



# Level 4: Whitewater Rafting - Paddle Instructor Criteria

## Overview

Fundamentally, participants are expected to have the paddling skills, technical knowledge, rescue ability, teaching ability, group management, and interpersonal skills commensurate with this level of certification prior to presenting themselves for evaluation as Instructor Candidates at an Instructor Certification Course (IDW, ICE, or ICW).

## Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgement of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- Be a current ACA member
- Completion of the appropriate level skills course, assessment course, or equivalent skills
- Completion of an ACA, Rescue III, or similar swiftwater rescue course within the last 3 years

## Course Duration

Combined Instructor Development Workshop (IDW) and Instructor Certification Exam (ICE) - Minimum 4 days (32 hours).

## Course Location / Accessible Venues

Sections of rivers rated class II-III, where maneuvering in current is required to avoid obstacles. *A rapid class includes rapids at the lower and upper ends of the difficulty range, designated “-“ and “+” respectively.*

## **Course Size**

6 Instructor Candidates : 1 Instructor Trainer; with an additional qualified assistant, the ratio can be 12 : 2. The maximum number of Instructor Candidates permitted is 12.

For additional details, see [SEIC Policy Manual Chapter 6](#).

## **Instructor Trainer**

This certification course may be offered by Level 4: Whitewater Rafting - Paddle (or higher) ACA Instructor Trainers or Instructor Trainer Educators.

## **Succeeding Courses**

- Raft Guide Examiner Endorsement
- Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Rafting - Paddle Skills, Assessment, or Certification Course

## **Complementary Courses**

- Level 4: Whitewater Rafting - Oar Assessment or Certification Course
- Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Rafting - Oar Skills, Assessment, or Certification Course

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The following is a list of the criteria used to evaluate Instructor Candidates. The content and sequence of evaluation is to be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location, time allowance, and be craft appropriate.

## **General Requirements for all ACA Certification Candidates**

- Be at least 18 years old
- Demonstrate general knowledge of [ACA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion \(DEI\) initiatives](#)
- Successfully complete an Instructor Certification Workshop (IDW and ICE)
- Upon successful completion, register with the [Safety Education and Instruction Council](#)

- Have and maintain first aid and age appropriate CPR
- Demonstrate a general knowledge of paddlesports and the ACA
- Demonstrate the ability to appropriately perform and teach all of the following material, unassisted, in the appropriate venue

## **Certification Maintenance Requirements**

- Teach at least two courses that meet ACA standards within the four-year certification period and properly report the courses using the ACA Course Management System (CMS).
- Complete an Instructor Update, at the highest level of certification, during the four-year certification period
- Maintain ACA membership and SEIC registration annually
- Maintain appropriate CPR and first aid certification for the duration of certification

## **ACA Level 4: Whitewater Rafting - Paddle Instructor Requirements**

### **Demonstrate a knowledge of ACA administrative processes:**

- How to register and report a course (with and without insurance)
- An understanding of the ACA Waiver and Release of Liability
- Familiarity with the ACA website and the resources and SEIC policies available

### **Demonstrate a knowledge of and appropriately model teaching and learning theory:**

- Understand multiple methods of teaching and how they impact different learners
- Differentiate instruction targeting different learners
- Use effective teaching methods including appropriate skills progressions when teaching complex skill sets
- Present information effectively, both prepared and impromptu
- Focus on **core principles** rather than specific techniques

- Provide appropriate, specific, and meaningful feedback

### **Demonstrate the following:**

- Positive interpersonal skills to include all items outlined in the ACA SEIC Policy Manual
- Appropriate group management skills including leadership and judgment
- Ability to choose an appropriate venue / class site
- Effectively make documented skill assessments

### **Demonstrate ability to paddle efficiently and comfortably in venue utilizing:**

- Safe and effective body usage: bio-mechanics (body, posture, linkage, and rotation)
- Efficient and effective paddle placement for intended maneuver
- Parts of strokes: CPR (catch, power, recovery), static and dynamic

### **Demonstrate knowledge of all the following topics and the ability to teach one or more of the following topics and skills effectively:**

- Describe and follow safe boating practices: behavior, substance abuse, on water and land etiquette
- Paddling environments pertinent to paddlers
  - Discuss current weather conditions, forecasts, and other environmental factors (water, weather, wind, waves)
    - Water confidence and comfort
  - River classifications
- River etiquette
  - Leave No Trace ethics
  - Efficiency and courtesy during launching and landing
  - Awareness of and respect for private property
  - Courtesy on the water

