



Flatwater Kayaking Safety & Rescue Skills Course

Course Overview

This course is designed as a short program emphasizing safety, enjoyment, and skill development. The skills and knowledge gained through this course can set the stage for a lifetime of exploration, adventures, a healthy lifestyle, appreciation of water and the natural world, lasting memories with family and friends, and a rewarding experience for all - we paddle because it is fun.

If you're a student who would like a resource to prepare for this course, ACA is pleased to provide a free online paddling safety course, [here](#). A certificate of completion is included!

Note: The use of spray skirts is not appropriate for Level 1: Introduction to Kayaking courses.

Course Objectives

- Understand that prevention is the key to a safe trip
- Understand how to avoid potential dangers
- Develop and practice key self-rescue skills
- Learn to focus on fast, simple, low-risk rescue techniques
- Develop the skills to manage minor in-water incidents

Minimum Personal Equipment for the Course

Appropriately fitted life jacket designed for paddling, protective clothing suitable for extended time in the water, appropriate footwear, boat, paddle, and whistle.

Skills 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. Up to 1 day (8 hours).

Course Location / Accessible Venues

Flat water, protected from wind, waves, and outside boat traffic, with current less than 0.5 knots, and within swimming distance of shore.

Course Size

5 Participants : 1 Instructor; with an additional qualified assistant, the ratio can be 10 : 2.

Instructor

This course may be offered by Level 2: Essentials of River Kayak or Level 2: Essentials of Kayak Touring (or higher) ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

Succeeding Courses

Level 1: Introduction to Kayaking Skills, Assessment, or Certification Course

Level 2: Essentials of River Safety & Rescue Skills, Assessment, or Certification Course

Course Outline

The sequence of this course should be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location, time allowance, and craft being used.

Introduction, Logistics, and Expectations

Learning objectives - students should have a basic understanding of the ACA and its policies, how and where this course is being conducted, and acceptable student behavior.

- Welcome! We're so glad that you've chosen to further your paddling experience and education by attending this course! Let's review a few highlights about the ACA
- Let's talk about the course itinerary, expectations, and limitations
- Lay of the land (and water): the logistics of this venue
- Review liability waiver, assumption of risk, challenge by choice, and medical disclosure
- Life jacket policy: always wear while on the water
- Describe and follow safe boating practices (behavior, substance abuse, on water and land etiquette, respecting private property, and Leave No Trace ethics)

Let's Talk About: The Paddling Environment

Learning objectives - students should understand the paddling environment and the course venue.

- Water
- Weather
- Wind
- Waves
 - Water confidence and comfort
 - Swimming ability

Let's Review: Communications and Signaling

Learning objectives - students should understand the importance of on-water communication and knowing when to call for assistance, including situations in which audible communication among group members is challenging.

- Hand, paddle, and whistle signals
- Cell phone and radios when appropriate

All About: Equipment

Learning objectives - students should understand the equipment (both personal and group equipment) needed for paddling, including appropriate use, maintenance, and care.

- Enables your paddling trip and significantly contributes to comfort and safety
- Safe paddle and boat handling practices
- Boats with flotation or bulkheads
- Paddle floats, pumps, and slings
- Life jackets
- Clothing
- Other personal paddling equipment reviewed by the Instructor

Principles of Safety & Rescue

Learning objectives - students should understand the handling of common emergency situations on the water.

- Avoiding trouble and hazards
- Being a competent leader, through trip planning considerations
- Use of safe rescue strategies such as:
 - Rescue priorities: people, kayak, paddle, gear
 - Responsibilities of: rescuer, group, swimmers
 - Rescue organization
 - Realities of injuries
- Safety and rescue equipment:
 - Whistle, knife
 - First aid kit
- Swimming skills are the basis for self-rescue; a fundamental personal safety skill
 - Defensive swimming

- Aggressive swimming

Boat Based Rescues

Learning objectives - students should be able to perform the following rescue techniques efficiently and effectively.

- Talk about the advantages and disadvantages of various kayaks used during rescues (e.g., sit-ins, sit-on-tops, recreational kayaks)
- Practice: calmly exit the kayak after capsize, using proper body position and contact with the kayak and paddle
- Demonstrate paddle recovery options
- Discuss and model strategies for kayak recovery
- Self-rescue: swimming with equipment
- Kayak bumping/bulldozing
- Kayak towing options
- Swimmer towing options
 - Rope handling skills to include, selecting a tow line, handling tows in wind or current, throw rope use
- Swimmer re-entry/re-mount techniques (e.g., stern entry, heel hook, rescue sling, paddle float)
- Kayak specific rescues (e.g., boat over boat, boat to boat, scoop)
- Unresponsive paddler rescue
- Emptying water from kayak (e.g., on-shore, sponges, pumps, etc.)

Conclusion and Wrap Up

Learning objectives - students should understand the importance of continuing education and practice. The instructor should debrief the course and hand out any pertinent materials.

- This has been a great class! Let's talk through what we've learned with a group debrief and/or Individual feedback

- Course limitations: there is always more to learn, and the skills and concepts we discussed require more practice and experience
- First aid and CPR training is a very valuable tool and could make the difference between a “near miss” and an emergency requiring outside rescue / first responders
- Paddling is a lifetime sport - there are local organizations, clubs, events, competitions, and classes through which you can continue your learning and build community. Get connected!
- Handouts and reference materials (if applicable)

© American Canoe Association

Date of last revision: 1/1/2023

<https://americancanoe.org>

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