



# River Kayak Trip Leading 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

**For Level 3:** Moving water on rivers rated class I-II.

**For 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.*

## **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 4: Whitewater Kayaking (or higher) Instructor
- Level 3: River Kayaking Instructors with the River Kayak Trip Leading Endorsement

All Instructors must operate within the venue corresponding to their level of certification.

## **Succeeding Courses**

- Level 3: River Kayaking Skills, Assessment, Trip Leader, 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)

## **Personal Preparation & Getting Started**

- 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 (water, weather, wind, waves)
- Discuss importance of developing good judgment, group responsibility, management, and dynamics
- Warm up to reduce injury
- 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
- Kayak carries
- Review paddling terminology and care of gear (to be reviewed by the instructor):
  - Boat: parts, materials, sizing, outfitting
  - Paddle: parts, materials, sizing, hand position
    - How to hold the paddle in correct orientation and grip for effective paddling
  - Spray skirts: types and materials, grab loop
  - Life jacket: types, materials, fit
  - Helmet types and use
  - Flotation
  - Throw rope
- 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)
- Emergency shelter, water purification, sanitation equipment, and bivouac (a.k.a., bivy kit)
- Evaluate individual's swimming ability, water comfort, and confidence prior to beginning the trip
- Appropriately use communication (paddle, hand, and whistle) signals

## **Trip Preparation and Planning**

- Sources of venue information: maps, guide books, local knowledge, etc.
- Thorough float plans including
  - Trip timing and schedule
  - Contingency plans for unexpected events and conditions
  - Emergency contact information for local rescue agency(s) and/or governmental agency(s) responsible for the chosen venue and
  - Designated emergency contact person for group
  - Federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and permits that apply to trip venue or route
  - Buddy boats, lead and sweep boats, group formations, and evacuation routes
  - Put-in and take-out locations, transportation route, and shuttles to include possible assistance from local outfitters or liveries

## **Venue Hazards and Prevention of Accidents**

### Environmental hazards

- Air temperature
- Water temperature
- Weather

## River Hydrology and dynamics

- Flow volume
- Gradient/elevation changes
- Flow rates and current
- Currents
- Rocks (upstream and downstream Vs)
- Ledges and low head dams (horizon lines)
- Pins and entrapment
- Strainers/sieves
- Bends
- Undercut rocks or ice
- Dams/flow diversion structures and pipelines

## River features

- Eddies
- Waves
- Holes and hydraulics
- Downstream Vs

## Prevention of accidents

- Proper planning and pre-trip hazard identification
- Put-in safety briefing
- Constant reassessment of venue conditions
- Scouting
- Portaging and lining

## **Paddling strokes in course venue**

- Forward

- Back
- Sweeps
- Draws
- Sculling
- Rudder

## **Maneuvers in course venue**

- Forward in a straight line
- Backward in a straight line
- Front ferries
- Eddy turns
- Peel-outs
- C-turns
- S-turns
- Bracing and rolling

## **Principles of Rescue**

- Self care and care of other group members
  - Importance of fueling, hydration, clothing/insulation, and sun protection
  - Recognition and prevention of cold shock, hypothermia, and hyperthermia
- Use of safe rescue strategies such as T-RETHROG (Talk, Reach, Throw, Row, Go) including throwable buoyancy aids and throw bag use
- Rescue Priorities: people, boat, paddle, gear
- Responsibilities of the group, rescuer, swimmers
- Appropriate use of rescue and safety gear
  - Sponges, pump, sling, etc.
- Emergency procedures such as a lost paddler scenario

- Discuss foot entrapment, defensive and aggressive swimming
- When exiting the kayak with a spray skirt after capsize: must be modeled two ways: (1) utilizing the spray skirt grab loop and (2) releasing the skirt off the hip
- Calmly exit the boat after a capsize, using proper body position and contact with the craft and paddle
- 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) in flat water
- Assisted rescues: boat over boat in flat water, side by side in moving water
- Basic wading with a paddle
- Emptying water from the boat (on shore, bailers, pumps, sponges, etc.)
- Unresponsive paddler rescue (i.e., Hand of God rescue)

## **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: 4/14/2023

<https://americancanoe.org>

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