



Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Instructor Criteria

Course Overview

Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking is a high level in the ACA Coastal Kayak discipline where coastal kayakers refine and apply their skills and knowledge to a more exposed paddling environment. The Open Water Coastal Kayaking instructor certification program is an upgrade opportunity for currently certified Level 3: Coastal Kayak Instructors. As continuing education for certified instructors, the focus is the development of teaching methods and working in more challenging conditions. The Level 4 Instructor Criteria is cumulative, building upon the Level 3 Instructor Criteria.

Passing an Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Skills Assessment is required before the start of instructor development. By the time of evaluation, candidates are expected to exceed the Level 4 skills and technical knowledge, including the “developing skills,” as identified in the Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Skills Assessment.

Instructor Candidates will focus on the coaching aspect of developing kayaking skills and knowledge for those who wish to learn to kayak in conditions up to and including Level 4. In general, Level 4 instructors incorporate a wide range of instructional frameworks and create learning progressions based on student readiness and environment. Increased awareness enhances the Level instructor’s ability to observe and analyze student performance and provide feedback to optimize various techniques. Successful candidates will teach, lead, and manage groups in open water environments where the conditions may limit verbal communication. Level 4 certification workshops focus on planning, designing, and delivering of continued learning experiences and multi-day programs, as well as the roles and responsibilities of an ACA instructor.

Course Prerequisites

- Demonstrate general knowledge of the purpose and significance of the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- Be a current ACA member
- Understands and acts in accordance with [ACA's Code of Conduct](#)
- Candidates must be an ACA Level 3: Coastal Kayak Instructor in good standing, having taught and reported at least two Level 3: Coastal Kayak skills or assessment courses.
- Must have successfully completed a Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayak Skills Assessment or Level 4: Coastal Kayak Trip Leader Assessment.

Course Duration

Instructor Certification Workshop (ICW) - Minimum 4 days (32 hours).

Course Location / Accessible Venues

Instructor candidates must demonstrate proficiency in 3 of the following 4 conditions at some time during the certification workshop to receive certification. The selected venue is to have regular access to a safe landing and be within 2 nautical miles from shore:

- 15 - 20 knot winds
- 3 - 5 foot waves (chop) (0.9 – 1.5 meters)
- 3 - 4 foot surf (0.9 – 1.2 meters) required
- 2 - 4 knots of current

Conditions do not need to be simultaneously present, and areas of escape from conditions must be available. The training venue shall provide a variety of leadership environments, such as regions with boat traffic, surf zones, tidal races, and rocky headlands.

Course Size

5 Instructor Candidates : 1 Instructor Trainer; with an additional qualified assistant, the ratio can be 10 : 2. The maximum number of instructor candidates permitted is 10.

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

Instructor Trainer

This certification course may be offered by Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking (or higher) ACA Instructor Trainers or Instructor Trainer Educators.

The following is a list of the criteria used to evaluate instructor candidates. The content and evaluation sequence should be adjusted to fit the participant's needs, class location, and time allowance.

General Requirements for all ACA Certification Candidates

- Be at least 18 years old
- Demonstrate general knowledge of [ACA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion \(DEI\) initiatives](#)
- Successfully complete an Instructor Certification Workshop (combined ICW or IDW and ICE)
- Upon successful completion, register with the [Safety Education and Instruction Council](#)
- Have and maintain venue-appropriate first aid and age-appropriate CPR
- Demonstrate a general knowledge of paddlesports and the ACA
- Demonstrate the ability to appropriately perform, model, and teach all of the material contained within the official ACA skills course and assessment course outlines corresponding to their level of certification and all levels below, if applicable
- Demonstrate the ability to appropriately perform, model, and teach all of the following material, unassisted, in the appropriate venue
- Demonstrate the ability to appropriately perform, model, and teach all of the material contained within the official ACA skills course and assessment course outlines corresponding to their level of certification and all levels below, if applicable.
- Demonstrate positive interpersonal skills

Certification Maintenance Requirements

- Teach a minimum of two courses that meet ACA standards within the four-year certification period and properly report the courses using the ACA Course Management System (CMS). At least one course must be at their highest level of certification
- Complete an Instructor Update, at the highest level of certification, during the four-year certification period
- Maintain ACA membership and SEIC registration annually
- Maintain appropriate CPR and First Aid certification for the duration of certification

ACA Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Instructor Requirements

ACA Knowledge and Professionalism:

- Has a general understanding of the history, mission, and philosophy of the American Canoe Association.
- Understands the mission of purpose of the ACA Safety, Education, and Instruction Committee (SEIC) and the Safety, Education, and Instruction (SEI) Department.
- Familiar with the Course Management System (CMS), use of the "test system," dashboard, uploading of credentials, registering a course with and without insurance, reporting courses, candidate evaluations, and completing and submitting an ACA Waiver.
- Understands instructor certification maintenance requirements.

Personal Paddling:

- Effectively models the competencies and skills listed in the **Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Skills Assessment**.
- Personal skills largely "exceed" the standards and can perform the "Developing Skills" as described in the **Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Assessor's Guide**.

