



River Kayak Trip Leading Endorsement Criteria

Course Overview

Fundamentally, participants are expected to have the paddling skills, technical knowledge, rescue ability, teaching ability, group management, and interpersonal skills commensurate with this course content prior to presenting themselves for evaluation as an Endorsement Candidate.

This endorsement course provides the knowledge and skills needed for safe and effective leading of a day trip. The following are the endorsement criteria for currently certified Instructors.

Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgement of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#).
- Be a current ACA member
- Completion of the appropriate level skills course, assessment course, or equivalent skills
- Be a currently certified ACA Level 3: River Kayaking Instructor (or higher) in good standing

Course Duration

Minimum of two days (16 hours) or more.

Course Location / Accessible Venues

For Level 3: Sections of rivers rated up to and including class I-II, where limited maneuvering in current is required to avoid obstacles.

For Level 4: Sections of rivers rated up to and including class II-III, where 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 Endorsement Candidates : 1 Endorsed Instructor Trainer; with an additional endorsed instructor or qualified assistant, the ratio can be 10 : 2. The maximum number of participants permitted is 10.

Instructor Trainer

This endorsement course may be offered by:

- Level 4: Whitewater Kayaking (or higher) Instructor Trainers and Instructor Trainer Educators
- Level 3: River Kayaking Instructor Trainers with the River Kayak Trip Leading Endorsement

All Instructor Trainers must operate within the venue corresponding to their level of IT certification.

The following is a list of the criteria used to evaluate Endorsement Candidates. The content and sequence of evaluation is to be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location, time allowance, and be craft appropriate.

General Requirements for all ACA Endorsement Candidates

- Be at least 18 years old
- Demonstrate general knowledge of [ACA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion \(DEI\) initiatives](#)
- Successfully complete an Endorsement Workshop
- Have and maintain First Aid and age appropriate CPR
- Demonstrate a general knowledge of paddlesports and the ACA
- Demonstrate the ability to appropriately perform and teach all of the following material, unassisted, in the appropriate venue
- Maintain ACA Level 3: River Kayak Instructor (or higher) status through the following:

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 River Kayak Trip Leading Endorsement Requirements

Demonstrate a knowledge of and appropriately model teaching and learning theory:

- Understand multiple methods of teaching and how they impact different learners
- Differentiate instruction targeting different learners
- Use effective teaching methods including appropriate skills progressions when teaching complex skill sets
- Present information effectively, both prepared and impromptu
- Focus on **core principles** rather than specific techniques
- Effective methods of providing feedback

Demonstrate the following:

- Positive interpersonal skills to include all items outlined in the ACA [SEIC Policy Manual](#)
- Appropriate group management skills including leadership and judgment
- Ability to choose an appropriate venue / class site
- Effectively make documented skill assessments

Demonstrate the ability to work collaboratively in an instructional team environment:

- Work well with students, including ability to effectively listen and respond to student concerns and desires
- Work well with other members of instructional teams
- Actively participate in discussions throughout the course

Trip Leader Qualities and Knowledge

- Judgment and leadership
- Competent paddler
- Good communication skills
 - Paddle, hand, and whistle signals
 - Cell phone and radios when appropriate
- River sense
 - Water confidence and comfort including swimming ability
 - River classifications
 - American Whitewater Safety Code
- Trained and well versed in safety and rescue
- Applies appropriate discipline and group control
- Makes final safety decisions including trip cancellation
- Considers the well-being of the group over the wants of an individual
- Takes responsibility
- River etiquette and Leave No Trace (LNT) principles and application to paddling environments

Trip Preparation and Planning

- Appropriate vetting of group members/participants
- Ability to choose an appropriate venue / trip course based on goals and existing skills of the group
- Sources of venue information: maps, guidebooks, local knowledge, etc.
- Completes thorough float plan including:
 - Driving route to and from
 - Specific put-in and take-out locations with a map
 - Trip timing and schedule
 - Contingency plans for unexpected events and conditions
 - Identify trip leaders and participants. Include contact telephone numbers
 - Emergency contact information for local rescue agency(s) and/or governmental agency(s) responsible for the chosen venue
 - Distance to emergency care
 - Designated emergency contact person for group

- Attach copies of permits and documentation of permissions from private landowners when appropriate
- Federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and permits that apply to trip venue or route
- Secure medical releases and parental permissions
- Assignment of buddy boats, lead and sweep boats, group formations, and evacuation routes
- Organization of put-in and take-out locations, transportation route, and shuttles to include possible assistance from local outfitters or liveries
- Develop a planning and training schedule when appropriate. Include organizational, classroom, and on-the-water time. If no training is planned, determine methods of verification of skills including swimming and paddling
- With group input, determine trip rules for acceptable behavior and discipline consequences
- Determine if food or snacks are necessary
- Discuss personal and group equipment. Make assignments for specific group equipment.

