



Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayak (Sample Skills Course)

Course Overview: The **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:

- The “J-Lean” and its uses, including 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
- Basic 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, PFDs, spray skirts, paddle floats, bilge pumps, and clothing appropriate for weather and immersion)

Course Duration: One day (8 hours)

Course Location / Venue: Ideal teaching conditions are a protected cove for launching and landing and working on J-leans, stroke review, and maneuvering, with quick access to more open water and/or variable conditions for practicing rescues and short open water crossings. Waves should not exceed 2 feet; winds should not exceed 15 knots. Groups must be kept within 1 mile from shore.

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

Succeeding courses:

Rough Water Maneuvering, Towing and Rescues
Advanced Surf

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

Course Content

Introduction, Expectations, & Logistics:

- 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 water)
- Appropriate personal behavior
- No alcohol / substance abuse
- Proper etiquette on & off the water
- Respect private property



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- Practice Leave No Trace ethics

The Paddling Environment:

- Wind
- Waves
- Weather
- Water

Personal Preparation:

- Personal ability
- Swimming ability
- Water comfort & 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 the J-lean and its many uses. Explain why it is the single most important kayaking skill:

- 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 J-Leans and Maneuvers

Suggested exercises/progression:

- Tilt 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
- Lean boat and hold on edge, while paddling forward
- Lean boat, initiate turn with one sweep stroke, and paddle forward continuing the turn, while holding boat on edge
- Practice sweep strokes with J-lean; lean boat toward working blade
- Paddle in a large circle, using J-lean and sweep strokes to maintain turn
- Paddle on a range (straight line), using sweep/lean corrective strokes to maintain course

Refine Forward Stroke

- Work on torso rotation



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- 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
- 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

- T-Rescue
- Self Rescue (Paddle float)

Skills Development Tour on Open Water

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

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 maneuver
- Life sport / Paddling options
- Local paddling groups / Clubs
- Handouts / Reference materials
- ACA Membership forms
- Course evaluation
- Participation cards



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