ACA River Kayak Skills Assessment and Guide – Level 4: Whitewater Kayaking

Procedure and Guide for use during Skills Assessment:

- Candidates must be assessed by a certified ACA instructor, Instructor-Trainer or Instructor Trainer Educator.
- Assessors can only offer assessments up to and including their own level of certification; *i.e., a Level 3 instructor/assessor cannot assess candidates at Level 4.*
- Course duration: One day (8 hours) minimum.
- Venues chosen for assessment must be appropriate to the assessment level being sought by the candidate; *Level 4 – Moving water on rivers including class II-III sections. A rapid class includes rapids at the lower and upper ends of the difficulty range, designated "-" and "+" respectively.*
- Maximum ratio: 5 Candidates : 1 Instructor; with an additional qualified assistant, the ratio can be 10 : 2. The maximum number of candidates permitted is 10.
- Assessors are to use the skills rubric chart below to assess candidates in **Technical Knowledge, Flat Water Strokes and Skills, Moving Water Skills, and Risk Assessment and Management.**

Candidates must meet the standard in each of the required skills per the assessment level they are seeking; *i.e. candidates seeking a Level 4 assessment must be observed performing all of the skills in the Level 4 description in the appropriate venues.* Use the descriptions in the rubric chart as a guide for assessments, then rate the candidates' performance in the candidate rating box per level description; *i.e., candidate performs at the Level 4 description, list Meets Standards in candidate rating*. Please provide narrative candidate feedback for each of the four categories, highlighting strengths and offering next steps for growth. If a candidate is below standard for any Assessed Skill, they are to be provided an action plan that outlines areas for practice and a recommendation of when to return for the assessment.

Procedure and Guide for use during Instructor Certification Exams: This skills rubric may also be used to assess Instructor Candidates for certification. Instructor Candidates should have a deeper level of understanding and be able to teach each skill. Instructor Candidates are expected to be able to perform each skill with minimal to no instruction when presenting for an instructor course. At the conclusion of the certification exam, Certified Instructors are expected to be able to ***perform, role model, teach and troubleshoot every skill*** within all levels of their certification.

Technical Knowledge

This includes general knowledge of paddlesport safety, equipment, paddling theory, river reading, river running strategies, and rescue. Including an ability to explain these concepts in layperson's terms. Experience is a key factor in Technical Knowledge.

Evaluation System: Many of these concepts and skills can be assessed via conversations, safety talks and observations of candidates' readiness for level of assessment, i.e. has proper gear for the activity and venue, gear is maintained and in good order.

Meets Standards: Candidates have the appropriate understanding and depth of knowledge for their assessment level and can communicate it effectively.

Below Standards: Lack of knowledge appropriate for the level of assessment sought. Lack of ability to explain concepts in layperson's terms.

Name of Concept	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
American Whitewater Safety Code	Understands the concepts in the AW Safety Code	
Federal, State and Local regulations	Understands the regulatory systems in place on the rivers they frequent	
Trip Planning Ability to plan trips across various venue conditions	Can plan and execute a day trip of five miles in class II/III venues	
Personal Skills Assessment	Paddler has an accurate personal skills assessment and ability to safely navigate features in class II/III venues calmly and in control	

Name of Concept	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Group Awareness and Cohesion	Paddler is aware of others and maintains group cohesion in class II/III venues	
Environmental Issues	Demonstrates understanding and application of LNT principles.	
Cold and Heat Related Issues	Understands the risk and is able to manage themselves in the river environment	
Equipment	Demonstrates working knowledge of kayaking equipment required for class II/III venues	

Name of Concept	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Securing kayaks to vehicles; Straps vs. Ropes and knots, Hardpoint capture	Demonstrates securing kayaks to vehicles and/or trailers using a variety of methods	

Technical Knowledge Comments and Next Steps:
Strengths: Next Steps:

Flat Water Strokes and Skills

Flat Water skills are the foundation to good paddling technique. Flat Water practice allows us to focus on stroke efficiency and improve technique without the distractions of moving current.

Evaluation System: Observation of candidate paddling strokes and skills on flat water. Candidate demonstrates the following skills satisfactorily per level description.

Meets Standards: Knowledge of skills and ability to meet the standard description for assessment level sought with engaged posture, core rotation, edge control, vision and mental tranquility.

