



Level 2: Essentials of Sit-On-Top (SOT) River Kayaking Skills Course

Course Overview

The Essentials of Sit-On-Top Kayaking course is designed as a short program emphasizing safety, enjoyment and skill acquisition for entry level individuals in the public, private and commercial setting.

Note: *This course is designed for sit-on-top (SOT) kayaks only and this curriculum is meant to highlight this limitation. Participants should understand that rescuing decked kayaks requires additional and separate instruction. Bulkheads are not required; however, some form of flotation must be present to keep the kayak from sinking.*

Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- No prior paddling experience or training is required to participate in this course

Course Duration

The course duration should be adjusted to best fit the needs and goals of the participants. One day (8 hours) or more.

Course Location / Accessible Venues

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

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](#).

Instructor

This course may be offered by Level 2: Essentials of River Kayaking (or higher) ACA Instructors, Instructor Trainers, or Instructor Trainer Educators.

Succeeding Courses

- Level 2: Essentials of Sit-On-Top Coastal Kayak Touring Skills Course and/or Skills Assessment
- Level 2: Essentials of River Kayaking Skills Course and/or Skills Assessment
- Level 3: Sit-On-Top Coastal Kayaking Skills Course and/or Skills Assessment

Course Outline

The following is a general summary of course content for the Essentials of Sit-On-Top River Kayaking skills course. The content and sequence of instruction should be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location and time allowance.

Introduction, Expectations, and Logistics

- Welcome, introductions, paperwork
- Student and Instructor course expectations and limitations
- Course itinerary and site logistics
- Review waiver, assumption of risk, challenge by choice, medical disclosure
- About the ACA
- PFD policy (always wear on water)
- Appropriate personal behavior
 - No alcohol / substance abuse
 - Proper etiquette on and off the water
 - Respect private property
 - Practice Leave No Trace ethics

Paddling Environment

- Wind
- Waves
- Weather
- Water

Personal Preparation

- Personal ability
- Swimming ability
- Water comfort and confidence
- Fitness, conditioning, and warm up
- Safe paddle and boat handling
- Safety and rescue considerations
- Personal equipment (reviewed by Instructor)
- Judgment. In addition to learning hard skills, the importance of developing personal judgment and group responsibility increases on more difficult paddling venues.

Equipment

- Life jackets (PFDs): types, fit
- Kayaks: types, parts, back bands and safety gear such as pumps
- Paddles: types, materials, parts, length, blade size, shape and offset, hand position

- Care of equipment
- Personal equipment: water, food, shoes, hat, sunscreen, insect repellent, sun glasses, eyeglass straps, protective clothing for heat or cold, sponge, bailer/pump, whistle (or other approved sounding device), knife, light
- Optional equipment and outfitting for improved control, thigh braces

Getting Started

- Warm-up and stretching
- How to pick up and carry a kayak safely
- Car topping: loading and unloading, racks, straps
- Launching and landing
 - Boarding, three points of contact, weight kept low, etc.
 - Posture, safety, comfort, effectiveness, rocking, balance
- Wet exits
- Water comfort and confidence
- Self-rescue
- Basic terminology
- Types of strokes (covered in this course): power, turning, support
- Stroke components: catch, propulsion, recovery (CPR), control, correction
- Safe and effective body usage

Safety and Rescue

- Exercising judgment, safety as a state of mind
- Principles of Rescue
 - Use of safe rescue strategies such as T-RETHROG (Talk, Reach, Throw, Row, Go)
 - Rescue priorities: people, kayak, paddle, gear
 - Responsibilities of: rescuer, group, swimmers
- From shore
 - Extension
- Hypothermia / cold water shock: HELP, Huddle, clothing
- Dehydration / hyperthermia: hydration, clothing
- Hazards: wind, waves, weather, current, rocks, bridges, piers, dams, strainers, traffic
- Paddling as a group
- Signaling
- Interactions / sharing water with non-powered and powered traffic
- Emergency procedures

Swimming and Wading Skills

- Understand the risks associated with standing and walking in the types of environments mentioned above (including entanglement and environmental hazards)
- Strategies to minimize risk of foot entrapment
- Defensive and aggressive swimming positions, and transitions
- Techniques for successful exits from current to eddies
- Self-rescue: swimming with equipment
- Strategies to conserve energy
- Strategies for managing strainers in the appropriate venue

Kayak-based Rescues

- Advantages and disadvantages during rescues of various kayaks (e.g., sit-ins, sit on-tops, recreational kayaks)
- Calmly exit the kayak after capsize, using proper body position and contact with the kayak and paddle.
- Paddle recovery options
- Strategies for kayak recovery
- Swimmer tow options
- Swimmer re-entry / re-mount techniques (e.g., perpendicular entry, rescue sling, paddle float)
- Kayak bumping / bulldozing
- Kayak towing
- Kayak specific rescues (e.g., boat over boat, boat to boat, scoop)
- Unresponsive paddler rescue
- Emptying water from kayak (e.g., on-shore, bailers, pumps)

Throwable Floating Aid / Throw Rope Skills

- Throwing techniques
- Receiving techniques
- Belaying techniques
- Rope management and safety strategies
- Rope coiling methods and throwing techniques

Strokes

- Forward
- Back (stopping)
- Draw
- Sculling draw
- Sweep (including stern draw)

- Reverse sweep
- Rudder (stern)
- Low brace

Maneuvers

- J-lean / heeling the kayak
- Paddling in a reasonably straight line
- Spins
- Stopping
- Ferries
- Eddy turns
- Peel outs
- Moving abeam

Conclusion and Wrap Up

- Group debrief / individual feedback
- Course limitations
- Importance of First Aid and CPR
- Importance of additional instruction, practice, experience
- Importance of appropriate level of safety and rescue training
- Life sport / paddling options
- Local paddling groups / clubs
- Handouts / reference materials
- ACA membership forms
- Course evaluation
- Participation cards

© American Canoe Association

Date of last revision: 12/31/2023

<https://americancanoe.org>

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