

# AMERICAN CANOE ASSOCIATION

## Essentials of River Kayaking

Purpose: To teach beginner paddlers to safely and enjoyably kayak on gentle rivers.

Pre-requisites: none.

Suggested duration: Skills Workshop 8 hours.

Location: Flatwater and Rivers of no more than Class I difficulty.

Class Ratio:

**Tandem:** 1 Instructor to 6 students, 2 to 12 with a qualified assistant

**Solo:** 1 Instructor to 5 students, 2 to 10 with qualified assistant.

Succeeding courses: Whitewater Kayak, Advanced Whitewater Kayak.

### COURSE OUTLINE

#### Introductions and Logistics

Welcome

Course expectations, limitations and schedule

Review waiver/assumptions of risk and medical disclosure.

PFD Policy (always worn on the water)

No alcohol/dangerous drug use.

Respect private property, litter, noise, etc.

Proper etiquette on and off the water.

Site-specific procedures, regulations, and times.

#### Personal Preparation

Learning Judgment.

Group Equipment: extra paddle, drybags, first aid kit and rescue equipment.

Guidebooks, maps, local knowledge.

Assessing current environmental conditions including: Water level, weather, time of day, water and air temperature, and accessibility.

Assessing personal and group dynamics (skills, equipment, group makeup, logistics, and leadership).

#### Equipment

Life Jackets (PFDs): types, fit

Kayaks: types, materials, parts (including safety features such as flotation).

Paddles: types, materials, parts, length, blade size & shape, hand position.

Care of equipment.

Personal equipment: water, food, shoes, hat, sunscreen, bug repellent, sun glasses, eyeglass straps, protective clothing for heat or cold, sponge, bailer/pump, whistle, knife, light.

Optional equipment and outfitting.

#### Getting Started

Warm-up and stretching.

How to pick up a kayak safely.

Car topping: loading and unloading, racks, straps.

Launching and landing.

Boarding, three points of contact, weight kept low, etc.

Posture, safety, comfort, effectiveness, rocking, balance.

Water comfort and confidence.

Wet exits.

How to empty a kayak.

Basic Terminology:

Types of strokes: power, turning.

Stroke components: catch, propulsion, recovery (CPR), control, correction.

Safe and effective body usage.

#### Safety and Rescue

Exercising Judgment, Safety as a state of mind.

A. Principles of Rescue

1. Priorities: first people, then boats, finally other gear.
2. Responsibilities of the victim.
3. Responsibilities of the rescuers
4. Responsibilities of the group.

B. Types of Rescue

1. Self Rescue
2. Boat assisted rescue, towing or bulldozing a tired swimmer, towing or bulldozing a capsized boat.
3. Shoreline Rescue: Extension rescues, use of throw ropes/bags.

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### The Paddling Environment

#### A. Fundamentals of River Currents

1. Characteristics of Current
  - Downstream and Upstream “V”s
  - Eddies/Eddy Lines
  - Bends
2. Effects of Obstacles
  - Strainers & Sieves
  - Bridge Abutments/Rocks
3. Other Hazards
  - Power of the current, water levels
  - Cold water
  - Horizon Lines
  - Dams/Hydraulics
  - Undercut Rocks, Ice
4. International Scale of River Difficulty (handout AWA Safety Code)

### River Running

- A. Strategies for Running Rivers
  1. How to paddle in current
    - Spacing, avoid “tunnel vision”
  2. Scouting
    - From boat, from shore
    - How to establish the “best” route
    - Plan B
  3. Portaging hazards
  4. Use of good judgment
- B. Group organization on the river
  1. Group organization, lead, sweep, etc.
  2. Universal River Signals.
- C. Emergency Procedures.

### Strokes

**Solo:** Forward, Back, Draws (to bow, hip, and stern), Push-away, Sweeps (forward and reverse)

### Tandem

Concepts of stroke timing to match partner, need for communication to work as a team, etc.

### Maneuvers

Paddling in a reasonably straight line.  
Spins  
Stopping  
Ferries  
Eddy Turns  
Peel Outs  
Moving Abeam

### Rescues:

Self Rescues

- Swimming in current
- Boat Emptying

### Assisted Rescues

- From shore
  1. Extension
  2. Rescue ropes
- From boat
  1. Bulldozing
  2. Towing

### Next Steps

Course review  
Course limitations (not a river course)  
Need for more instruction, practice, and experience.  
Demo an advanced maneuver  
Trip planning - 6P's: prior, proper planning prevents poor performance  
Life sport/paddling options  
Local paddling groups/clubs  
ACA membership forms/participation cards

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