Below Standards: Lack of knowledge of skills. Poor posture, lack of core rotation and engagement, inability to control boat edges, lack of mental tranquility. Tippy and uncomfortable in the boat. Close mindedness about technique improvement.

Name of Skill	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Lifting, Carrying and Portaging	Carrying Technique to reduce risk of injury over uneven and challenging terrain	
Launching and Landing	Ability to effectively enter and exit from steep bank and seal launch in Class II/III venues	
Wet Exit	Can demonstrate controlled/calm wet exit from kayak including release from spray skirt modeled two ways	

Name of Skill	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Forward Paddling Paddler uses good posture, core engagement and quiet edge to move boat	Paddler effectively moves boat 50 yards in straight line	
Stopping	Paddler can stop the kayak going forward and backwards, while maintaining directional control using 5 or less strokes	
Reverse Paddling	Paddler moves the kayak in reverse for 20 yards in straight line using good posture and core engagement	

Name of Skill	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Rotate 360° Turning Strokes	Paddler rotates boat on the spot using forward and reverse sweeps maintaining good posture, core engagement. Can combine sweeps to perform pinwheels.	
Turning on the move	Paddler effectively uses sweep strokes and edge to change angle and carve turns	
Power Circles (Carving)	Paddler can make kayak carve a circle around a fixed point maintaining momentum with strokes predominantly on the inside of the turn utilizing edge to assist in carving circles	
Figure 8's	Can paddle a figure 8 using vision and a variety of strokes, maintaining momentum, good posture, effective core engagement and edge transitions	

Name of Skill	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Side Draws	Can move the kayak 20 feet using side draws, utilizing feathering and sculling draws (both sides)	
Stern Draws	Utilizing stern draws to control veer and maintain momentum	
Bow Draws	Utilizes bow draws while turning on the move	
Ruddering	Utilizes stern and bow rudders to control angle when going forward and in reverse	
Advanced Strokes; Sideslips and Duffeks	Can perform Duffeks and sideslips on flat water and can utilize in class II/III venues	
Bracing; (Prevent Capsize)	Utilizes both low and high brace while minimizing risk of injury (both sides) exploring dynamic bracing	

Flat Water Strokes and Skills Comments and Next Steps
Strengths: Next Steps:

Moving Water Skills and Maneuvers

Candidates should be able to move their boat confidently and effectively in the venue for the assessment level which they are seeking.

Evaluation System: Observation of personal paddling strokes and skills on moving water. Candidate demonstrates the following skills satisfactorily per level description.

Meets Standards: Knowledge of skills and ability to meet the standard description for assessment level sought with engaged posture, core rotation, edge control, vision and mental tranquility. Paddles with grace and control.

Below Standards: Lack of knowledge of skills. Poor posture, lack of core rotation and engagement, inability to control boat edges, lack of mental tranquility. Tippy and uncomfortable in the boat. Close mindedness about technique improvement.

Name of Skill	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Momentum Management	Can build and manage momentum in class II/III venues	

Name of Skill	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Strokes	Can utilize and combine a variety of strokes in class II/III venues.	

Name of Skill	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Eddy Catching and Peel Outs Demonstrates control and poise entering and exiting eddies in venue	Can identify, enter and exit eddies in class II/III venues, utilizing a variety of angles, degrees of boat edge, strokes and momentums	
Ferrying	Can effectively forward ferry across current utilizing features efficiently in class III venues, back ferry in class II venues	
C-Turns Peel out and eddy into same eddy	Peel out and turn back into the same eddy utilizing a variety of angles, strokes and edging to maintain momentum in class II/III venues	

Name of Skill	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
S-Turns Peel out one side and eddy into opposite side	Peel out and turn back into the adjacent eddy downstream utilizing a variety of angles, strokes and edging to maintain momentum in class II/III venues	
Surfing	Ability to enter, exit and maintain surfs on 1'-2' waves in class II/III venues	
Kayak Rolling In Current	Can perform safe and effective rolls from a non setup position in venue	

Moving Water Skills and Maneuvers Comments and Next Steps
Strengths: Next Steps:

Risk Assessment and Management

Candidates can properly assess and manage risks associated with paddling at the level they are seeking for skills assessment.

