



# Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking Instructor Criteria

## Course Overview

Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking is the highest level of the ACA Coastal Kayak discipline, where coastal kayakers apply their skills in complex sea kayaking venues and conditions. The Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking Instructor certification is an upgrade opportunity for currently certified Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Instructors. As continuing education for certified instructors, the focus is on coaching and mentoring kayakers and working in dynamic conditions. The Level 5 Instructor Criteria is cumulative, building upon the Level 3 and Level 4 Instructor Criteria.

Passing a Level 5: Advanced 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 5 skills and technical knowledge, including the “developing skills,” as identified in the Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking Skills Assessment.

Instructor Candidates will focus on the mentoring aspect of developing kayaking skills and knowledge for those who wish to learn to kayak in conditions up to and including Level 5. In general, Level 5 instructors work cooperatively with their students to develop practice progressions based on student readiness and environment. They facilitate students’ ability to analyze their performance and provide feedback to optimize their technique. Successful candidates will teach, lead, and manage groups in complex environments where conditions may limit verbal communication. Level 5 certification workshops focus on planning, designing, and delivering 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 4: Open Water Coastal Kayak Instructor in good standing, having taught and reported at least four Level 4: Open Water skills or assessment courses within the past four years.
- Must have successfully completed a Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking Skills Assessment. (Effective 01/01/2025)

## Course Duration

Combined Instructor Development Workshop (IDW) and Instructor Certification Exam (ICE) - Minimum 6 days (48 hours).

## Course Location / Accessible Venues

Instructor Trainers (IT) shall choose a location with exposure to conditions where an area of retreat is accessible. During the course, the IT shall keep participants within 2.0 nautical miles of shore. Participants must be assessed while paddling in any three of the four conditions below.

- Winds of at least 15 - 25
- Waves of at least 3 feet (0.9 meters)
- Surf of at least 4 feet (1.2 meters)
- Tidal Current greater than 4 knots

An area of escape from rough conditions must be accessible. Candidates must demonstrate an ability to read and interpret environmental conditions and their contributions to student learning and risk, including effects of multiple criteria superimposed simultaneously; effects of wind, swell, and current direction; and character of a surf break (for example, spilling vs dumping, beach vs rocky shore). Selection of and continued operation in venues must be guided by a sound understanding and continuous monitoring of environmental conditions, with candidates demonstrating the application of sound judgment to ensure the safety and provision of an optimal learning environment.

## **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 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking 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.

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## **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 5: Advanced 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 Department (SEI).
- Familiar with the Course Management System (CMS), use of "test system," dashboard, uploading of credentials, registering courses with and without insurance, reporting courses, candidate evaluations, and completing and submitting an ACA Waiver.
- Understands the instructor certification maintenance requirements.

### **Personal Paddling:**

- Effectively models the competencies and skills listed in the Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking Skills Assessment.
- Personal skills largely "exceed" standards and can perform "Developing Skills" as described in the Level 5: Advanced 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 5.
- 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.

- Facilitates effective student-led course planning.
- Engages course participants in shared responsibility for group support.
- 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 deliver and adapt a session based on learner interest, need, and environment.
- Demonstrates the ability to use skills and/or environmental progressions to support the development of complex skills and/or understanding of complex environments.
- Uses reproductive and productive teaching styles to support learner learning.
- Demonstrates using performance tasks such as scenarios to challenge learners' skills and decision making.
- Provides performance feedback based on observation (what) and analysis (why) and supports the development of intrinsic feedback pathways.

### **Practical Teaching of Skills and Competencies from the Level 5 Skills Assessment\***

- **Demonstrates ability to teach boat handling in Level 5 conditions:**
  - Refinement of boat handling in Level 5 venues and conditions
  - Performance coaching of boat handling in Level 5 venues and conditions
- **Demonstrates ability to teach rolling in Level 5 conditions:**
  - Rolling progression for conditions
  - Performance coaching of rolling
- **Demonstrates ability to teach rescues and towing in Level 5 conditions:**
  - Refinement of self-rescues and assisted rescues for able and unable paddlers
  - Performance coaching of assisted and self-rescues
  - Refinement of towing strategies
  - Performance coaching of towing techniques and strategies
- **Demonstrates ability to teach awareness and seamanship for Level 5 conditions:**
  - Effects of wind, tide, currents, and land masses on the marine environment
  - Leave No Trace Principles and NOAA Marine Wildlife Viewing Guidelines
  - Causes, prevention, and treatment of heat and cold-related issues
  - Kayak design and equipment
  - Kayak repair
  - Knots
- **Demonstrates ability to teach incident prevention and management for Level 5 conditions:**
  - Kayak transport and carrying

- Launching and landing
- Teamwork
- Communication
- VHF radio use
- **Demonstrates ability to teach trip planning and navigation content for Level 5 conditions:**
  - Kayak transport and carrying
  - 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 chart and compass, dead reckoning, and piloting
  - Systems of buoyage and the Nautical Rules of the Road
  - Limited visibility navigation
  - Constructing navigation exercises
- **Demonstrates ability to teach two of three Level 5 venue specific skillsets from the Level 5 Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking Skills Assessment. The Level 5 Instructor must demonstrate venue appropriate skill and knowledge of features and hazards specific to their regions of operation. Demonstration of teaching two venue specific skill sets denotes the necessary level of teaching ability in Level 5 Venues.**
  - Tide races
  - Surf
  - 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 or competency from each of the above categories. Further detail on the skills and competencies is found in the Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking Skills Assessment.

### **Delivering Skills Assessments:**

- Understands the standards set in the Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking Skills Assessment.
- Structures opportunities for performance assessment experiences in Level 5 conditions.
- Demonstrates the ability to accurately assess whether a paddler's skill level meets Level 5 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](#).