



Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Rafting - Paddle

(Sample Skills Course)

Course Overview: The **Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Rafting - Paddle** course is designed to refine and expand judgment, decision making and techniques of advanced paddlers on class III to IV whitewater. Advanced techniques include, but are not limited to advanced team management, boat control, high water techniques and technical river running as appropriate to the site.

Judgment, Safety & Rescue Objectives: This course will use on-the-water scenarios to assess risk, evaluate rapid features and complexities, develop strategies, and nurture good judgment. Course will emphasize use of proactive, aggressive rescue skills stressing self-reliance. This course should only be taken by those with a SWR experience and self-rescue skills. *Participation in a SWR course within the last three years is strongly recommended.*

Essential Eligibility Criteria (EEC):

ACA courses are open to all individuals who acknowledge the ability to perform the following essential eligibility criteria.

1. Breathe independently (i.e., not require medical devices to sustain breathing)
2. Independently maintain sealed airway passages while underwater
3. Independently hold head upright without neck/head support
4. Manage personal care independently or with the assistance of a companion
5. Manage personal mobility independently or with a reasonable amount of assistance
6. Follow instructions and effectively communicate independently or with the assistance of a companion
7. Independently turn from face-down to face-up and remain floating face up while wearing a properly fitted life jacket*
8. Get on / off or in/out of a paddle craft independently or with a reasonable amount of assistance*
9. Independently get out and from under a capsized paddlecraft*
10. Remount or reenter the paddlecraft following deep water capsize independently or with a reasonable amount of assistance*
11. Maintain a safe body position while attempting skills, activities, and rescues listed in the appropriate Course Outline, and have the ability to recognize and identify to others when such efforts would be unsafe given your personal situation*

** To participate in adaptive programs, participants must acknowledge only the first six EEC listed above. Entry-level adaptive programs will involve teaching and practicing EEC #7-11.*

Course Duration: Two days (16 hours) or more based on instructor's discretion.

Course Location / Venue: Rivers features rated up to Class IV (This course is not to be taught in a whitewater environment exceeding class IV)



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Course Prerequisites:

- Completion of an ACA Level 4: Whitewater Rafting – Paddle course (or equivalent) in class III whitewater
- Proficiency and experience in executing maneuvers and techniques required for paddle captaining on class III whitewater with a paddle team
- Proficiency and experience in executing forward, back, draw, pry, sweep, and rudder strokes
- Swiftwater Rescue (SWR) experience and the ability to aggressively self-rescue is required

Instructors: ACA Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Rafting- Paddle Instructor

Class Ratio: 6 students : 1 instructor; with an additional instructor or qualified assistant the ratio can be 12 : 2

Succeeding courses:

Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Rafting- Paddle Skills Assessment

The following is a general summary of course content for the **Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Rafting - Paddle** course. The content covered and the sequence of instruction should be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location, and time allowance.

Course Introduction

Course Learning Objectives:

While navigating class III-IV rapids in a paddle raft the participant will learn to:

- Identify, evaluate, and maneuver through complex whitewater features
- Make advanced on water maneuvers
- Use strategies for good judgment in complex whitewater
- Apply methods for risk assessment
- Use proactive, aggressive rescues skills

Introduction, Expectations, & Logistics:

Learning Objective - Students should have a basic understanding of the ACA and its policies, how & where the course is being conducted and student behavior.

- Welcome, introductions, paperwork
- Student & instructor course expectations and limitations
- Course itinerary & site logistics
- Review waiver, assumption of risk, challenge by choice, medical disclosure
- About the ACA
- PFD policy (always wear on the water)
- Appropriate personal behavior
- No alcohol/ substance abuse
- Proper etiquette on & off the water
- Respect private property
- Practice Leave No Trace ethics

The Paddling Environment:

Learning Objective - Students should understand the current Paddling Environment for the duration of the course.

- 4 W's: Wind, Waves, Weather, Water
- River classifications of the venue of the course

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Personal Preparation:

Learning Objective - Students should understand their level of what is expected of them for the duration of the course.

Check-in with student on the following:

- Ability to self-evaluate
- Whitewater swimming ability
- Whitewater comfort & confidence
- Fitness, conditioning, and warm-up
- Boat handling experience
- Safety and rescue training
- Quality of personal equipment (reviewed by instructor)

Hazard Evaluation and Judgment:

Judgment: *Learning Objective - Students should be able to use good judgment in the river environment, within themselves and their group.*

Operating on class II and III whitewater the emphasis is on hard skills, which are easily defined. Operating in class IV and above whitewater requires a high level of decision making based on self-awareness and your evaluation of yourself and the group.

Self Awareness:

- Understanding your level of anxiety
- Knowing your personal style and risk tolerance
- Your level of responsibility to the group
- Your level of awareness of the environment and your group

Self Evaluation:

- What moves are required to successfully run the rapid? - Can I perform the required moves?
- What are the consequences of missing the required moves? - Am I willing to accept these consequences?
- What if...? - Am I prepared?
- Rescue considerations - Am I capable of performing potential rescues?

Group Evaluation:

- What is the skill level of the group and paddle team?
 - What is each member's *Self Evaluation*? If they have none, how does that affect your decisions?
- Is the size of the group appropriate to the environment?
 - How is boat spacing being managed?
 - Are boat roles being identified? (ie: point, sweep, Trip Leader, etc...)
- What are the group dynamics?
 - Are there conflicting personalities?
- What is the condition of the group?
 - What is their fitness level?
 - Are they hot/cold, tired, hungry, dehydrated, etc...?