Course Structure and Delivery:

- Able to plan, design, and structure courses for paddlers with various skill and experience levels.
- Able to plan, design, and structure courses for venues, conditions, and content, including Level 4.
- Able to plan, design, and structure continued learning experiences and multi-day programs.
- Chooses venue for specific learning outcomes.
- Modifies venue choice and place within the venue when appropriate.
- Optimizes features within the chosen venue.
- Delivers effective sessions with student goals at the forefront.
- Able to incorporate and engage students in course planning.
- Engages course participants in shared responsibility for group support.
- Facilitates effective course introduction and debrief sessions.
- Effectively communicates with Instructor Trainer and peers before, during, and after the course.

Instructional Expectations

- Demonstrates the ability plan and deliver a structured learning sessions.
- Demonstrates the ability to implement and facilitate purpose-drive activities (for example, learning through games).
- Demonstrates the ability to deliver and adapt a session based on learner interest, need, and environment.
- Plans cohesive learning progressions.
- Demonstrates the ability to use skills and/or environmental progressions to support the development of complex skills and/or understanding of complex environments.
- Develop individual sessional goals in collaboration with learners.
- Demonstrates using performance tasks such as scenarios to challenge learners' skills and decision making.
- Provides performance feedback based on observation (what) and analysis (why).

Practical Teaching of Content from Level 4 Skills Assessment*

- **Demonstrates ability to teach boat handling in Level 4 conditions:**
 - Refinement of strokes: forward, reverse, sweeps, draws, and rudders
 - Application of strokes to Level 4 venues and condition.
 - Refinement of maneuvers: bow and stern rudder turns, low and high brace static and dynamic draws
 - Application of maneuvers to Level 4 venues and conditions
- **Demonstrates ability to teach edging and support in Level 4 conditions:**
 - Edge awareness and control
 - Refinement and application of low and high brace recoveries
 - Refinement and application of sculling for support
 - Refinement and application of low and high brace turns
- **Demonstrates ability to teach rolling in conditions up to and including Level 4. In addition to teaching, the candidate has a personal level of proficiency. They can roll 3 times within 1 minute, and one roll must be from a non-setup position:**
 - Rolling progression
 - Rolling in conditions
- **Demonstrates ability to teach rescues and towing in Level 4 conditions:**
 - Refinement and application of assisted rescues for able paddlers: side-by-side, scoop, T-rescues, and swimmer deck carry
 - Refinement and application of assisted rescues for impaired swimmers: scoop, Unresponsive paddler, and swimmer deck carry
 - Refinement and application of self-rescue: re-enter and roll, paddle float, and scramble
 - Refinement and application of towing strategies: in-line, rafted-in-line, and anchor tow
 - Refinement and application of boat moving strategies: contact tow, bulldozing, and toggle tow

- Tow system management
- Refinement and application of kayak and paddle presentation rescues
- Refinement and application of connecting a swimmer separated from their kayak
- **Demonstrates ability to teach awareness and seamanship for Level 4 conditions:**
 - Effects of wind, tide, currents, and land masses on the marine environment
 - Leave No Trace Principles
 - NOAA Marine Wildlife Viewing Guidelines
 - Kayak design and equipment
 - Equipment selection and packing of the kayak
 - Kayak repair
 - Hypothermia and cold-water shock
 - Hyperthermia and heat-related issues
 - Knots
- **Demonstrates ability to teach incident prevention and management for Level 4 conditions:**
 - Kayak transport
 - Launching and landing
 - Paddling as a cohesive group: communication, line of sight, awareness, and positioning
 - VHF radio, signaling devices, and distress calls
 - Float plan
- **Demonstrates ability to teach trip planning and navigation content for Level 4 conditions:**
 - Weather forecasting and application to route planning
 - Trip planning; effects of wind, waves, and swell
 - Tidal planning; calculations for stages of tide, drift and flow strength and direction
 - On water use of chart and compass
 - On water application of dead reckoning
 - On water application of piloting
 - Limited visibility navigation
 - Systems of buoyage and the Nautical Rules of the Road
 - Constructing navigation exercises
- **Demonstrates ability to teach one of three Level 4 venue specific skillsets from the Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Skills Assessment. The Level 4 Instructor must demonstrate venue appropriate skill and knowledge of features and hazards specific to their regions of operation. Demonstration of teaching a venue-specific skill set denotes the necessary level of teaching ability for all Level 4 venues.**
 - Tide Races

- Surf Zone
- Rock Gardens and Sea Caves

***Note:** Candidates need not demonstrate practical teaching of all the strokes, maneuvers, rescues, and competencies during the course. They must simply demonstrate teaching at least one skill from each of the above categories.

Delivering Skills Assessments

- Understands the standards set in the Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Skills Assessment.
- Structures opportunities for performance assessment experiences in Level 4 conditions.
- Demonstrates the ability to accurately assess whether a paddler's skill level meets Level 4 standards.
- Provides appropriate and accurate feedback in a timely manner at the conclusion of the assessment course.

Leadership

- Demonstrates an understanding of the principles of group management, both on and off the water.
- Demonstrates personal leadership on and off the water.

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