



# River Kayak Trip Leading Skills Course

## Course Overview

This course is intended to provide the minimum skills and training necessary for an adult leader with basic paddling skills, to safely lead a trip for participants with adequate paddling skills, on a day trip, on moving water.

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

All Instructors must operate within the venue corresponding to their level of certification.

## Course Outline

The sequence of assessment should be adjusted to best fit the participant's needs, class location and time allowance.

Day One Classroom and on shore discussion depending on locale, etc.

## **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

### **Trip Leader Qualities**

- Qualifications and desired characteristics of trip leaders
  - Judgment and leadership
  - Competent paddler
  - Good communication skills
  - River sense
  - Safety and rescue trained
- Trip leader
  - 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 final responsibility overall

### **Trip Leader Knowledge - Discussion**

- Group Organization
  - Assignment of buddy boats
  - Group formations; responsibility for others, with attention to best position for the leader
  - Communication systems
  - Audio and visual river signals
  - International Scale of River Difficulty
- Leave No Trace – outdoor hygiene, stretch break, and lunch stops
- Group etiquette with put-ins, take-outs, property owners, and changing clothing in public

### **Trip Preparation and Planning**

- Recommended guidelines for leader/participant ratio:
  - 1 leader for every 10 participants, with an assistant
  - Conditions or skill levels may warrant additional leaders
- Appropriate river selection and determining skill level of the group
- Sources of information on rivers - other paddlers, guide books, Internet
- Develop a float plan including:
  - Driving route to and from
  - Specific put-in and take-out locations with a map
  - Schedules with approximate times
  - Contingency plans for bad weather, health problems, or equipment failures. Plans should include evacuation routes.
  - Identify trip leaders and participants. Include contact telephone numbers
  - Emergency contact information for local rescue agency(s) and/or governmental agency(s) responsible for chosen river and designated emergency contact person for group.
  - Distance to emergency care
  - Attach copies of permits and documentation of permissions from private landowners when appropriate
- Make assignments to secure the necessary permits and permissions
- 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.
- Secure medical releases and parental permissions
- Discuss environmental concerns
- Organize transportation and shuttles. Include use of possible outfitters or livery services.

## **Trip Hazards and Prevention**

### **Environmental hazards**

- Air temperature
- Water temperature
- Cold water shock, hypothermia and hyperthermia; prevention and treatment
- Changing weather, water levels

### **River dynamics**

- Flow volume
- Gradient-elevation changes
- Flow rates and current

- Straight channel
- Bends
- Right angle corners
- Waves
- Eddies

### **Specific River Hazards**

- Rocks (upstream and downstream Vs)
- Holes
- Low head dams and ledges
- Undercut rocks
- Strainers and sieves
- Debris and logjams
- Human-made obstructions
  - Bridge abutments
- Entrapments
- Pins and broaches

### **River Classification Systems**

#### **Accident Prevention**

- 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 Safety Equipment – Discussion**

- 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
- Debrief and discuss day two preparations, boats, gear etc.
- End of Day One, or at IT's discretion an evening session, homework, etc.

## **Day Two**

### **The Put-in Talk/ Pre-launch Briefing**

- Discuss weather and water temperature for the day
- Review trip plan for day including known hazards and plans to deal with them
- Review paddling partner and buddy boat assignments
- Discuss responsibility of buddy boats, lead boat, sweep boats, and group organization on water

- Check PFD's for size and fit
- Check each kayak for safety equipment, inflated flotation bags, and that all gear is well-secured
- Review auditory and visual signals
- Discuss lost paddler procedures/scenario
- Review etiquette and outdoor ethics

## **Review of Basic Paddling Skills – On Water**

### **Strokes**

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

### **Maneuvers**

- 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

### **Water Reading and Route Determination**

- Understanding behavior of water in the riverbed
- River running strategies
  - Destination, Obstructions, Route, Alternatives (DORA)
- Use of eddies
- Awareness of weather – current conditions and upcoming

### **Safety and 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
- Self defense; bracing, rolling

## **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
- 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
- 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
- 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

## **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

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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](#).