



Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayak Trip Leader Assessment Course

Purpose

The purpose of the Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Trip Leader (Level 4: OWCKTL) assessment is to prepare individuals who intend to lead other paddlers, either recreationally or professionally, in open water and moderate conditions in coastal environments (oceans, bays, large lakes, wide rivers, etc.). The emphasis of the assessment is on leadership. Successful completion of the assessment provides evidence of proficiency in the participant's technical skills, as well as the knowledge and leadership necessary to plan and implement single day or multi-day trips appropriate for a group's abilities in environments up to and including Level 4: OWCK conditions where more dynamic environments may limit decision times and where wind and wave noise may degrade communication.

Assessment Overview

For successful completion of the Level 4: OWCKTL assessment, an individual must demonstrate technical proficiency, appropriate trip planning, group management and leadership skills in Level 4: OWCKTL conditions. While this is not a teaching award, an Level 4: OWCKTL must also be able to provide basic tips to paddlers, as appropriate, to help them to paddle safely through the environment.

Assessment Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- Be a current ACA Member
- Complete a Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayak Trip Leader Training Course
- Provide a summary of previous trip experience including leadership roles

Course Duration

Two days (16 hours) minimum.

Course Location / Accessible Venues

The selected venue must provide access to open water and at least three of the four conditions within the following ranges, with constant access to safe landing and within 2 nm 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

rafts, and rocky headlands. Safe landings within 2 nm must always be available.

Course Size

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

Assessor

This assessment course may be offered by:

- Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Instructor Trainer (or higher), or
Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking Instructor with the Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Trip Leader Endorsement

Course Outline

Equipment

Participants shall possess all the equipment appropriate for a trip leader in Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking conditions, and demonstrate the judgement to carry equipment that is appropriate and responsive to various venues, climates, trip durations, and group characteristics. Participants' gear selections shall cover the following categories:

- Kayak (single sit-on-top or sit-inside) and personal equipment appropriate for coastal paddling. If sit-on-top kayaks are used, at least some of the kayaks in the course must be sit-inside to allow demonstration of skills and knowledge of both types of boats.
- Safety and emergency
- Signaling and communications
- First aid and equipment repair kits
- Navigation

Participants shall be able to explain why they selected/omitted certain items, for a particular venue. Participants may borrow equipment for assessment.

Skills

The following list of criteria are to be used in the assessment of Level 4: OWCKTL participants. The time spent on each skill and the sequence of evaluation should be adjusted to fit the participant's needs, class location, and time allowance with an emphasis on the application of each skill in a leadership context.

Maneuvering:

Participants shall be able to demonstrate safe, efficient, and effective skills for maneuvering and boat control in a variety of sea states, wind conditions, and tidal currents up to the Level 4: OWCKTL course venue. The focus of the assessment will be on desired results rather than on specific individual technique. The skills shall include:

- Forward (touring and power) and reverse paddling, and stopping
- Turning and maneuvering with good edge awareness and control
- Boat handling and control skills, preventing capsize with braces and sculling for support and maintaining directional stability

- Launching and landing, both of themselves and the group in mild surf

Note: The assessment context of technical skills shall include the necessary maneuvering for towing, quickly attaining the bow of a capsized boat, paddling on edge to maintain directional stability, using support strokes to prevent capsize, reverse paddling to assist in rescue rather than turning, or similar practical applications of personal skills.

Rescues and Tows: Participants shall be able to perform a variety of assisted rescues and self-rescues, as well as tows, in Level 4: OWCKTL conditions, to include:

For sit inside kayaks, the following skills:

- T-rescue
- Scoop rescue
- Roll

If sit-on-top kayaks are available, the following optional skills:

- Side by side with stabilization assisted rescue
- Cross kayak PFD grab assisted rescue

For both sit inside and sit-on-top kayaks, the following skills:

- Unresponsive paddler, e.g. Hand-of-God
- Stirrup rescue
- Efficient self-rescue from a swimming start
- Swimmer carries (bow, stern, and back deck)
- Contact tow (forward and reverse)
- Tow – single boat and multiple boat inline
- Rafted tow

The assessor shall evaluate the participant's situational awareness and ability to maintain group control during the performance of rescues and towing exercises. A variety of touring, sit-on-top and tandem kayaks may be used at the assessor's discretion.

Technical: Participants shall demonstrate the following technical skills:

- **Navigation** – Participants shall demonstrate a knowledge of chart symbols, distance measurement, bearings, variation and transits. While on the water, participants shall be able to determine a position using bearings and/or transits, navigate using shoreline features, buoys and other visible references, and maintain a course using a compass heading, transits and time.
- **Basic boat repair** – Participants shall demonstrate basic field repair/management of either a small hole, compromised/missing hatch cover or a damaged skeg/rudder. At the assessor's discretion, the repair may occur on the water.

Leadership

Leadership ability shall be assessed in the context of exercises or legs of a journey where each candidate is given the opportunity to make challenge-appropriate decisions, cognizant of conditions and the current performance capability of the group. Individual legs shall be debriefed to assess an understanding of leadership principles and to

reveal the participant's decision-making process. Participants shall show leadership styles appropriate to the circumstances, the risk at hand, the individuals being led, and the environmental challenges encountered.

