

Level-1 Skills

Introduction to sea kayak skills.

Course Description

Building on the information covered in Basic Skills, Level-1 is a two-day course that moves participants beyond flatwater kayaking and into the sport of sea kayaking. The course is conducted in slightly rougher water than Basic Kayak, aiming to develop the paddler's comfort in [class-1](#) waters. There is a strong focus on re-entry techniques as well as the skills required to safely plan and execute a day trip with friends (for example, navigation & route planning, weather interpretation, proper clothing/gear.)

General Learning Outcome

Upon successful completion of the course, the student will be able to confidently paddle in [class-1](#) conditions in the company of one or more paddlers with similar skills or knowledge. The paddler should be self-reliant yet an asset to the group and an active participant, willing and able to assist others if they need assistance. A Level-1 paddler should be taking on more of a leadership role, especially with group go or no go type decisions.

Prerequisites

- Certification:
 - Paddle Canada Basic Kayak skills certification or equivalent skill and knowledge at the discretion of the course director.
- Paddling experience:
 - Five kayaking excursions (2 or 3 hours) in [class-0](#) conditions.
 - Can execute a controlled wet exit in class-0 conditions.
 - Can perform a simple assisted re-entry in class-0 conditions.

Course Length

16 hours of instruction (2 days), minimum 10 hours instruction on the water.

Class Ratio

1 instructor:6 participants

1 instructor+1 assistant:8 participants

Minimum Staff & Certification

One Level-1 Instructor is required to teach this course.

Any assistants must be at least Basic Kayak Instructors.

Environmental Conditions and Sea State

Conditions should not exceed water class-1. Please see [Appendix A: Water Class Definitions](#) on page 205 for a specific description of all water classifications.

Class-1 environment: Non-challenging waters with mild wind effect (0–11 knots), little or no current (0–0.5 knots), uninterrupted easy landing options, and ready access to land-based assistance. Sea state is calm to light chop.

Teaching Notes

Suggested teaching times listed are intended to be used as a resource for new instructors as well as help experienced instructors understand how much emphasis should be on each topic. Instructors can use their discretion to shorten or lengthen suggested times as they see fit.

Assessment

Assessment at Level-1 occurs throughout the program as the instructor observes the participants' performance of each skill and overall development as a paddler. A written test is not required.

Learning Outcomes

Re-entry Skills

Unassisted Re-entry

The student will wet exit and re-enter a kayak in deep water.

General Description:

- The re-entry is complete when the excess water is removed from the cockpit, the swimmer is back in the boat, the spray skirt is reattached and the paddler has regained sufficient stability to continue paddling effectively.



Teaching Tip:

Typically, the re-entry skills portion of Level-1 can be taught in about 2.5-3 hours.

Teaching Notes:

- The spray skirt must be in place during the capsize.
- Aids such as a paddle float may be used.
- While there is no specific maximum time a student can take, they should be encouraged to move quickly and confidently to complete the exercise without rushing.

Assisted Re-entry

The student will:

- wet exit then re-enter the kayak with assistance from another paddler while in deep water,
- demonstrate as both swimmer and assistant, and
- have the opportunity to practice both the T-rescue and the raft, re-enter and pump techniques.

**Teaching Tip:**

While there is no specific maximum time students can take for assisted re-entries, they should be encouraged to move quickly and confidently to get back in their kayaks without rushing.

General Description:

- The re-entry is complete when the excess water is removed from the cockpit, the swimmer is back in the boat, the spray skirt is reattached and the paddler has regained sufficient stability to continue paddling effectively.

Teaching Notes:

- The spray skirt must be in place during the capsize.
- Aids such as a stirrup may be used.

Towing

The student will demonstrate a simple contact tow without the use of a towline for approximately 25 meters.

Paddling Skills

Launching and Landing

The student will:

- launch and land a kayak at each of a beach and/or a low dock, and
- demonstrate the proper body mechanics to lift and carry a kayak with a partner to prevent injury.

Teaching Notes:

- To help prevent potential injury, students should be encouraged to always carry a kayak with two people.