Venue Hazards and Prevention of Accidents

- Environmental hazards
 - Air temperature
 - Water temperature
 - Weather
 - Cold water shock, hypothermia and hyperthermia; prevention and treatment
 - Changing weather conditions and water levels
- River hydrology and dynamics
 - Flow volume
 - Gradient/elevation changes
 - Flow rates and current
 - Straight channel
 - Bends
 - Right angle corners
 - Eddies
 - Waves
- Specific River Hazards
 - Rocks (upstream and downstream Vs)
 - Undercut rocks or ice
 - Strainers/sieves
 - Debris and logjams
 - Human-made obstructions
 - Bridge abutments

- Holes and hydraulics
 - Ledges and low head dams (horizon lines)
 - Dams, flow diversion structures, and pipelines
- Pins and entrapment
- Prevention of accidents
 - Proper planning and pre-trip hazard identification
 - Proper skill training
 - Put-in safety briefing
 - Constant reassessment of venue conditions
 - Scouting
 - Portaging and lining
 - “Just say NO!” if uncomfortable. Better safe than sorry.
 - Effective communication is key
 - Risk management issues. Warn and inform.

Personal and Group Equipment

- Life jackets: types, usage, fitting, regulations
- Helmets: types, fit, usage
- Appropriate paddling clothes plus spares
- Appropriate footwear
- Kayak: types, parts, materials, nomenclature, and design
 - Grab loops intact
 - Sponges
 - Flotation materials and float bags
 - Center walls / pillars
 - Foot braces, back bands, thigh braces
- Paddle: types, parts, materials, fit
- Spray skirts: types and materials, grab loop
- Tow bags and rescue ropes
- Dry bags, waterproof containers and packs
- Night lighting and signal devices as appropriate and required by law
- Survival kit (knife, matches, etc.) and where to carry what - e.g. on your person
- Personal items including sunscreen, medications, hygiene products, plenty of food, water
- Group
 - Adequate First Aid kit(s).

- Kayak repair kit for use on/off water
- Cell phones (several) and other communication devices
- Bivouac kit
- River maps, compass
- Emergency group shelter
- Spare paddles, food, water
- Water purification
- Bio breaks and sanitation equipment
- Items NOT to bring - e.g., glass containers
- Securing kayak for transport on car or trailer using proper tie downs, straps, or knots
 - Knots: figure 8, bowline, truckers hitch, and 2 half hitches
- Kayak carries

Demonstrate ability to effectively perform, model and teach basic kayak strokes and maneuvers

Paddling strokes in course venue:

- Forward
- Back
- Sweeps
- Bracing
- Draws
- Sculling
- Rudder (stern)

Maneuvers in course venue:

- Forward in a straight line
- Backward in a straight line
- Edging: kayak turns by edge control
- Front ferries
- Eddy turns
- Peel outs
- C-turns
- S-turns
- Carving turns
- Sideslips, draws on the move
- Rolling

Demonstrate the ability to teach and model safety and rescue techniques and concepts effectively, and as appropriate to craft.

- Use the [ACA River Kayak Safety & Rescue Terminology Handbook](#) to:
 - Identify and explain key safety and rescue skills coursed in this curriculum
- 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 the group, rescuer, swimmers
- Appropriate use of rescue and safety gear
- Emergency procedures such as a lost paddler scenario
- Entrapments (stabilization line)
- Pinned boat rescues (arm strong, rope/vector)

Demonstrate the ability to teach and model swimming and wading techniques and concepts effectively.

- 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
- Wading applications for foot / kayak entrapments
- Defensive and aggressive swimming positions, and transitions
- Techniques for successful exits from current to eddies
- Self-rescue: swimming with equipment
- Strategies to conserve energy
- Swiftwater entries: in and out of water starting position
- Techniques for successful downstream swim of a rapid
- Swimming techniques for: waves, hydraulics, and drops
- Strategies for managing strainers in the appropriate venue

Demonstrate the ability to teach and model kayak-based rescue techniques and concepts effectively, and as appropriate to craft.

- Advantages and disadvantages during rescues of various kayaks (e.g., sit-ins, sit on-tops, recreational kayaks)
- Calmly exit the kayak after capsizes, using proper body position and contact with the kayak and paddle. When exiting the kayak with a spray skirt after capsizes, must be modeled two ways: (1) utilizing the spray skirt grab loop and (2) releasing the spray skirt off the hip.
- 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)

Demonstrate the ability to teach and model throw rope techniques and concepts effectively.

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

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
- Importance of safety and trip leader responsibility
- Avoid and manage risk as much as possible
- Incident reporting

Demonstrate leadership, group management skills, experience, and judgment necessary to be a safe, effective instructor.

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Date of last revision: 12/31/2023

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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](#).