



# Level 3: Freestyle Canoeing 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!

## 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

Protected water with constant access to safe landing and within .5 nautical miles from shore:

- Winds less than 10 knots

- Waves less than 1 foot (0.3 meters)
- Current less than 1 knot

## **Course Size**

**Tandem:** 6 participants : 1 Instructor; with an additional instructor, the ratio can be 12 : 2.

**Solo:** 5 participants : 1 Instructor; with an additional instructor, the ratio can be 10 : 2.

## **Instructor**

This course may be offered by Level 3: Freestyle Canoeing ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

## **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)

## **Personal Preparation & Getting Started**

*Learning objectives - students should understand the critical components of trip planning, including how to prepare their equipment and craft for a safe departure and return.*

- Describe and follow safe boating practices (behavior, substance abuse, on water and land etiquette, Leave No Trace ethics)
- Review elements of a float plan (who, what, when, where, filing practices)
- Discuss current weather conditions, forecasts, and other environmental hazards (wind, water, weather, waves)
- Discuss importance of developing good judgment, group responsibility, management, and dynamics
- Warm up to reduce injury
- Evaluate individual's swimming ability, water comfort, and confidence prior to beginning the trip
- Review paddling terminology and care of gear (to be reviewed by the instructor):
  - Boat: parts, materials, sizing, outfitting
  - Paddle: parts, materials, sizing, hand position (straight and bent shafts)
    - How to hold the paddle in correct orientation and grip for effective paddling
  - Life jacket: types, materials, fit
  - Outfitting for touring: paddles, hulls, pads
- Review of additional personal and group gear, including, but not limited to:
  - Environmental supplies (food, water, appropriate clothing, sunscreen, etc.)
  - Navigational and signaling tools (maps, charts, whistle, etc.)
  - Safety and rescue tools
  - Repair kit
  - First aid kit (appropriate to training)
- Review securing boat for transport on car or trailer using proper tie downs, straps, or knots
  - Knots: Figure-8, bowline, truckers hitch, and 2 half hitches

- Review proper techniques to safely lift and carry the boat on shore:
  - Overhead and suitcase
- Prepare boat for departure: stowing gear securely and ensuring it is balanced
- Appropriately use communication (paddle, hand, and whistle) signals
- What is Freestyle?
  - Proper use of the hull: why heel and pitch the canoe?
  - Types of heeling: muscle control (J-lean) and weight control (both knees to one side)
  - Types of kneeling: three point, high kneel, Canadian, transverse
  - Palm roll: keep one blade face force loaded
  - Parts of Freestyle maneuvers: initiation, heel, placement, pitch, and conclusion

## **Paddling Efficiently and Comfortably**

*Learning objectives - students should understand strategies for having a fun and safe day on the water taking the following concepts into account.*

- Boat stability (trim, posture, rocking, balance, etc.)
- Positions in the canoe: sitting or kneeling stance
- Efficient and effective paddle placement for intended maneuver
- Canoe physics: pull the paddle, push the canoe; quick turns, steer from the rear
- Safe and effective body usage: bio-mechanics (body, linkage, and rotation)
  - Avoidance of positions that contribute to shoulder injury
- Tandems: paddle on opposite sides, in cadence, match power
- Switch sides for fatigue and steering

## **Solo Maneuvers**

*Learning objectives - students should be able to perform the following maneuvers efficiently and effectively to control their craft.*

- Post

- Wedge
- Offside slip (from onside)
- Onside slip (from onside)
- Onside and offside Gimbal
- Reverse Axle
- Reverse Post
- Reverse Wedge
- Reverse Christie
- Reverse offside sideslip (from onside)
- Reverse onside sideslip (from onside)
- Cross Axle
- Cross Post
- Cross Wedge
- Cross onside sideslip
- Cross offside sideslip
- Cross Christie
- Cross onside and offside Gimbal
- Cross reverse Axle
- Cross reverse Post
- Cross reverse Wedge
- Cross reverse Christie
- Cross reverse onside sideslip
- Cross reverse offside sideslip

## **Tandem Maneuvers**

*Learning objectives - students should be able to perform the following maneuvers efficiently and effectively to control their craft.*

- Post
- Wedge
- Offside sideslip
- Onside sideslip
- Onside and offside Gimbal
- Stern Axle
- Stern Post
- Stern Wedge
- Stern offside sideslip
- Stern inside sideslip
- Cross Axle
- Cross Post
- Cross Wedge
- Cross onside sideslip
- Cross offside sideslip
- Cross onside and offside Gimbal
- Stern Cross Axle
- Stern Cross Post
- Stern Cross Wedge
- Stern Cross onside sideslip
- Stern Cross offside sideslip

## **Safety & Rescue**

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

- Paddling environments pertinent to paddlers
  - Wind

- Waves
- Weather
- Water
  - Water confidence and comfort including swimming ability
- Principles of Rescue
  - Rescue Priorities: people, boat, paddle, gear
  - Responsibilities of the group, rescuer, swimmers
  - Appropriate use of rescue and safety gear
    - Bailer, pump, sling, etc.
  - Emergency procedures
- Communication
  - Paddle, hand, and whistle signals
  - Cell phone and radios when appropriate
- Self care and care of other group members
  - Importance of fueling, hydration, clothing/insulation, and sun protection
  - Cold shock, hypothermia, and hyperthermia: prevention and treatment

## **Boat Based Rescues**

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

- Deep water exits: vault and slide performed in flat water
- Calmly exit the boat after a controlled capsize, using proper body position and contact with the craft and paddle
- Self rescue: swim 20 feet (6 meters) to shore in moving water using defensive and offensive techniques
- Strategies and techniques for boat and paddle recovery including bumping, bulldozing, towing, or swimming equipment to shore

- Swimmer tow options
- Self and assisted swimmer re-entry techniques (i.e., heel hook, rescue sling, paddle float, etc.)
- Assisted rescues: boat over boat or side by side or others appropriate to conditions
- Unresponsive paddler rescue
- Emptying water from the boat (on shore, bailers, pumps, sponges, etc.)

## Technical Knowledge

*Learning objectives - students should be able to demonstrate thorough knowledge of the following material.*

- Life jackets: types, usage, fitting, regulations
- Canoe: types, parts, materials, nomenclature, and design
- Paddle: types, parts, materials, fit
- Securing boat for transport on car or trailer using proper tie downs, straps, or knots
  - Knots: Figure-8, bowline, truckers hitch, and 2 half hitches
- Canoe carries: overhead & suitcase
- Importance of developing good judgment and group responsibility for a trip
  - Group organization, trip planning, and travel strategies
    - Float plan components and filing
    - Maps, guide books, local knowledge
    - Safety issues and hazards of larger lakes and lake travel
    - Boat traffic awareness and safe practice
    - Lead boat, sweep boat, safety boats, spacing, group members with repair kits, first aid kits, and first aid and CPR training
  - Federal, state, and local laws and regulations that apply to trip venue or route
  - Put-in safety briefing
  - Three boat minimum for group trip



## 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)

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