulty range, designated “-” and “+” respectively. The rivers are to be accessible and have access to portages.

COASTAL COURSE

Coastal Leader Trainers will choose a location on lakes or coastal waters with some exposure to wind and wave conditions, with regular access to landing areas and within 1.5 nautical miles from shore. Participants must be observed in 3 of 4 of the following conditions during the exam:

- **Winds:** 8 - 12 knots
- **Waves:** 1 - 2 feet
- **Surf:** 1 - 2 feet
- **Tidal Current:** 1 - 2 knots

REMOTENESS: ALL ENVIRONMENTS

Paddlesport Leader certification courses may occur in readily accessible locations or remote and wilderness locations that have access to rescue services, or evacuation time frames to emergency services, within an 8 hour period. Upon certification as a Paddlesport Leader the remoteness of their subsequent trips will not exceed the scope of their wilderness medical certification.

CLASS SIZE

6 Leader Candidates : 1 Leader 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 Leaders will also follow these ratios.

The following is a list of the criteria used to evaluate leader 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 Leader Certification Exam (LCE) Course.
- ☐ Upon successful completion, register with the Safety Education and Instruction Council.
- ☐ Have and maintain requisite First Aid (defined in Remoteness section) 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 a Paddlesports Leader Update during the four-year certification period.
- ☐ Maintain ACA membership and SEIC registration annually.
- ☐ Maintain venue appropriate First Aid and age appropriate CPR certification for the duration of certification.

PADDLESPOrts LEADER REQUIREMENTS

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

LEADERSHIP ALL ENVIRONMENTS

- ☐ Able to identify and utilize opportunities to challenge paddlers and provide individualized support during a trip.
- ☐ Able to prioritize and address health and safety, enjoyable experiences, and trip logistics when making decisions that involve 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 a positive social environment during the trip.
- ☐ Able to provide appropriate responsibilities for trip members and incorporate the members when relevant for making decisions.

PADDLESPORTS LEADER REQUIREMENTS cont'd**LEADERSHIP CONT'D**
ALL ENVIRONMENTS

- ☐ 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 a strategy for addressing and resolving conflicts.
- ☐ Able to provide direct instruction for paddlers on a trip and 'top tips' when paddling.
- ☐ Basic concepts to make informed decisions / guide decisions for creating and implementing inclusive programming.

**TRIP PLANNING
& DELIVERY**
ALL ENVIRONMENTS

- ☐ Able to source relevant information for planning a trip that includes cross-referencing another source.
- ☐ Able to communicate effectively with relevant parties involved with the trip and external entities.
- ☐ Able to develop a comprehensive trip plan for a full day.
- ☐ Able to prepare relevant paddling equipment for the trip and communicate individual needs to trip members.
- ☐ Able to gather, and maintain confidentiality, relevant medical and health information from trip members.
- ☐ Able to conduct reviews during the trip and at the end with group members.
- ☐ Able to determine the physical location of the group using digital and traditional equipment.
- ☐ Able to set personal goals for a trip and conduct a post-trip reflection for continued development.

EQUIPMENT
ALL ENVIRONMENTS

- ☐ Able to conduct basic repairs of paddling equipment while onshore and on-the-water.
- ☐ Working knowledge of core paddling equipment.
- ☐ Working knowledge of core outdoor equipment.

ENVIRONMENT
ALL ENVIRONMENTS

- ☐ Able to identify relevant factors in the paddling environment and explain potential impacts to the group.
- ☐ Able to be proactive in preparing the group for changes in weather and/or conditions.
- ☐ Able to demonstrate and explain Leave No Trace principles and practices to reduce impacts while on paddling trips.

PADDLESPORTS LEADER REQUIREMENTS cont'd**RISK & RESPONSE**
ALL ENVIRONMENTS

- ☐ 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 whole group and purpose of the trip.
- ☐ Able to recognize and respond to simple and complex incidents both on and off the water.
- ☐ Able to coordinate rescues 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.

PERSONAL PADDLING:
COASTAL

- ☐ Able to paddle and maneuver in the environment and craft with ease.
- ☐ Able to display effective paddling technique.
- ☐ Able to perform assisted rescues for other craft users (for example: canoe, kayak, SUP, packraft, raft, etc.)
- ☐ Able to perform self-rescues that reduce risk, are effective, and efficient.

PERSONAL PADDLING:
RIVER

- ☐ Able to paddle and maneuver their craft with ease in the river course venue.
 - ☐ Raft includes maneuvering with and without the support of their crew.
- ☐ Able to display effective and efficient paddling technique.
- ☐ Able to perform swiftwater rescue in the river course venue that includes other craft users.

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 Committee (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.