- Communicating with other groups
- Use of good judgment
- River stewardship
- Local rules, regulations, and permitting requirements
- Terminology
- Familiarity with the different disciplines of paddlesport and boatmanship
- Raft and equipment
  - Secure rafts to vehicle or trailer: attach raft to rack or trailer using flat cam-straps or rope and suitable knots
  - Rafts: types, parts, materials, nomenclature, and design
  - Paddle: types, parts, materials, fit, and design
  - Rigging: securing equipment in the raft / minimizing entrapment
  - Life jackets: types, usage, and fit
  - Helmets - types, sizing, and proper fit
  - Clothing and footwear suitable for immersion and appropriate to the venue conditions
  - Raft outfitting: bow & stern lines, flip lines, perimeter lines
  - Proper inflation including use of pumps
  - Care of equipment including raft maintenance and repair
- Paddle captain responsibilities
  - Distribution of paddlers
  - Group communication
  - Commands
  - River reading
- Group organization, trip planning, and travel strategies
  - Review elements of a float plan (who, what, when, where, filing practices)

- Shuttle logistics
  - Sourcing local beta such as river sections, flows, weather, etc. (i.e., online groups, guidebooks, websites, apps, businesses, gauges, etc.)
  - Lead boat, sweep boat, safety boats, spacing, group members with repair kits, first aid kits, and first aid and CPR training
- Proper equipment for single, multi day, and expedition length raft trips
  - Special equipment such as groovers, coolers, dry boxes, ammo cans, etc.
- Put-in safety briefing
- Scouting

### **River Dynamics:**

- Currents
- Bends
- Eddies and eddy lines
- Waves, holes, and pillows
- Upstream and downstream Vs, tongues
- Rocks
- Ledges and low head dams (horizon lines)
- Strainers, sieves, undercut rocks or ice
- Manmade hazards

In addition:

- How each of the above changes with river levels
- How each of the above impacts a boat and why

### **Seating and Proper Positioning:**

- Launching and landing
  - Lifting and carrying

- Stacking
- In the raft
  - Foot position and lock-in for paddlers and captain
  - Positions in the raft: stern, right, left, center
  - Movements in the raft: high side, down
  - Safety of paddle team and passengers
  - Efficient paddle positioning
    - Maintaining the “paddler's box” with correct body positioning and paddle placement
    - Using torso rotation and reach to efficiently turn the boat and transfer power while keeping shoulders safe

***Appropriately model all of the following skills. Demonstrate the ability to teach one or more of the following topics and skills:***

- Forward
- Back
- Draw
- Pry
- Rudder
- Sweeps
- J-stroke
- Focus on blade entry, purchase, and exit to maximize efficiency

***Appropriately model all of the following skills with and without the use of a paddle team. Demonstrate the ability to teach one or more of the following topics and skills:***

- Left turn
- Right turn

- Forward: paddle in a straight line
- Reverse: reasonably straight line backward
- Stopping raft from a good speed
- Spin: pivot the raft - left and right, stop the spin
- Proper raft angle when entering a rapid/tongue
- Angle adjustment during a rapid
- Proper use of forward stroke versus back stroke in moving water
- Ferries: front and back
- Eddy turns
- Peel-outs
- Spin: pivot the raft - left and right, stop the spin
- Micro eddy use: while running rapids, boat scouting and safety positions
- Surfing: hole and wave

**Demonstrate knowledge of all the following topics and the ability to teach one or more of the following topics and skills effectively:**

- Principles of rescue
  - Rescue priorities: people first, boat, paddles, and gear second
    - Group over individuals, rescuer over swimmer
  - Fast and simple to slow and complex
- Communication
  - Paddle, hand, and whistle signals
- Boat flip and recovery (considerations for flip safety and heavy boats)
- Re-entry into the boat
  - Self
  - Assisted



- Swimming in current - defensive and aggressive swimming techniques
  - Preventing foot entrapment
- Boat pin and/or wrap (strong arm, rope/vector)
- Bump, bulldoze, or tow a boat to shore
- Swimming a boat to shore
- Throw rope use and practice
- Appropriate use of rescue and safety gear
  - Rope, webbing, carabiners, anchor systems, etc.
  - Rescue equipment: unique safety considerations while rescue equipment is under load of heavy boat
- 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

**Demonstrate leadership, group management skills, experience and judgment necessary to be a safe, effective instructor**

**Notes:**

*An ACA Level 4: Whitewater Rafting - Paddle Instructor is expected to be able to demonstrate and teach everything on the Level 4: Skills Course and Level 4: Skills Assessment for their level/craft.*

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Date of last revision: 4/11/2023

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