



AMERICAN CANOE ASSOCIATION

Basic Whitewater Safety Course

Objective:

To provide beginner and intermediate paddlers with the basics of self-rescue with an emphasis on proactive prevention.

Specific Goals:

- 1— To comprehend that prevention is the key to safe river trips.
- 2— To understand how to avoid potentially dangerous situations.
- 3— To develop the skills to effectively manage minor river incidents.
- 4— To develop the in-water skills necessary for effective defensive and aggressive swimming.
- 5— To learn to concentrate on the safest, simplest, and quickest methods to effect rescue.
- 6— To be able to properly assist paddlers from shore with a throw bag and coiled rope.
- 7— To understand how to safely recover equipment (i.e., paddles and boats) from moving water.

Prerequisites:

General good health, comfort in water, ability to swim with a PFD on, and a desire to learn.

Location:

Class II whitewater.

Course Outline:

Part I. Introductions and Course Overview

Part II. Rescue Philosophy

- Priorities: self, team, bystanders, victim, gear last
- Stay out of trouble!
- Maintain a “What If?” mindset
- Get out of trouble by yourself if possible, and quickly!
- Help others who are in trouble if you are safely able to
- Overriding concern must be for the safety of the rescuer
- Successful rescues require a foundation of four building blocks:
 1. Training
 2. Practice
 3. Experience
 4. Judgment
- Keep an open mind
- Emphasize training over equipment
- Value simplicity and speed
- Minimize risk where possible

- Prioritize rescue techniques using mnemonic RETHROG
- Get victim away from power of river and out of current as fast as possible
- Trip planning, competent leader, medical concerns, river level, skills assessment (individual and group)
- Flexibility, plan A, plan B, with a backup.
- Incident command system and its application to real “river world” incidents
- Reality of injury and death



AMERICAN CANOE ASSOCIATION

Part III. Hydrology and River Hazards

- Swiftwater dynamics and principles
 1. Swiftwater is predictable
 2. Swiftwater is powerful
 3. Swiftwater is relentless
- River features and hazards
- River classification

Part IV. Communications

- Effective communications are essential for any group activity, such as proceeding down a river, setting safety, or affecting a rescue
- Predetermined, universally understood visual signals (i.e., hand or paddle signals) should be used
- Whistles should be used to attract attention only in emergencies

Part V. Throw Ropes

- Types and characteristics
- Strategy, scene survey, and backup systems
- Rope must be quickly accessible
- Don't tie in to rope
- One person throws at a time
- Establish contact with victim prior to throw
- Hit victim with rope
- Hold onto to rope and prepare for serious force as line goes taut
- Pendulum or reel in victim as quickly as possible.
- Take care of rope (i.e., wash, dry, inspect, replace often)
- Practice, practice, practice

Part VI. Wading Rescues

- Principles and safety
- Wading increases risk but can be managed by maintaining balance and control
- Make sure you have a reasonable safe runout
- “Look with your feet”
- Once you lose your footing, don't fight it by trying to regain contact with the bottom. Instead, swim safely for shore
- Wading configurations
 1. One person with prop
 2. Two person
 3. Wedge

Part V. Swimming Strategies

- Understand and practice defensive and aggressive swimming techniques
- Regarding swimming with gear, know “when to hold ‘em and when to fold ‘em”
- Never try to stand up in deep or swift current while swimming
- Swimming is often the fastest way to reach a victim, but puts the rescuer at significant risk.
- Never tie a swimmer to a line
- Enter the water cautiously and in control
- Swimming types
 1. Self-rescue
 2. Defensive position with ferry
 3. Aggressive position with transition and eddy catching
 4. Special situations: ledges, holes, hydraulics, and strainers



Part VI. Boat-based Assists

- Prioritize: swimmer first, boat second, paddle and other gear last
- Approach swimmers with caution
- Communicate clearly to swimmer what you want them to do
- When rescuing loose boats or gear, try to push by hand or throw toward shore
- Avoid attaching yourself to boat or swimmer, even with a rescue PFD
- Swimmers: towing and carrying
- Equipment: shoving, bulldozing, and towing
- Pinned craft techniques

Part VII. Tag Lines and Their Uses

Part VIII. Rescue PFDs

Part IX. Equipment

- A minimum of personal safety gear should be a constant and should be appropriate to potential task
 1. PFD
 2. Helmet
 3. Footwear
 4. Adequate protective clothing
 5. Knife
 6. Whistle
- Group gear
 1. Rope
 2. First aid kit
 3. Advanced rescue gear
- While essential, no piece of equipment can make up for a lack of training and experience.
- Boat and outfitting considerations