



Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking

(Sample Skills Course)

Course Overview: The **Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayak** course is designed to refine and increase coastal kayaking skills for use in open water.

Course Objectives: Participants will be introduced to:

- Refining edge control for maneuvering and correcting course, balance, bracing, and overall boat control
- Refining the forward stroke and learning the side slip maneuver (static draw)
- Performing assisted and self-rescues in open water
- Using compass to hold course and chart to fix location
- Bow angle method of avoiding collision
- Refining open water-towing technique

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 under water
3. Independently hold head upright without neck / head support
4. Manage personal care independently or with 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 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 paddlecraft 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.*



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Course Prerequisites: Basic Strokes and Rescues Course or equivalent experience

Minimum Personal Equipment for the Course

- Properly sized and outfitted kayak with front and rear flotation.
- Standard gear and safety equipment (paddles, lifejackets (PFDs), spray skirts, paddle floats, bilge pumps, and clothing appropriate for weather and immersion)

Course Duration: One day (8 hours)

Course Location / Venue: The selected venue should provide access to open water and at least one set of conditions within the following ranges, with constant access to safe landing and within 2 nm from shore:

- 10 - 15 knot winds
- 2 - 4 foot waves (chop) (0.6 – 1.2 meters)
- 2 - 4 knots of current

Class Ratio - 5 students : 1 Instructor; with an additional instructor or qualified assistant the ratio can be 10 : 2

Succeeding courses

Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking – Surf Zone

Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking – Rough Water Maneuvering & Towing

The following is a general summary of course content for the **Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayak** course. The content and sequence of instruction should be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location and time allowance.

Course Content

Introduction, Expectations, and Logistics

- 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
- Lifejacket (PFD) 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

The Paddling Environment

- Wind
- Waves
- Weather
- Water



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Personal Preparation

- ~~Personal ability~~
- Swimming ability
- Water comfort and confidence
- Fitness, conditioning, and warm up
- Safe paddle and boat handling
- Safety and rescue considerations
- Personal equipment (reviewed by Instructor)

Onshore Discussion

- Discuss the importance of edging and its many uses
- Balance
- Edging (carving turns and correcting course)
- Bracing and rolling
- Control in wind and rough water
- Surfing
- Boat fit and adjustment
- Boat/body weld
- Foot brace adjustment
- Review wet exit (make sure everyone can and has performed one)

Practice Edging and Maneuvers

Suggested exercises/progression:

- Edge boat side-to-side, keeping upper torso steady
- Hold boat on edge, using balance; both sides
- Paddle forward, lift paddle, lean boat, allowing it to carve a turn
- Edge boat and hold on edge, while paddling forward
- Edge boat, initiate turn with one sweep stroke, and paddle forward continuing the turn, while holding boat on edge
- Practice sweep strokes with edge; edge boat toward working blade
- Paddle in a large circle, using edging and sweep strokes to maintain turn
- Paddle on a range (straight line), using sweep/edging corrective strokes to maintain course

Refine Forward Stroke

- Work on torso rotation
- Work on keeping power phase well forward with a short stroke
- Keep upper hand near eye level; do not drop upper hand toward deck

Side-Slip Maneuver, Using Static Draw

- Start with sculling draw
- Introduce static draw position
- Practice using static draw while moving forward

On-Land Presentations

(Excellent time for a “working lunch”)

- Compass use in low visibility (safety heading)
- Chart use to fix location
- Bow angle method of avoiding collision



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- Brief on-land review of rescue technique

Towing Procedures

- Basic towing demonstration and practice
- Standard one-on-one tow
- Push tow

Practice Rescues in Open Water

- Assisted rescues
- Self-rescues

Skills Development Tour on Open Water

- Continue to develop efficient stroke technique
- Practice course corrections
- Practice using ranges
- Have fun

Conclusion and Wrap Up

- Group debrief / individual feedback
- Course limitations
- Importance of first aid and CPR
- Importance of additional instruction, practice, experience
- Importance of appropriate level of safety and rescue training
- Demo advanced maneuver
- Life sport / paddling options
- Local paddling groups / Clubs
- Handouts / reference materials
- ACA membership forms
- Course evaluation
- Participation cards