



Level 2: Essentials of Canoeing Skills Course

Course Overview

The Essentials of Canoeing course is designed as an introduction to paddling canoes on flatwater and gently moving protected waters. Participants learn to paddle a canoe, recognize and avoid hazards, perform rescues, and respond to emergencies. This course is appropriate for all types of tandem and/or solo canoes. It can be taught tandem, solo, or both.

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. One day (8 hours) or more.

Course Location / Accessible Venues

Flatwater or gently moving rivers with current up to 1 knot (1.15 mph), wind up to 10 knots (11.5 mph), and waves up to 1 foot (0.3 meters).

Course Size

Tandem: 6 participants : 1 Instructor; with an additional instructor or qualified assistant, the ratio can be 12 : 2.

Solo: 5 participants : 1 Instructor; with an additional instructor or qualified assistant, the ratio can be 10 : 2.

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

Instructor

This course may be offered by Level 2: Essentials of River Canoeing (or higher) or Level 2: Essentials of Canoe Touring (or higher) ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

Succeeding Courses

- Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Canoeing
- Level 2: Essentials of River Canoeing
- Level 2: Essentials of Canoe Touring
- Level 3: River Canoeing
- Level 3: Freestyle Canoeing

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

- 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
- PFD policy (always wear on water)
- Appropriate personal behavior
 - No alcohol / substance abuse

- Proper etiquette on & off the water
- Respect private property
- Practice Leave No Trace ethics

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)

Getting Started:

- Warm-up and stretching
- Personal clothing & equipment
- Car topping: loading and unloading, racks, straps
- Knots: figure 8 or bowline, trucker's hitch and 2 half hitches
- Canoe carries: overhead and suitcase
- Launching / landing from shore or dock
- Canoe trim
- Posture, rocking and balance

- Positions in the canoe (students may select sitting or kneeling stance)
- Concepts of Paddling
- Trip Planning - 6P's: Prior Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance
- Group Dynamics
- Judgment
- Federal, State and Local laws and regulations
- River etiquette

Equipment:

- Canoe: types, parts, materials
- Paddle: types, parts, materials, sizing, hand position (straight and bent shafts)
- Lifejacket (PFD): types, materials, fit
- Safety equipment
- Group equipment
- Care of equipment
- Optional equipment & outfitting

Strokes:

- Forward stroke
- Forward (w/ stern pry, rudder and/or J Stroke corrections)
- Reverse/Back stroke
- Sweeps (forward, reverse)
- Draws (with out of water and in water recovery [IWR, OWR], sculling)
- Bow Draw (Stationary/Dynamic)
- Cross Bow Draw (Stationary/Dynamic)
- Stern Draw
- Stern Pry

- Pry/Push Away

Maneuvers:

- Go Forward: Paddle in a straight line for 15-20 boat lengths
- Go in Reverse: Paddle backwards reasonably straight for 2 boat lengths
- Stop: within 2 boat lengths from good speed
- Spin canoe in both directions
- Move Abeam: Move the canoe 10 Feet (3 meters) sideways to both sides w/o headway
- Move the canoe abeam while underway
- Propel the canoe in a figure of 8 course around markers 3-4 boat lengths apart
- Turn the canoe 90 degrees to the right and left while moving
- Launch and land the canoe in a controlled and safe manner
- Switch positions in the canoe

Safety & Rescue:

- Group organization and management on the water
- Communication Devices, Signals: Whistle, Paddle, and Hand
- Signals: Whistle, Paddle and Hand
- Identify hazards
- Paddling in boat traffic
- Responsibility: Group; Individual; Rescuer; Rescue
- Rescue Priorities: People, Boats & Gear
- Rescue Sequence: (T-RETHROG)
- Throw rope use
- Controlled capsize
- Swimming a boat 25 feet to shore

- How to empty a boat full of water
- Canoe over Canoe rescue
- Side by Side (parallel/curl) rescue
- Re-entry (Self & Assisted, Heel Hook, Rescue Sling)
- Towing a swimmer/canoe, Tired Swimmer Assist
- Hypothermia, Hyperthermia: recognition, symptoms, treatment, prevention, proper clothing

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
- Demonstrate advanced maneuvers
- Life sport / paddling options
- Local paddling groups / clubs
- Handouts / reference materials
- ACA membership forms
- Course evaluation
- Participation cards

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<https://americancanoe.org>

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

website.