

# North Atlantic Canoe and Kayak, Inc.

## NACK

### Assessment Criteria and Procedures Club Rating System

NACK recognizes that paddling is a pursuit that encompasses many skills. It may be enjoyed by the novice almost immediately, yet allows an interested paddler a lifetime of advancement and challenge. We believe that paddlers of all levels need to practice, evaluate, and refine their technique and knowledge. Changes in equipment, technology, and weather patterns create a rich palette of possibilities, both positive and negative. To ensure a high degree of safety and fun, paddlers must continually advance their knowledge.

Long Island and the Eastern seaboard possess a wide range of paddling possibilities and environments. From ponds to lakes; rivers to bays; the Sound; and the Atlantic Ocean—all present particular demands upon the kayaker or canoeist. We encourage all our members to explore any and all of these areas, but to first gain the skills and knowledge necessary to venture safely, with minimum risk to themselves or others. Training is the means by which we grow as paddlers, and as a club.

Training without some means of objective assessment can create unsafe paddlers who not only pose a risk to themselves but to others as well. The purpose of this program is to give the individual paddler a method of rating his or her kayaking skills. These skills include knowledge of general kayaking; demonstration of proper, effective technique; safety skills; and an understanding of the nautical “rules of the road” and marine environment.

The assessment program has been constructed to allow all NACK members a way to gauge their current skills in a straightforward manner. Kayaking skills relate directly to an individual’s ability to control human-powered watercraft properly in conditions encountered in various types of water and weather. Ratings give the canoeist or kayaker a method of determining whether current skills are appropriate for current or expected conditions or on particular trips.

In addition, the program helps paddlers place themselves in groups and conditions that match their levels of ability and comfort. Kayaking should be fun, safe, and energizing! By using a straightforward rating system, a confidence is gained that allows paddlers to choose trips to match their ability and desires.

Unprepared boaters can jeopardize not only themselves but others at the trip or event. Canoeists or kayakers who misjudge conditions, their abilities, or a trip’s intent may be in store for an unpleasant experience. When choosing a paddling trip, members must adhere to NACK guidelines and requirements that recognize their ability rating. Minimum requirements exist as well for safety equipment to be carried on the craft. Failure to adhere to these standards will result in a paddler being denied participation in that trip or event. Repeated violations of these minimum standards will subject the member to disciplinary action by the Club.

There are three levels NACK uses when matching a paddler to a particular level or trip:

**1. Paddler Ratings**

**2. Trip Leader Ratings**

**3. Ratings for Water Bodies and Conditions**

## **Paddler Ratings**

Paddlers are rated at particular skill levels determined by the Training and Safety Committees. These skill levels are set according to the variety of conditions encountered in our geographical area. They have been designed to be parallel and equivalent to rating systems in use by internationally recognized canoe and kayaking organizations. In acknowledgment of this, NACK has provided for cross-rating. This means that a paddler rated by the American Canoe Association—ACA— or the British Canoe Union—BCU—will be automatically given a club rating that matches their demonstrated skill and ranking with these groups. This accommodation applies to personal proficiency and instructor ratings with these two agencies. We encourage our members to train with and become certified under professional instructors associated with the ACA and BCU.

## **Group Leader Ratings**

Those wishing to organize and lead Club-sponsored trips must be rated prior to doing so. This rating has as a prerequisite a requirement for prior Paddler rating within the club. Ability to safely plan and lead trips will be assessed. In addition to technical skill, the prospective group leader must demonstrate ability to make prudent judgments, to keep a “safety-first” attitude, and to possess rescue skill in excess of the conditions they are expected to encounter. The group leader must be an assertive individual, able to delegate tasks, and have a positive attitude when working with others.

## **Trip Ratings**

The Club is designing a system to help its members choose scheduled trips that match their ability and desires. The rating system is a guideline and is not absolute. When planning a trip, a group leader considers the *average* and *expected* conditions normally encountered on that body of water. Variations may occur seasonally, daily, or hourly. The trip leaders will work with our Safety Director and Safety Committee to properly rate our trips.

## **Training**

A paddler may undertake any method of training desired to prepare for an assessment. In addition to certified instruction, books, video, and online resources have been found to be helpful. However, skills must be demonstrated at the minimum level standard set by NACK. Demonstration of technique that has not been approved by Club assessment guidelines will not pass. For this reason, NACK members are encouraged to seek out certified high-quality instruction for their personal training. Working with a certified instructor gives the student immediate feedback, a recognized standard of performance, and the confidence to explore and extend their experiences in their craft.

