



## AMERICAN CANOE ASSOCIATION Coastal Kayak Assessment Levels

The ACA skills assessment system is designed to supplement ACA Coastal Kayak courses to clarify the paddler's path of progression, identify skill and knowledge level at the time of assessment, and assist in risk management decisions for sea kayakers. The following levels indicate an increasing level of skill, knowledge, seamanship, and sea kayaking experience.. This is a brand new pilot program to the ACA. The assessments will be carried out for the public by Instructor Trainers and Instructor Trainer Educators.

This is a general summary. For a more detailed look at specific skill sets, see the Assessment Outlines for each level.

### **Level 1:**

Has the ability to do the following in a safe manner:

- Can paddle a stable kayak or "recreational kayak" with limited maneuvering ability in calm water.

### **Level 2:**

Has the ability to do the following in a safe manner:

- Perform basic strokes and maneuvers in calm water.
- Perform an assisted deep water rescue and paddle float self-rescue in calm water.

L2 paddlers will have some limited experience paddling on short day trips in calm water.

### **Level 3: (Intermediate)**

Has the ability to do the following in a safe manner:

- Perform basic strokes and maneuvers in calm to moderate conditions.
- Hold a kayak on edge using boat tilt, and perform turns and maneuvers using boat tilt.
- Brace to prevent capsizes.
- Perform assisted and self rescues in open water and moderate conditions
- Perform a roll.
- Use a towing system.

L3 paddlers will have experience paddling on short day trips in calm to moderate open water conditions, using the seamanship, navigation, judgment, and group leadership necessary on such trips.

### **Level 4: (Intermediate/Advanced)**

Has the ability to do the following in a safe manner:

- Perform a wide range of strokes and maneuvers efficiently and with grace and style in moderate to rough open water conditions.
- Effectively brace in rough water.
- Use an efficient boat tilt that can be used for a variety of maneuvers in moderate to rough seas

- Paddle efficiently in any direction in Force 4 wind (16 knots) and seas.
- Negotiate moderate surf (up to 3 feet) in all directions with good boat control.
- Negotiate moderate current (3 knots), including ferrying and eddy turns, with good boat control.
- Perform a variety of assisted rescues and self rescue in rough water conditions.
- Perform a roll in rough water.
- Use a variety of towing techniques in open water.

L4 paddlers will have experience paddling on day trips of 12-15 nautical miles in a variety of conditions, with good working knowledge of the seamanship, navigation, judgment, and group leadership necessary for such trips.

#### **Level 5: (Advanced)**

We have no outline for this level yet, but the definition would include all the abilities of L4 taken to rougher water, stronger wind, current, larger surf, and most important, more experience and a high degree of judgment.

#### **Recommended Courses as partial preparation for Assessments**

**Important note:** Taking courses is an important phase of training for kayakers.

But the courses alone are not enough. Follow up practice, time on the water, and the experience gained by paddling in varying conditions are necessary to learn and absorb the skills introduced in a course. Seamanship and good judgment are learned over a period of time.

There is a major difference between an assessment and a course. The course introduces a set of skills and body of knowledge to the student. An assessment measures the ability to use various skills and knowledge and rates the paddler accordingly. The courses listed below are recommended for each assessment level, but the skills covered in each course must be learned and absorbed in order to pass an assessment. As noted in the assessment descriptions above, paddling experience is also necessary and is just as important as course content.

- L1—Introduction to Kayak, Essentials of Kayak Touring.
- L2--Basic Strokes and Maneuvering.
- L3--Open Water Skills, Rolling.
- L4--Open Water Skills, Stroke Refinement, Surf Zone, Tidal Currents, Rolling, (Navigation, in progress).
- L5--Advanced Open Water, Kayak Surfing.