

Level 4 Skills Course

Advanced paddling skills, problem solving, group dynamics, and leadership during a multi-day trip in a rough water environment.

Course Description

Upon completion of the course, the student will be able to confidently sea kayak in class-4 water conditions along remote and exposed open coast for an extended trip. The student will be an effective part of a group of peers, able to perform both leadership and supportive roles. This course is a minimum of 5 days long.

General Learning Outcome

Students will be challenged to apply already learned leadership/decision making and paddling skills in the context of a multi-day trip in class-4 conditions. With a strong focus on scenarios and problem solving, this course will develop students' skills appropriate to travelling in remote and/or technically challenging locations while fine tuning new skills such as surf and currents.

Prerequisites	<p>Paddle Canada Level-3 Skills certification (no exceptions)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ At least 10 day-trips kayaking in class-3 conditions. ○ A minimum of three extended trips totalling 10 or more overnights. The student must show evidence (e.g. weather/sea state logs, photography or video) that they spent a minimum of five days during any trip in class-3 conditions. ○ An ability to confidently roll (on one side) in class-3 conditions is essential. ○ Wilderness first aid certification (36 hours) with CPR is strongly recommended ○ Restricted Radio Operator's Licence (marine VHF) is strongly recommended
Course Length	6 days with an excursion that includes 3 or more adjacent overnights and a campsite change
Class Ratio	2 instructors : 6 participants 2 instructors + 1 assistant: 8 participants
Minimum Staff & Certification	Instructors: one Level-4 Instructor and one Level-3 Instructor Optional assistant(s): one Level-3 Instructor
Location	Exposed coastline with infrequent landing opportunities; Class-4 environment: Rugged and exposed coast with long and committed crossings and any combination of the following: strong turbulent currents (≥ 3 knots), strong wind effects (near 20 knots), large swells with a combined sea state 1 metre or more with a moderate to rough sea state, exposed surf beaches (≥ 1 metre), infrequent and sometimes difficult landings which present significant challenges for individual safety and group management. Significant delays in access to land-based assistance can be expected.

	It is the instructor's responsibility to ensure that the minimum environmental and sea state conditions required for Level-4 are met. Certification cannot be considered complete if skills were not demonstrated in class-4 conditions.
Conditions	Winds (20 + knots) Combined sea state 1 metre Surf > 1 metre Current > 3 knots Combined sea state over metre with a rough sea state

Overview

Rescue Skills	Paddling Skills	Knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisted Rescue • Unassisted rescue • Towing • Hypothermia • Communication • Complex Scenarios • Rolling • Judgement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance • Vary stroke and paddling techniques to cope with different situations • Bracing • Complex towing • Advanced incident management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety • Planning • Rescue • Leadership

Rescue Skills

Practice and assess rescue skills in complex scenario based exercises. Effective and reliable rescue are crucial to success at Level-4.

Rolling — Perform rolls in rough water as well as wet exit, re-enter and roll up.

Unassisted re-entry — Demonstrate skill with several means of re-entry.

Assisted rescues — Perform several assisted rescues and adapt them to a range of sea conditions, including rescuing an incapacitated or passive victim. Demonstrate the ability to bring an injured paddler to shore.

Towing — Demonstrate safe and effective use of various towing techniques. Demonstrate releasing a towline under tension, including from a capsized position.

Paddling Skills

Launching and landing — Demonstrate launching and landing in difficult conditions.

Manoeuvring and control — Essential skills include effective forward paddling, towing, maneuvering and control when paddling in swell, broken water, surf, and around rocky shorelines with breaking waves.

Knowledge

Knowledge required at this level is governed by the conditions along an exposed shore with infrequent landing opportunities. Leadership skills at this level are substantial and participants are required to show well-informed judgment in all aspects of the course.

Heritage — Relate traditional Greenland and Aleutian designs to contemporary kayak design features and discuss the merits and challenges of the identified design feature(s).

Identify at least 2 other genres of kayaking, and describe how the practice of kayaking differs in these genres (equipment, technique, environment), such as flatwater racing, slalom racing, surf ski, white water, kayak surfing or kayak polo.

Environment — Identify natural objects found during the trip using a variety of resources (previous knowledge, other participants, leaders, guide books).

Describe the seven Leave No Trace Principles and practices given in the *Important Notes for All Courses* section of this manual (page 10), and work to integrate these principles and practices while on the trip

Journeying and Seamanship

Journeying and seamanship refers to the practical skills, equipment preparation, trip planning and judgments that are ongoing throughout the planning and completion of a trip. The following list is not exhaustive and is provided here as a guide to areas of judgment necessary for safe and enjoyable paddling in a Level-4 environment.

Navigation and route selection — Determine a safe and efficient route along a complex coastline exposed to wind, current, and swell. Use charts, tide tables, guidebooks, local knowledge, practical observation and other pertinent references to support your judgments. File an appropriate float plan.

Weather interpretation and forecasting — Interpret a marine weather broadcast for the probable effects on local paddling conditions including concerns for fog, onshore and offshore winds, and the effects of local topography.

Understand the influence of tides, currents and winds on the sea conditions.

Understand typical weather patterns for low and high-pressure weather systems.

Camping skills — Select an unimproved wilderness campsite and prepare a camp for safety and comfort during inclement weather.

Discuss the implications of tide and weather on a wilderness campsite.

Prepare a bivouac, simulating an emergency overnight stay in wet and windy weather.

Group awareness — Exercise appropriate group management on the water and demonstrate concern for the comfort and welfare of the party throughout the journey.

Assessment

Participants must demonstrate a high level of ability controlling their kayak in all circumstances. Leadership in trip planning and in rescues must demonstrate the ability to adapt. A written test will include knowledge of navigation, weather and general seamanship. Written or oral navigation and trip planning exercises may also form part of the assessment.