## **Assessment**

Assessment will be provided by the Club in accordance with NACK guidelines and standards. These assessments will be as objective as possible, and will conform to aforementioned NACK standards.

Those wishing to appear for assessment must first apply to NACK and be approved for assessment. They will make arrangement with the Assessment Committee staff to determine location and time for the test. The applicant must bring to the assessment any NACK forms required for same: proof of membership; level approval from Assessment Committee; and confirmation of assessment time. On the day of the assessment, the member must arrive early and have all necessary equipment ready. Assessors will not collect fees, nor will they accept “walk-ons” who appear without prior registration. An assessment will not be delayed and promotion will not be given if a member is unprepared.

All human-powered watercraft commonly referred to as canoes or kayaks will be considered during assessment. With skilled design and proper outfitting, sit-on-top craft can be used to perform most of the skills listed for closed-deck kayaks. Use in desired conditions must be considered in light of a craft’s design intent. Ultimately, watercraft performance is determined by the intent and skill of the pilot.

Paddlers will be assessed based on their ability to complete or perform listed tasks. We encourage all to become skilled, active paddlers. Paddlers with physical limitations will be assessed with needed modification in boat outfitting and required tasks (see Individual Conditional Approval, below).

The paddler may be asked to demonstrate knowledge or skills expected at a lower level than which the applicant is currently being tested. All knowledge and skills are considered cumulative.

## Assessment Procedure

NACK prides itself on the high level of professionalism and support it provides during instruction and evaluation. NACK Assessment Committee staff are highly trained observers and teachers. During the assessment, the Safety and Training staff will confirm a member's application for assessment and review the general expectations for the session. It is the member's obligation to become familiar with the requirements for each test. Minimal demonstration and instruction will be provided during the test.

Kayaking is an activity that requires preparedness. The ability to react logically and calmly when under some stress is a necessary skill associated with kayaking at all levels. Part of the assessment process is to ensure that NACK paddlers are prepared for the conditions they are approved to paddle in and on. Therefore, members undergoing assessment must have all required equipment available for the duration of the assessment, *and* during future trips. Borrowed or rented equipment will be evaluated as if it is the property of the paddler. The paddler is also responsible for the correct operational order of said equipment. After successful assessment, a paddler must carry the equipment required on all Club-sponsored trips, outings, or events. This is to promote and ensure the safety of the member paddler as well as provide a positive example to outside agencies and individuals. Part of NACK's mission is to prevent on-water mishaps by promoting training, being pro-active, and acting as a professionally responsible organization.

## Approval

NACK considers the assessment process to be a highly beneficial one. It allows a paddler to accurately gauge their performance, knowledge, and skills in a straightforward manner. Even if an applicant does not attain a performance rating that corresponds to their perceived ability, the assessment process can serve to help the paddler correct deficiencies and further their learning.

If the applicant has demonstrated abilities required for a rating at the proper level of execution, they will be awarded the skill level rating they have applied for. This rating will take effect immediately and will be formally acknowledged by NACK directors and membership at the next club meeting.

In the event that a paddler has not met critical requirements for the rating in question, they will be approved for the appropriate level for their demonstrated skills. The assessor(s) will provide private exit interviews for all those undergoing assessment. This will allow the assessment staff to inform the paddler of their performance on each level of the evaluation.

## Conditional Approval

In the event that a candidate has not performed at the prescribed required level necessary for achieving a particular rating, the candidate may be awarded the level below the one they have applied and tested for. In cases where a candidate has performed well in all but a few minor (not related to vital knowledge or safety skills) areas, the assessor may award a "conditional approval." In this case, the candidate is expected to re-assess within a set amount of time determined by the assessor, and properly demonstrate the expected knowledge or skills needed for advancement or rating. The applicant need not take the entire test again; only those skills in need of improvement during the first assessment are required.

## **Individual Conditional Approval**

NACK affords all its members the opportunity to safely explore kayaking to the fullest extent of their desires. NACK will work with its members to accommodate individual physical needs. In cases of legitimate physical limitation or handicap, a "Conditional Approval" may be awarded. This award may place certain restrictions on conditions a paddler may be exposed to, based on that person's ability to perform in those conditions. This is most often applied at the Inland Coastal (IC) level and beyond. The applicant may be expected to demonstrate a higher level of skill in certain areas (example: self-or assisted-rescues; rolling; and/or support strokes) for the conditional award to be given.

