

SEA KAYAK TRIP CLASSIFICATIONS (SK RATING)

TRIP RATING	SK I	SK II	SK III	SK IV	SK V	SK VI
Geography (fetch is defined as the unobstructed distance the wind can blow over the water and build up waves) NM = Nautical Miles	In areas protected from waves by nearby landforms in case of wind.	Fetch less than 10 NM unless it is generally possible to land and walk out. Crossings less than 1/2 NM except for very protected trips.	Crossings up to 2 NM wide and/or fetches longer than 10 NM.	Crossings up to 5 NM.	Crossings more than 5 NM, but less than 3 hours paddling time at the speed listed for the trip. Exposed ocean coasts are included when precautions are taken.	Trips combining a long fetch with stretches where safe landing may be difficult or impossible for most of the day.
Hydraulics (expected en route) kt = knot	Insignificant currents.	Max. predicted current up to 1 kt.	Max predicted currents up to 2 kt.	Predicted currents may be more than 2 kt, but less than slowest paddler's top speed.	Currents may be faster than group can paddle against.	Exposure to hazards at any other levels taken to extremes.
Routes	Day trip near shore.	Either has protection or intermittent places to get out.	May involve crossing eddy lines and tide rips.	May cross strong eddy lines, tide rips, and upswellings.	May include landing and launching in surf.	Exposure to hazards at any other levels taken to extremes.
Acceptable Conditions (no guarantees)	Calm.	Generally try to avoid choppy water and/or winds above 10 kt.	Generally will not start out in whitecaps, but be prepared for paddling into waves large enough to wash over the deck, and be comfortable paddling in at least 10 kt winds.	May include steep waves and swells. Be comfortable paddling in 15 kt winds.	For groups prepared to knowingly set out in rough weather, whitecaps, and fast currents.	May only be negotiable with favorable conditions. Kayak rescues may not be possible.
Skills and Conditions (the skills and experience required are cumulative with ascending levels)	Ability to swim. Except with leader's permission: (a) previous experience is required on trips more than 5 NM; and (b) previous practice capsizing and wet exiting (or be willing to learn how before the trip).	Participants must have practiced assisted sea kayak rescue techniques.	Conditions may require bracing skills. Previous group and self rescue practice (both as rescuer and rescuee).	Conditions may require anticipatory leaning, reflexive bracing, stern rudder with paddle, and the ability to read moving water. Familiarity with charts and navigation.	Trip members must have tested their skills in rough conditions, know their limits, and be self-reliant in the event of separation from the group. The ability to Eskimo roll is highly recommended as conditions can make sea kayak rescues difficult. Rescue practice with the kayak and equipment used on this trip.	Extensive experience and skills including kayak surfing and rolling are required.

Plus or minus signs can be used to further differentiate the levels. For example, a minus sign could be used for a trip which technically gets a given level, but is on the easy side of that level. An asterisk designates training trips open to paddlers new to that level. The distance to be paddled and the expected paddling speed should be listed, but do not affect the trip level.

Due to extra risk, the following factors increase the trip rating 1/2 level:

- Water temperatures less than 55 degrees Fahrenheit, unless participants bring wetsuits or drysuits to wear.
- A slightly faster current or longer crossing when all other conditions meet the criteria of a stated trip.
- Overnight or longer trips, unless an alternative (such as hiking out or being picked up by a support boat) is available.

Sources for Sea Kayak Trip Classifications:

The Mountaineers Sea Kayaking Committee. Trip Leader's Manual. Seattle, Tacoma, ca. 1993.
Harrison, David. Kayak Camping. New York: Hearst Marine Books, 1995.