



Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Trip Leader Skills/Training Course

Course Purpose and Overview

The purpose of the Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayaking Trip Leader (Level 4: OWCKTL) training 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 training is on leadership.

Training Overview

The Level 4: OWCKTL training exposes an individual to the technical, trip planning, group management and leadership skills required to lead other paddlers in Level 4: OWCKTL conditions. While this is not a teaching award, an Level 4: OWCKTL should also be able to provide basic tips to paddlers, as appropriate, to help them to paddle safely through the environment. This training course is intended to be followed by an assessment course.

Skills Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- Complete a Level 4: Open Water Coastal Kayak Skills Assessment

Course Duration

Two days (16 hours) minimum

Course Location / Accessible Venues

The selected venue should 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:

- 10 - 15 knots winds
- 1 - 2 foot waves (chop) (0.3 – 0.6 meters)
- 1 - 2 foot surf (0.3 – 0.6 meters)
- 1 - 2 knots of current

At least 3 of the above conditions should be present during some part of the training.

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 Participants : 1 Instructor; with an additional qualified assistant, the ratio can be 10 : 2.

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

Trainer:

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

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 training 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 training 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 capsizes with braces and sculling for support and maintaining directional stability
- Launching and landing, both of themselves and the group in mild surf

Note: The training context shall include maneuvering for towing, quickly attaining the bow of a capsized boat, paddling on edge to maintain directional stability, using support strokes to prevent capsizes, 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 and unassisted 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 trainer shall evaluate the participant's situational awareness and ability to maintain group control during the performance of rescues and towing exercises.

Technical

participants successfully 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 trainer's discretion, the repair may occur on the water.

Leadership

Leadership ability shall be evaluated during a journey where each candidate is given the opportunity to make appropriate decisions, cognizant of conditions and the current performance capability of the group. Individual legs shall be debriefed to evaluate an understanding of leadership principles and to reveal the participant's decision-making process. Participants shall show leadership appropriate to the circumstances, the risk at hand, the individuals being led and the environmental challenges encountered.

- Group abilities – demonstrate the ability to assess individual and group performance capabilities (i.e., skills, experience, judgement, fitness, boats, and equipment) and set goals

- Environmental awareness – demonstrate the ability to assess conditions based on weather forecasts, observed wind, current and swell. Candidates shall also identify protected areas, potential hazards, early exit options, remoteness, and rescue resources. Based on these observations, candidates shall plan an appropriate journey and adapt their plan as conditions
- Group awareness – 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
- Group management – demonstrate group management and control appropriate to the conditions, environment, and group readiness (for example, spacing, pacing, formation and supporting roles) to include setting clear parameters and establishing emergency procedures
- Risk assessment, incident avoidance and management – demonstrate on-going risk assessment relative to the readiness of the group, implement proactive strategies to avoid potential incidents, and manage incidents effectively if incidents occur
- Communication – demonstrate the use of effective and ongoing communication to manage the group, share plans, assess paddlers, adapt to environmental limitations (i.e., wind or swell) and proactively prepare for potential emergencies
- Positioning – 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 in the context of the Level 4: OWCKTL environment and conditions. A candidate's knowledge can be evaluated using a variety of methods which may include observation, self-assessment, feedback, written assessment, questioning, and preassigned 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.
- Basic first aid – Participants shall be prepared to independently manage simple injuries and illness (small soft tissue or minor musculoskeletal injuries, nausea) and show appropriate judgement regarding evacuation or rescue for more serious medical problems.
- Prevention and management of cold-water shock, hypothermia, and hyperthermia – Participants shall have knowledge of symptoms, prevention, and management of cold-water shock, hypothermia, and hyperthermia

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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](#).