



# Level 4: Performance Surf Kayaking Skills Course

## Skills Course Overview:

The Surf Kayaking skills course is designed for experienced kayakers seeking to develop their skills in dynamic surf using smaller, more maneuverable, and venue appropriate boats including sit-on-top kayaks (with thigh straps), whitewater kayaks, surf-specific kayaks, and wave-skis in significant surf. The focus is on developing skills with the aim of maximizing safety and enjoyment.

*Coastal kayaking surf skills are included in ACA Coastal Kayaking curriculum.*

## Course Objectives:

- Safety – Learn about the surf zone environment, surf etiquette, self-rescues and assisted rescues
- Skills – Introduce paddle strokes and techniques to catch and ride waves safely
- Fun – To promote the inherent enjoyment and rewards of paddling in the surf zone

## Course Prerequisites:

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#)
- Completed a Level 3: Surf Kayaking skills course or possess equivalent skills and experience.
- Having a reliable combat roll is strongly recommended.

## 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:

Sandy beach break with significant surf, a mix of peeling waves and steep (plunging) waves during sets, with access to flat, protected water (if available.)

- Winds, if cross-shore or off-shore less than 10 knots, if on-shore less than 20 knots
- Wave faces less than 4 feet (1.2 meters)

*Note: When selecting a venue, careful consideration should be given to hazards including other surfers, rip currents, long- shore drift, rocks, and human-made structures.*

## 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 4: Performance Surf Kayaking (or higher) ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

## **Succeeding Courses:**

- Level 5: Advanced Performance Surf Kayaking Skills or Certification Course.

## **Course Outline:**

The following is a general summary of content for this course. The content and sequence of instruction should be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location, and time allowance.

- 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

## **Personal Preparation:**

- Swimming ability, water comfort and confidence
- Fitness, conditioning, and warm up including stretching

## **Equipment:**

- Safe boat lifting, loading / unloading transport, and handling to and from water
- Surf kayak types, materials, outfitting, and nomenclature
- Kayak paddle design, selection and hand placement
- Personal thermal / uv protection and fit (wetsuit / dry suit, paddle jacket / dry top / paddle shorts / rash guard)
- PFD (life jacket) types and fit
- Helmet types and fit
- Group gear: first aid kit, throw rope, shelter

## **Essential Paddling Skills:**

- Forward stroke: move kayak forward 200 yards maintaining a reasonably straight course

- Reverse stroke: paddle backwards over small waves with reasonable directional control
- Stopping strokes: stop the kayak from a good speed within one kayak length
- Forward and reverse sweeps: turn the kayak smoothly without losing momentum
- Powerful acceleration stroke
- Edging: hull flat to wave face; rail to rail transitions
- Edging: use edges with purpose and consistency during strokes and maneuvers
- Low brace: prevent capsize when off balance
- High brace: prevent capsize when off balance
- Stern rudder: uses down-wave rudder placement that enables diagonal runs and turns
- Low brace turn: makes a turn of at least 90 degrees
- Draw strokes: move kayak sideways with in-water and out-of-water recovery
- Rolling from non-set-up position, and variations including back-deck roll

### **Surf Zone Environment:**

- Wave dynamics and beach characteristics
- Anatomy of surf zone and terminology: swash/backwash, soup zone, impact zone, outside
- Surf break – type of waves, height, period, wind effect, tide effect, sets and lulls
- Weather, wind, water, and air temperature

### **Surf Zone Safety:**

- Surf break suitability: identify hazards including rocks, rips, other surfers, swimmers, other beach users
- Surf area, beach positioning, setting boundaries
- Surf etiquette and collision avoidance
- Surf zone safety: swimming in surf, separation from kayak, control of free boat and use of grab loops / webbing tails, always staying ocean-side of kayak
- Use of paddle leash – pros and cons

### **Surfing Skills and Techniques:**

- Launching: positioning and timing, depth of water, side saddle technique (Sit-On-Top Kayaks)
- Holding position in the soup: bow to the waves, stern to the waves, parallel to the waves – bracing
- Paddle out: timing, reaching over the back of the wave, paddle position when punching through waves, using a rip
- Positioning: drift, sets, reading the water - previous waves, observation of other surfers
- Take off: waiting for waves, timing, upright posture, power forward stroke, straight / angled take off, late take off
- Riding the wave: diagonal run, stern rudder, changes of direction (head, torso, paddle, edge), prepare for broach

- Bottom turn (developing)
- Side surfing with intention and control, able to move forwards and backwards

### **Conclusion & Wrap Up:**

- Group debrief / individual feedback
- Course limitations – what's next?
- Importance of additional instruction, practice, experience
- Importance of appropriate level of safety and rescue training
- Importance of First Aid & CPR
- Life sport / paddling options
- Local paddling groups / clubs
- Handouts / reference materials
- ACA Membership forms
- Course evaluation
- Participation cards

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