- Group abilities – Participants shall demonstrate the ability to assess individual and group performance capabilities (e.g. skills, experience, judgement, fitness, boats and equipment) and set goals appropriately.
- Environmental awareness – Participants shall demonstrate the ability to assess conditions based on weather forecasts, observed wind, tidal current and sea state. Participants shall also identify protected areas, potential hazards, early exit options, remoteness and rescue resources. Based on these observations, participants shall plan an appropriate journey and adapt their plan as conditions change.
- Group awareness – Participants shall demonstrate group awareness throughout a trip to include assessing a group's energy levels, hydration, confidence in conditions and readiness for upcoming challenges, and adjust their trip plans accordingly.
- Group management – Participants shall demonstrate group management and control appropriate to the conditions, environment and group readiness (e.g. spacing, pacing, formation and supporting roles) to include setting clear parameters and establishing emergency procedures.
- Risk assessment, incident avoidance and management – Participants shall demonstrate ongoing risk assessment relative to the readiness of the group, implement proactive strategies to avoid potential incidents, and manage incidents effectively if they do occur.
- Communication – Participants shall demonstrate the use of effective and ongoing communication to manage the group, share plans, assess paddlers, adapt to environmental limitations (e.g. wind or swell) and proactively prepare for potential emergencies.
- Positioning – Participants are expected to use various positions as appropriate to the situation, environment and potential consequences. Leader positioning shall reflect an awareness of potential hazards, the need to maintain a line of sight, and preparedness to manage potential rescues/incidents.
- Launching and landing – Participants must demonstrate proficiency launching and landing themselves and a group in Level 4: OWCKTL conditions, including planning, communication and positioning to maintain group control

Knowledge

The topics and concepts below provide a framework of knowledge necessary for trip planning, implementation, and leadership. All will be covered and assessed in the context of the Level 4: OWCKTL environment and conditions. A candidate's knowledge can be assessed using a variety of methods which may include observation, self-assessment, feedback, written assessment, questioning, and pre-assigned and/or ad hoc presentations.

- Weather – Participants shall be familiar with the terminology typically found in marine forecasts and know multiple means of accessing appropriate forecasts. Participants shall possess basic field forecasting skills, such as recognition of cumulonimbus clouds and the factors that can produce fog.
- Tides and currents – Participants shall be familiar with tidal terms, timing, forecasts and rules for determining tide height, current speed and drift.
- Conditions – Participants shall be familiar with the terminology found in surf and sea state forecasts, know multiple sources for obtaining forecasts, know the upper limits of the Level 4: OWCKTL environment, and understand the importance of keeping their trips within those parameters.
- Trip planning – As a tabletop exercise, participants shall prepare a trip plan that demonstrates an understanding of chart data, simple course plots, weather, tides, currents, and group abilities.

- Communication and signaling – Participants shall demonstrate knowledge of communication and signaling tools and their appropriate use, including VHF radios, emergency signals, paddle and hand signals.
- Rules of the road – Participants shall understand the hazards posed by other boat traffic, know USCG night lighting requirements and basic rules of the road as they pertain to kayakers.
- Leave No Trace (LNT) skills and ethics – Participants shall have a general understanding of LNT best practices and follow LNT principles and practices at all times.
- Prevention and management of hypothermia and hyperthermia – Participants shall have knowledge of symptoms, prevention, and management of hypothermia and hyperthermia.

Assessment Criteria Checklist

Participant Name: _____

Participant ACA Membership #: _____

Course Venue: _____

Course Date(s): _____

P = Pass, N = Not Pass, DNO = Did Not Observe

Maneuvers	Pass? P/N/DNO
Forward and reverse paddling	
Turning with forward and reverse momentum	
Static turns and 360° rotation with forward and reverse strokes	
Sideways movement— static and with forward momentum	
Preventing capsize with braces and sculling for support	
Rescues and Tows	Pass? P/N/DNO
T-rescue	
Scoop rescue	
Roll—demonstrate ability to roll within 3 consecutive attempts	
Side by side with stabilization assisted rescue (if using sit-on-top)	
Cross kayak PFD grab (if sit-on-top)	
Unresponsive paddler, e.g. Hand-of-God	
Stirrup rescue	
Efficient self-rescue from swimming start	
Swimmer carries (bow, stern and back deck)	
Contact tow (forward and reverse)	
Tow—single boat and multiple boat inline	
Rafted tow	
Technical	Pass? P/N/DNO
Navigation	
Boat repair	

Leadership	Pass? P/N/DNO
Group abilities	
Environmental awareness	
Group awareness	
Group management	
Risk assessment, incident avoidance, and management	
Communications	
Positioning	
Launching and landing	

Knowledge	Pass? P/N/DNO
Weather	
Tides and currents	
Conditions	
Trip Planning	
Communication and signaling	
Nautical rules of the road	
Leave No Trace skills and ethics	
Prevention and management of hypothermia and hyperthermia	

Final Assessment
Pass or Needs More Work (circle one)
Assessor Name:
Assessor Signature:
Assessor ACA Number:
Course Conclusion Date:
Comments:

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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](#).