## **Fees and Allowances**

Only members in good standing are eligible for assessment. Membership status must be confirmed with the membership committee. Those interested in assessment must first apply to the Assessment Committee for approval. Following approval, a member must select a date when assessments are performed, then register with the Assessment Committee. This appointment must be kept; the appointment may be cancelled or rescheduled within twenty-four (24) hours of the scheduled assessment without penalty. Any cancellations outside of this result in forfeiture without refund or loss of that year's complimentary assessment.

Club policy allows for an individual member to receive one (1) free assessment each year. In the event of a sub-standard performance, the member will be assessed the normal member rate for re-assessment. Re-assessment may occur at a future date not less than three (3) weeks from the date of the last, substandard one.

## **Private Assessment**

NACK will strive to provide an assessment schedule that reflects its members' goals for training and advancement. Assessments will be provided at intervals throughout the most active paddling season. Members are encouraged to plan their training and practice schedules in a way that accommodates their goals. Private assessment is an option that will allow the member to advance to different levels between scheduled evaluation dates. The Club will provide special rates for these assessments on request; only NACK-approved assessors will be eligible to award level assessment, evaluation, and awards.

## **Rates:**

NOTE: assessment fees are non-refundable. If assessment is cancelled within the allowed time (see above), a credit will be issued that may be redeemed at the session the applicant attends. Failure to attain a particular level or to pass an assessment that has been attempted will not result in reimbursement of fees or a credit.

## **Non-Member Assessment**

Self-assessment has been found to be a poor substitute for professional, objective evaluation using a set group of requirements. NACK, as a service to the paddling community, will provide assessment for non-members. The assessment process can be helpful to all, as it provides a highly objective measurement of a paddler's ability and technique.

A non-member may apply and register with the Assessment Committee for any scheduled assessment. Space for all assessments is limited, and NACK members will be given priority. Therefore, non-members must apply in a timely manner to be eligible for consideration. Fee schedule for non-members is listed in NACK's fee listing (above).

## **Standards**

NACK has designed a comprehensive schedule for its assessment procedure. Requirements for each level are published and available for inspection at the NACK website. Those considering assessment will be expected to be familiar with all terminology and techniques required at the level in question. NACK members are encouraged to attend training opportunities offered by the club. These sessions will offer members an opportunity to see approved technique for each level, and to practice skills under the guidance of instructor members.

Minimal guidance during the assessment session will be provided; however, the assessment is not a replacement for instruction. Assessors will not, during an assessment, teach technique. It is imperative that anyone considering level assessment have questions answered *prior* to the beginning of the session.

## **The Assessment**

The assessment will begin at the appointed time. Late arrivals will not be accepted once an assessment has begun.

The assessor will confirm the level of the evaluation that is scheduled. A personal inspection will then take place, confirming the presence of proper personal gear and required clothing.

The assessor will then inspect the paddler's craft. All required equipment must be on or in the craft. After this, any additional land-based assessment will occur, including skills such as knot tying, vehicle transport, and personal carry technique if applicable.

Following this, craft will be launched. The assessor will expect a level of execution matching or exceeding the stated NACK standard, listed on the Club's website. The paddler must perform at the level expected, or the skill will not be considered acceptable.

The assessment will often be conducted in a group. Assessors will try to have paddlers alternate when demonstrating a skill or technique. A paddler who is waiting for their turn should carefully observe the individuals who perform prior to them. Observation is an excellent learning tool; reinforcement of learned skills through this technique can result in a higher level of success during the assessment.

Only skills demonstrated can be assessed. Past performance history—positive or negative—will not be considered during an assessment. Skills must be practiced to a level that ensures a high probability of successful completion during the assessment.

It is important to arrive at the assessment site well-rested, calm, and motivated to do well. NACK and its directors, members, and assessors wish for all applicants to enjoy the assessment process and to expand their skills and areas of exploration as they grow in their sport. Good luck!

# NACK Certification Levels: Paddler Proficiency

## Flatwater –F1

Description—A paddler at this level is generally new to the sport, having received less than 8 hours of formal training. They paddle in daylight hours only, in protected waters, and in winds of Force 3 (10Kn) or less.