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Objective and Subjective Hazards: *Learning Objective - Students should be able to recognize, evaluate and make good decisions based on objective and subjective factors*

What are Objective Hazards and how do we deal with them?

Objective hazards are a natural part of the environment. They cannot be eliminated. i.e.:

- Strainers
- Hydraulics
- Sives

Ways to avoid:

- Understand and identify
- Maneuver around
- Use good judgment

What are Subjective Hazards and how do we deal with them?

Subjective hazards are human-caused. These hazards can be controlled or minimized through recognition, experience, skill, conditioning, and human connection. i.e.:

- People (i.e. Is there one or more individual that is afraid/ drunk/ overly confident/ etc...?)
- Human factors (i.e. Is your group falling prey to psychological effects such as groupthink, halo effect, familiarity, scarcity, etc...)
- Actual risk vs perceived risk

Ways to avoid:

- Learn to recognize early
- 6 P's (Prior Planning Prevents Piss Poor Performance)

Scouting:

Learning Objective - Students should be able to apply objective and subjective factors, showing good judgment, in the decision process of scouting.

Scout class III/IV rapids and assess all of the following:

- Objective Hazards
- Subjective Hazards
- Identify various lines to navigate a rapid
- Potential consequences if lines are missed
- Options for setting safety
- Potential places for swimmers and option for rescue
- Options for portaging if running deemed too hazardous for **all or part** of the group

Advanced on Water Maneuvers

Learning Objectives - Students should understand various advanced maneuvers for both play and necessity, and how to make those maneuvers

Paddling Techniques

Anticipating Paddle Strokes - Think ahead and anticipate the paddle strokes you might want to use for the maneuvers you'll be making.

- Reading the water
 - Identify how water features will affect your boat
 - Thinking multiple moves ahead and anticipating the strokes that will make each move



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Surfing as a Maneuver:

Learning Objectives - Students should understand and be able to demonstrate the use of surfing as a maneuver in a rapid as opposed to playing in a single feature.

Surfing Maneuvers - Holes and Waves

- Lateral waves - good for making “typewriter” maneuvers
- Small holes - good for slowing momentum
- Large features - good for making ferry maneuvers (particularly waves)
- Assess holes to make sure they aren’t too “sticky”

Surfing Maneuvers - Direction

- Front surf (Bow upstream) - Best for paddle rafts
- Back surf (Bow down stream) - Best for oar rafts

Playboating a Paddle Raft:

Learning Objectives - Students should understand the benefits and consequences of making non essential maneuvers for the sake of fun and practice.

Playboating - Playboating can be a great way to learn but increases chances of swimming. Make sure your crew is comfortable with playing and swimming, and make sure your venue is safe. (i.e. no downstream hazards)

- Downstream safety
- Communication - With crew and other boaters

Making non-essential maneuvers - Make class IV moves in class II & III whitewater

Practicing higher consequence moves in lower consequence water leads to increased confidence and ability, preparing paddlers for the step up into class IV whitewater.

Using powerful eddy lines as play features

- Playing with tube suck
- Playing with low siding
- Be ready for a potential flip and swimmers on the low tube

Boofing Rafts

- Fun in small rafts on ledges
- Practice boof stroke with crew -
 - Large far reaching forward stroke at very edge of ledge
 - Finishing with crew leaning far back while thrusting hips forward
- Timing is key -
 - Time the boof stroke when the bow crests the lip of the ledge
 - Each row of paddlers reaches, placing their paddle in the lip of the drop, taking a hard forward stroke at the lip of the ledge.
 - Paddlers stroke in succession, not unison, as they pass over the ledge. (Like a caterpillar - i.e. front row strokes at edge, then second row then third row strokes as each row of paddlers reaches the lip of the edge.)
- Approach the ledge perpendicular to the lip
- Forward momentum approaching the lip is required

Safety & Rescue



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Learning Objectives - Students should understand the risks involved in a whitewater environment and how to mitigate them. Students should be able to perform required techniques to safely recover from unplanned situations.

Rescue Philosophy

- Rescue Priorities: People first, boats & gear second
- Responsibility - Group over an individual, rescuer over a victim
- Rescue management & leadership:
 - Have a rescue leader
 - Identify rescue and first aid skill sets in group
 - Develop and communicate a rescue plan
- Fast & simple to slow & complex
- Can I should I? (Do I have the skills? Is it safe?)

Environmental Concerns

- Cold Water Shock and Hypothermia
- Hyperthermia

Whitewater Swimming

- Possibility of longer harder swims
- Swimming techniques for hydraulics
- Re-entering the boat

Boat Recovery Techniques

- Raft-Flip Recovery
- Boat bumping/ bulldozing
- Dealing with a pinned boat
 - Basics of mechanical advantages
 - Understand dangers of mechanical advantage

Proper Outfitting to Improve Safety

- Rig a clean / *svelte boat
 - Take what you need for the environment you are boating in
 - Rigging your boat for fast flip recovery
- *Svelte, French word meaning slender or graceful in figure or outline*

Conclusion & Wrap Up

- Group debrief / Individual feedback
- Course limitations
- Importance of First Aid & CPR
- Importance of additional instruction, practice, experience
- Importance of appropriate level of safety & rescue training
- Demo advanced maneuvers
- Life sport / Paddling options
- Local paddling groups / Clubs
- Handouts / Reference materials
- ACA Membership forms
- Course evaluation
- Participation cards