Forward Stroke

The student will:

- demonstrate efficient forward paddling, with good speed and control over 200 metres.
- paddle forward in a straight line without the aid of a rudder or skeg,
- show upright posture and effective torso rotation, and
- add edge to help maintain course.

General Description:

- The blade should enter the water at or near the toes, be fully submerged and leave the water at or just past the hips.
- The propulsion stage of the stroke is short and should end just past the hips.

Stopping

The student will travel at a moderate speed, and then stop the kayak within 4 strokes (2 on each side) without changing heading.

Reverse Stroke

The student will:

- demonstrate controlled reverse paddling with edging while looking back for a clear and safe route, and
- demonstrate effective torso rotation.

Sweep Strokes

The student will:

- start from a static position and use a series of forward and reverse sweeps to pivot the kayak 360 degrees in both directions,
- turn the kayak with a forward (or reverse) sweep stroke and edging while moving with speed,
- show efficient placement of the paddle and demonstrate unwinding of the trunk, and
- students will attempt to push with their lower body towards the direction of travel.



Teaching Tip:

New students have a tendency to watch or stare at their paddle while doing a sweep stroke. Encourage them to keep their eyes up and to look where they are going.

Draw Stroke

The student will:

- move the kayak sideways 3 metres using the draw stroke from a static start,
- move the kayak sideways 3 metres using the sculling draw stroke from a static start,
- use either a side draw or sculling draw, move the kayak on a diagonal (forwards or reverse and sideways at the same time) from a static start, and
- demonstrate draw strokes with a near vertical paddle shaft and effective torso rotation.

Low Brace

The student will demonstrate correct technique to prevent a capsize with a low brace.

Teaching Note:

- Emphasis should be placed on proper body mechanics to prevent shoulder injury: elbow above wrist, back of blade on the water, hip flick/leg drive to regain balance.

Stern Rudder

The student will:

- use stern rudder strokes to turn the kayak in calm conditions,

- demonstrate effective torso rotation for solid paddle placement and appropriate edging for assistance in turning, and
- will understand the best environmental conditions to apply this stroke (e.g. turning downwind, or to keep going straight on small following waves).

Teaching Note:

- Students should be encouraged to experiment with rotating the blade (power face catching water to non-power face catching water) as well as pushing and pulling the blade (pry and draw) to turn the kayak in different directions.

Edge Control

The student will:

- demonstrate confident edge control (on both sides) that assists turning,
- hold the edge consistently throughout the turn,
- maintain course using edging to correct boat heading as needed, and
- begin to intentionally incorporate edging into their strokes and should be gaining confidence with this skill.

Knowledge

The extent of knowledge required for safe paddling at this level is governed by Class-1 conditions. Activities and topics should be structured in the context of a day-trip with a group of peers of similar kayaking skill level. The content noted throughout this section is not exhaustive and is provided as a guide to the nature and extent of knowledge necessary for safe and enjoyable paddling in [class-1](#) conditions.

Equipment and Equipment Care

The student will:

- state the key features, attributes and care of paddling equipment, including:
 - sea kayak, paddle and spray skirt designs as well as bailing devices,
 - lifejackets and paddling clothing,
 - equipment required by Transport Canada,



Teaching Tip:

Typically, the equipment and equipment care topics can be accomplished in about 30 minutes.

- additional safety equipment necessary for sea kayaking (beyond Transport Canada regulations), and
- the purpose and application of both a rudder and a skeg.
- demonstrate how to outfit a sea kayak for proper fit and comfort including adjustment of foot pegs, backband, and thigh braces,
- demonstrate knowledge of different boat shapes and their effect on the kayak in the water, and
- organize gear and packing for a day-long outing with a focus on choosing gear needed to participate safely and waterproofing techniques as necessary.

Communication

The student will:

- use of various types of signals within the paddling group (e.g. hand, paddle and sound),
- outline how one could summon help if needed using various signalling and communication methods including cell phones, VHF radio, and flares,
- understand the importance of knowing the best communication tools to use based on the paddling location and the situational needs, and
- identify the strengths and weaknesses of a variety of communication tools.



Teaching Tip:

Typically, communication methods can be accomplished in about 15-20 minutes.

