



Level 3: Essentials of Surf Kayaking Skills Course

Skills Course Overview

The Essentials of Surf Kayaking course is designed for paddlers with previous flat water or whitewater experience wishing to experience surf kayaking using surf specific kayaks, whitewater kayaks and wave-skis. The course introduces paddlers to the essentials of surf kayak technique and ocean safety considerations with an emphasis on fun.

Course Objectives:

- SAFETY – Learn about the surf zone environment, surf etiquette, self-rescues and assisted rescues.
- SKILLS – Introduce paddle strokes and techniques to catch and ride waves safely.
- FUN – To promote the inherent enjoyment and rewards of paddling in the surf zone.

Skills Course Prerequisites

- Acknowledgment of personal compliance with the [ACA Essential Eligibility Criteria \(EEC\)](#)
- Level 2 Essentials of River Kayaking, or Level 2 Essentials of Kayak Touring, or Level 2 Essentials of Sit-on-Top Surf Kayaking, or equivalent skills and experience.

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

Sandy beach with moderate surf, mostly spilling waves with occasional steeper (plunging) waves during sets, with access to flat, protected water.

- Winds less than 15 knots
- Waves less than 3 feet (1 meter)

NOTE: When selecting a venue, careful consideration should be given to hazards including other surfers, rip currents, long-shore drift, rocks, and man-made structures.

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

Level 4: Performance Surf Kayaking

Succeeding Courses

- Level 4: Surf Kayaking Skills or Certification Course

Course Content

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

- 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

Personal Preparation:

- Swimming ability, water comfort & confidence
- Fitness, conditioning, and warm up

Equipment:

- Safe boat lifting, loading / unloading transport, and handling to and from water
- Surf kayaks – types, materials, outfitting and nomenclature
- Fin design and placement
- Personal thermal / uv protection and fit (wetsuit / dry suit, paddle jacket / dry top / paddle shorts / rash guard)
- PFD (life jacket) types and fit
- Helmet types and fit
- Group gear: first aid kit, throw rope, shelter

Essential Paddling Skills: (Flat Water)

- Warm-up

- Wet exit
- Forward, backward and stopping strokes
- Forward and reverse sweeps
- Edging
- Low brace and high brace
- Stern rudder
- Deep water remount or reentry, paddle to shore
- Power acceleration stroke

Surf Zone Environment

- Wave dynamics and beach characteristics
- Anatomy of surf zone and terminology: swash / backwash, soup zone, impact zone, outside
- Swell height and period
- Weather, wind, water and air temperature

Surf Zone Safety

- Beach suitability: identify hazards including rips, other surfers, swimmers, other beach users
- Identify surf break – type of waves, height, period, wind effect, tide effect, sets and lulls
- Surf area, beach positioning, setting boundaries
- Introduction to surf etiquette
- Surf zone safety: swimming in surf, separation from kayak, control of free boat and use of grab loops / webbing tails, always staying ocean side of kayak
- Use of paddle leash – pros and cons
- Capsize and wet exit – swimming in the surf, with and without kayak

Surfing Skills / Techniques (On the water)

- Launching: positioning and timing, depth of water, side saddle technique (SOT kayaks)
- Holding position in the soup: bow to the waves, stern to the waves, parallel to the waves – bracing, side surfing
- Paddle out: timing, reaching over the back of the wave, paddle position when punching through waves, “bunny hops”, using a rip
- Positioning: drift, sets, reading the water - previous waves, observation of other surfers
- Take off: waiting for waves, timing, upright posture, power forward stroke, straight / angled take off
- Riding the wave: diagonal run, stern rudder, changes of direction (head, torso, paddle, edge), prepare for broach
- Bottom turn, top turn
- Prepare for broach

- Side surfing with control

Conclusion & Wrap Up:

- Group debrief / individual feedback
- Course limitations – what's next?
- Importance of additional instruction, practice, experience
- Importance of appropriate level of safety and rescue training
- Importance of First Aid & CPR
- 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 Surf Kayaking Committee. To connect with the leadership of this committee, please view the SEIC Committee rosters on [the ACA website](#).