Evaluation System: Many of these concepts and skills can be assessed via conversations, safety talks and observations of candidates' readiness for level of assessment, i.e. has proper gear for the activity and venue, gear is maintained and in good order. Candidates will also be observed performing rescue skills in the venue they seek assessment. Candidates can demonstrate understanding of rescue options that might be available, and appropriately prioritize techniques. Candidates consider the speed, simplicity and safety of rescue techniques. Ideal rescues are simple, safe and speedy.

Meets Standards: Candidates have the appropriate understanding and depth of knowledge for their assessment level and can communicate it effectively. Candidates can perform skills to level description in the rubric.

Below Standards: Lack of knowledge appropriate for the level of assessment sought. Lack of ability to perform skills with confidence and mental tranquility. Lack of ability to explain concepts in layperson's terms.

Name of Skill	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Rescue Principles; Can I vs. Should I, First Priority is Hands-On	Understands these principles and risk of rescue and application in class II/III venues	
Rescue Priorities; People, Paddle, Kayak, Gear	Understands rescue priorities and application in class II/III venues	
Rescue Responsibilities; Rescuer, Group, Swimmers	Understands rescue responsibilities and application in class II/III venues	

Name of Skill	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Objective Hazard Recognition and Management; i.e. objects/features in the river environment	Can identify and manage hazards in class II/III venues; rocks, trees, bends, man made structures, sieves, undercuts, holes and hydraulics etc.	

Name of Skill	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Subjective Hazard Recognition and Management; Factors affecting individual and team performance, i.e. cold, tired, hungry, in a hurry, underskilled, etc.	Can identify hazards, evaluate consequences, and mitigate risks in class II/III venues	
Rapid Scouting; On shore and boat scouting, Hazard Recognition, Running/portaging options, Risk Management options (setting safety)	Ability to scout rapids and make running/portaging decisions using good judgment in class II/III venues	
Strategies for avoiding foot entrapment; understands risks of standing/walking in current	Understands and demonstrates defensive swimming techniques in class II/II venues	

Name of Skill	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Aggressive Swimming techniques and transitions; defensive/ aggressive and entering/exiting eddies and ferries.	Understands and demonstrates aggressive swim techniques and transitions in class II/III venues including strategies for waves, holes and drops	
Self Rescue	Can successfully self rescue boat and gear in class II/III venues	
Boat Based Rescues; Direct Contact, T-rescue, parallel rescue, unresponsive rescue	Understands risks of options and can perform assisted kayak rescues in class II/III venues	
Swimmer Assistance; Vocal coaching, towing on bow and stern	Understands risks of options and can perform swimmer assistance in class II/III venues	
Kayak Recovery; Bumping, bulldozing, towing *Towing is a specialized skill that requires technical knowledge and training to deploy.	Understands risks of options and can perform kayak recovery techniques in class II/III venues	

Name of Skill	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Paddle Recovery; Stacking, javelin toss	Can perform paddle recovery techniques in class II/III venues	
Kayak draining techniques; On shore, bailer/sponge, pump, boat over boat	Can perform kayak draining techniques in class II/III venues	
Swimmer re-mount/re-entry options; Stern entry, heel hook, rescue sling, paddle float, scoop	Understands the risks and can perform remount techniques in class II/III venues	
Unresponsive Paddler rescues; Ensure airway protection, towing to safety	Understands and can perform unresponsive paddler rescues in class II/III venues	
Throw Rope deployment	Can throw across a 4' moving target at 30' distance in class II/III venues	

Name of Skill	Level 4 Description	Candidate Rating
Rope management and coiling methods for a second throw	Can manage/coil rope after a miss for a second throw in 30 seconds in class II/III venues	
Techniques for receiving rope as a swimmer	Can perform rope reception in class II/III venues	
Belaying techniques for assisting throwing rescuer	Can perform belaying assistance to throwing rescuer in class II/III venues	
Vector pull for assisting swimmer to shore	Can perform vector pulls for assisting swimmer to shore in class II/III venues	
Managing Entrapments	Can establish and manage a stabilization line in class II/III venues	
Pinned Kayak Rescues	Can perform strong arm and vector pull rescues in class II/III venues	
Wading techniques; Advantages vs. disadvantages	Can perform effective wading techniques in class II/III venues	

Risk Assessment and Management Comments and Next Steps:
Strengths: Next Steps:

Candidate Rating:_____ **Assessor Name:_____**

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