



Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Canoeing Skills Course

Skills Course Overview

This course is designed as a 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.

Skills Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- Completion of an ACA Level 4: Whitewater Canoeing course or equivalent skills

Course Duration

2 days (16 hours) or more.

Course Location / Accessible Venues

Moving water on rivers up to and including class III-IV sections. *A rapid class includes rapids at the lower and upper ends of the difficulty range, designated “-“ and “+” respectively.*

Course Size

Tandem: 4 participants : 1 Instructor; with an additional instructor, the ratio can be 8 : 2.

Solo: 3 participants : 1 Instructor; with an additional instructor, the ratio can be 6 : 2.

Instructor

This course may be offered by Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Canoeing ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

Succeeding Courses

- Level 5: Advanced Whitewater Canoeing Assessment Course
- Canoe Rolling

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)

Note: The intent of this course is not introducing new material as much as it is refining, upgrading, and expanding upon strokes and maneuvers already mastered in previous courses/experiences.

Personal Preparation & Getting Started

Learning objectives - students should understand the critical components of trip planning, including how to prepare their equipment and craft for a safe departure and return.

- 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
- Evaluate individual's swimming ability, water comfort, and confidence prior to beginning the trip
- 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)
- Review 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
- Prepare boat for departure: stowing gear securely and ensuring it is balanced
- Appropriately use communication (paddle, hand, and whistle) signals

Paddling Techniques and Mechanics

- Body Mechanics

Learning objectives - students should understand and be able to demonstrate posture that promotes efficient paddling and places the least amount of stress on the body to avoid injury.

- Ranges of motion: tuck, twist, hinge
 - Posture enhances twist, balance, and comfort
 - Torso rotation while utilizing large muscle groups improves reach
- Correct body positioning, paddle placement, “the paddler’s box,” minimizes risk to shoulders
 - Power transfer varies with flexibility and strength
 - Advantages of turning torso into boat’s new direction versus steering with stern strokes
- Lower body balance
 - Value of warm up and stretching to increase flexibility and recovery
 - Heeling (J-lean), fake leans, head dinks
- Boat Factors
 - Carving versus skidding: affected by steadiness, range of boat heel, and power application
 - Glide: determined by boat pitch, yaw, and roll
 - Hull Design: resistance of the boat through water
 - Steering and corrections: done at both ends of boat depending on the situation
 - Pivot point of boat: changes with speed
 - Pressure control to transfer force: feet, knees, and pelvic thrust
 - Outfitting: to improve efficiency of force transfer
- Blade Factors

Learning objectives - students should understand the fundamentals needed for effective strokes and maneuvers including stroke timing, parts of the paddle, paddle shaft angle, and blade placement in the water.

- Propulsive: blade close to boat centerline to minimize turning [vertical paddle]

- Turning: blade far from centerline and pivot point to maximize turn effectiveness
 - Vary power, blade angle, and distance from pivot point for fine control
 - Define quadrants [angle relative to boat]
 - Define blade angle; degrees, open, closed, etc.
- Moving the boat is the object
 - Blade angle relative to direction of travel
 - Efficiency of force application: pull instead of punch
 - Accelerate blade and recover quickly to increase stroke rate
 - Stroke timing

River Hydrology Features and Associated Risks

Learning objectives - students should understand basic river hydrology and be able to identify different river features and hazards.

- Currents
- Rocks (upstream and downstream Vs)
- Ledges and low head dams (horizon lines)
- Broaches
- Pins and entrapment
- Strainers/sieves
- Bends
- Undercut rocks or ice
- Dams/flow diversion structures and pipelines
- Holes and hydraulics

Safety and Rescue

Learning objectives - students should understand the handling of common emergency situations on the water.

- Principles of Rescue

- Rescue Priorities: people, boat, paddle, gear
- Responsibilities of the group, rescuer, swimmers
- Appropriate use of rescue and safety gear
- Emergency procedures
- River running strategies
 - River classifications (understanding of Class I - VI)
 - Scouting on shore and by boat
 - Portaging and lining
 - Complex attainments
 - Group organization on the river
- Self care and care of other group members
 - Importance of fueling, hydration, clothing/insulation, and sun protection
 - Cold shock, hypothermia, and hyperthermia: prevention and treatment
- Self rescue: swim 20 feet (6 meters) to shore in moving water using defensive and offensive techniques
- Strategies and techniques for boat recovery including bumping, bulldozing, towing, or swimming a boat to shore
- Swimmer tow options
- Self and assisted swimmer re-entry techniques (i.e., heel hook, rescue sling, etc)
- Assisted rescues: boat over boat or side by side or others appropriate to conditions
- Unresponsive paddler rescue
- Throw rope use
- One, two, and three person wading with a paddle
- Entrapments with stabilization line
- Boat pins: strong arm, rope/vector, and simple mechanical advantage strategies
- Emptying water from the boat (on shore, bailers, pumps, sponges, etc.)

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)

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Date of last revision: 1/1/2023

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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](#).