



# Level 3: River Kayak Hand-Paddling Skills Course

## Course Overview

This River Kayak Hand-Paddling course is part of a program emphasizing safety, enjoyment and hand-paddling skill acquisition for entry-level through intermediate individuals in public, private, and commercial settings.

## Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- Recommended course preparation: Complete Level 2: Essentials of River Kayak Hand-Paddling Skills Course

## Course Duration

The course duration should be adjusted to best fit the needs and goals of the participants. Half day (4 hours) or more.

## Course Location / Accessible Venues

Sections of rivers rated up to and including class I-II, where limited maneuvering in current is required to avoid obstacles.

*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

- ACA Level 3: River Kayak Hand-Paddling Endorsed Instructor (or higher)

## Course Outline

The following is a general summary of course content for the Level 3: River Kayak Hand-Paddling course. The content covered 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
- Fitness, conditioning, and warm up
- Safe paddle and kayak 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.

### **Water Comfort:**

- Launching, carries and landing
- Water comfort and confidence

### **Terminology of Hand-Paddling:**

- Types of strokes: power, turning and bracing
- Stroke components: catch, propulsion, recovery, control, and correction
- Effective body usage and biomechanics
- Use of larger torso muscles
- Body position and how it differs from using a shafted paddle
- Arms as struts connecting paddle to torso
- Avoidance of positions that contribute to shoulder injury or dislocations

### **Equipment:**

- Kayak: how the shape, style, volume, and intended use may be affected by utilizing hand-paddles versus a shafted paddle
- Hand-paddles: types, parts, size and shape, fitting, position, tethers
- Spray skirts: types and materials, grab loop, and how removal is achieved when using hand-paddles
- Care of equipment: how to store and preserve hand-paddles depending on material
- Personal equipment for hand-paddles: gloves, tethers, flotation, backup pair

### **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, paddles, gear
  - Responsibilities of: rescuer, group, swimmers
- Shoreline rescue: extension rescues
- Pinned craft

### **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
- Strengths, limitations, advantages, disadvantages, and risks of wading techniques
- Actively participate in scenarios that apply wading skills for rescues
- Defensive and aggressive swimming positions, and transitions
- Techniques for successful exits from current to eddies
- Self-rescue: swimming with equipment
- Strategies to conserve energy
- Techniques for successful downstream swim of a rapid
- Swimming techniques for: waves, hydraulics, and drops
- 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. When exiting the kayak with a spray skirt after capsize, must be modeled two ways: (1) utilizing the spray skirt grab loop and (2) releasing the spray skirt off the hip (with and without maintaining possession of hand-paddles)
- Paddle recovery options
- Strategies for kayak recovery

- Swimmer tow options
- Swimmer re-entry / re-mount techniques (e.g., stern entry, heel hook, 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)

### **Throw Rope Skills**

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

### **Maneuvers:**

- Forward - kayak moves in a reasonably straight line.
- Reverse: kayak moves in a reasonably straight line
- Stopping: kayak stops within a reasonable distance
- Turns: kayak turns in broad arc made while underway
- Veering, carving, paddling the "inside circle"
- Spin
- Ferries
- Eddy turns
- Peel outs
- Moving abeam
- Sideslips: kayak moves sideways with headway

### **Strokes:**

- Forward (alternating hands)
- Power forward (both hands)
- Back (alternating hands)
- Power back (both hands)
- Draw
  - Side
  - Stationary

- Sculling
- Stern
- Sweep
  - Forward sweep - anticipatory and reactive techniques
  - Reverse sweep
  - Neutral sweep (hands moving in opposite directions to create rotation)
- Brace
  - Single brace (one-hand/one-side)
  - Double brace(both hands on same side)
  - Wing brace (both hands on opposite sides)
- Rudder
- Roll
  - Optional at instructor's certification level and discretion; can be taught by an L4 (or higher) Whitewater Kayak certified instructor or by an L3 River Kayak instructor with Kayak Rolling endorsement

### **River Reading:**

- Universal River Signals with hand-paddles
- How to establish the "best" route and how that might differ for when using hand-paddles
- Identifying, planning for, and navigating obstacles and hazards when using hand-paddles
- Cold water considerations, especially as they pertain to hand-paddling
- Demonstration of effective use of paddle strokes with hand-paddles
- Demonstration of effective whitewater maneuvers with hand-paddles
  - Ferries
  - Eddy turns
  - Peel outs
    - Wide (exit wide from eddy line)
    - Shallow (exit close to eddy line)
- Sequences of maneuvers
  - C-turns (peel out and eddy into same eddy)
  - S-turns (peel out one side and eddy into opposite side)
- Surfing

### **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

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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](#).