Route Planning and Basic Navigation Techniques

The student will:

- describe and use the concepts of basic nautical navigation needed for a safe day trip including piloting, handrails, backstops, time, distance, speed and direction, and
- use a chart or topographic map to plan an appropriate day trip as well as follow their route during the course of said day trip and be prepared to identify their position when asked.



Teaching Tip:

Typically, route planning and navigation at this level can be accomplished in about one hour with ongoing learning reinforcement throughout the day trip.

Half-day Kayak Journey

The student will:

- go on a minimum ½ day kayak journey, and
- apply day tripping skills covered in Level-1 in the context of an actual short journey.

Teaching note:

- The total day trip distance will be dictated by the environmental conditions and student's needs.

Weather

The student will:

- demonstrate knowledge of basic weather concepts such as wind direction and speed and how they are related to navigation as well as possible effects on sea state throughout the day and along the route,
- state the influence of weather on a kayaker on a day-long excursion,
- be familiar with the different sources of weather information available appropriate to where they will be paddling, and
- be aware of the importance of getting a weather forecast in relation to risk management.



Teaching Tip:

Typically weather at this level can be accomplished in about 20 minutes.

Sea State

The student will:

- state how waves form in terms of fetch, wind strength and basic shoreline effects, and
- be aware of local tools available for predicting water conditions that will be encountered on a day trip (tide tables, river or lake levels).



Teaching Tip:

Typically, sea state topics can be accomplished in about 10 minutes.

Risk Assessment and Mitigation

The student will:

- apply a risk assessment framework for route planning and simple incident response,
- review the concepts of hazards, risk, exposure, vulnerability, mitigation & benefits,
- demonstrate ability to plan and manage risks in a day-long journey with peers in Class-1 conditions,
- create a float plan and explain its importance in helping to manage risk, and
- respond effectively to a simple on-water scenario as an active member of the responding group.

Teaching note:

- See [Appendix B: Risk Assessment and Mitigation Frameworks](#) on page 206 for examples of various risk assessment frameworks and other resources.



Teaching Tip:

While an introduction to risk assessment can typically be accomplished in 20-30 minutes, various elements should also be integrated into other sections of the course, which will extend the estimated time.

Cold Issues and Sun Safety

The student will:

- explain the cause of hypothermia,
- identify symptoms of hypothermia,
- outline basic treatment for hypothermia,
- give examples of proper thermal clothing choices for weather and water temperature, and
- outline the positive effects of sun safety clothing, including hats, sunglasses, and sunscreen.

Teaching note:

- More resources related to sun safety can be found at: cancer.ca/en/prevention-and-screening/live-well/sun-and-uv/being-safe-in-the-sun



Teaching Tip:

Typically, topics around cold issues and sun safety can be accomplished in about 15 minutes.

Impact of Kayakers on the Environment

The student will:

- give examples of the negative impacts kayakers have on the local environment and how best these can be mitigated, and
- state the core principles of Leave No Trace practices.

Teaching notes:

- Topics pertinent to the location of the course should be focused on, including the paddler's ability to easily disturb wildlife (especially any local species at risk) and damage done to habitat by traveling over and along shorelines.
- See [Appendix E: Resources for Sustainable Kayaking](#) on page [215](#) for resources.

History and Heritage

The student will participate in a brief discussion on the history of the kayak.

Teaching note:

- See [Appendix H: Kayak History and Heritage Resources](#) on page [219](#) for an extensive list of online resources to help with research.

Kayaking Community and Resources

The student will:

- be made aware of local kayaking community (clubs, outfitters, provincial paddling associations, etc.) as well as get information on how to get connected, and
- be made aware of other sources of information such as books, videos, websites for further research and learning.



Teaching Tip:

Typically, impact of kayakers on the environment can be accomplished in about 15-30 minutes.



Teaching Tip:

Typically, all the topics on this page can be accomplished in about 10-20 minutes each.



Teaching Tip:

An excellent opportunity to talk about history and heritage is when the group is out paddling on a mini journey.

Vehicle Boat Tie Down

The student will:

- demonstrate safe methods for lifting and lowering a kayak off the roof of a vehicle, and
- demonstrate various methods of tying a sea kayak on the roof of a vehicle for both racks and foam blocks.