### Required Equipment for Assessment:

- Craft suitable for conditions with internal floatation (if applicable)
- Paddle
- Coast Guard approved personal floatation device—PFD
- Whistle
- Bailing pump
- Basic personal first-aid kit, packed in watertight container
- Clothing appropriate for immersion and conditions

### Skills and Knowledge:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of hypothermia and hyperthermia, along with techniques for prevention and treatment.
2. Transport: Paddler must demonstrate knowledge of safe method of road transport for watercraft.
3. Lift & Carry (Single and two-person): Safe and efficient method of transporting craft from road vehicle to shore demonstrated.
4. Launching/Landing: Entry and exit of craft from or to low dock or bank. Bank launch/landing to be accomplished without the use of paddle.
5. Wet exit/Swim to shore: In water no deeper than four (4) feet, with spray deck attached (if applicable), paddler will perform this maneuver with spotter alongside. To be performed in controlled, relaxed manner, using ACA-approved method. All equipment must be retained during maneuver. Paddler will then swim boat to shore (25 yards).
6. Rafting. Demonstrate stability of craft when rafted with others.
7. Forward stroke; Stop; Reverse stroke: Paddler will proceed 50 yards in straight line. They will then execute a controlled stop. Paddler will then paddle back to start in reverse in a straight line.
8. Sweep stroke: Forward and reverse sweep (turning) strokes demonstrated. Paddler will then execute sweep stroke pivot, turning craft 360°. Both directions demonstrated.
9. Draw stroke: One draw stroke demonstrated on both sides of craft. Watercraft must move sideward 10 (ten) feet.
10. Support stroke: Demonstration of low brace on each side. Describe high brace.

## **NACK Certification Levels: Paddler Proficiency**

### **Advanced Flatwater-AFW**

Description: A paddler at this level of proficiency has received a minimum of 8 (eight) hours of formal instruction or equivalent. Will paddle through twilight hours, in protected waters, with winds up to force 4 (11-16 Kn). Maximum distance to shore not to exceed 220 yards/1/8 mile. Must be able to complete 2 (two) hour journey at moderate pace.

### **Required equipment for assessment (in addition to that required for FW) :**

- Signaling device
- Mobile phone and/or marine VHF radio, in water-resistant bag
- Spare paddle
- Hand-held or mounted marine compass
- First-aid kit for 2 or more persons, packed in watertight container.
- Safety sling
- Paddle float (foam or bladder)
- Spare clothing appropriate for conditions, packed in dry container

### **Skills and Knowledge (in addition to those required for FW rating):**

1. Launching/Landing: Performed without damage to self, craft, or bank.
2. Signaling: Demonstrate knowledge of common paddle signals.
3. Swimmer Rescue. Return able-bodied swimmer to shore from 100 yard distance using approved technique.
4. Forward stroke: 200 yards; Evidence of torso rotation observed.
5. Stopping: Backward movement by fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) stroke; done on command.
6. Maneuvering (turning) strokes: Moderate edging of craft observed. 360° sweep executed without significant forward or reverse travel. Figure-of-Eight performed on course, forward direction.
7. Draw strokes: Two demonstrated; both sides, 15 feet each side.
8. Bow rescue: Performed from distance of ten (10) feet; paddler serving as rescuer and victim.
9. Deep-water rescue: Must be able to perform one (1) assisted and one (1) unassisted rescue. Type determined by paddler; Rescues must be completed within four (4) minutes.
10. Support strokes: Proficient low brace, head outside centerline of craft. Initial stage of high brace demonstrated.
11. Trip log: Recommended. Basic entries would include time; length of time on water; conditions at start/end; concerns; wildlife sighting.

# NACK Certification Levels: Paddler Proficiency

## Inland Coastal-IC

Description: A paddler at this level of proficiency has continued their training and instruction, participating in a minimum of twenty four (24) hours of formal training or equivalent contact time. Will paddle in daylight or night hours, on inland coastal waters, with winds up to force 5 (17-21 Kn) and waves up to two (2) feet. Can complete a day journey of at least ten (10) miles at moderate pace. Maximum distance to shore not to exceed ½ mile.

### Required equipment for assessment (in addition to that required for AFW):

- Sit-on-or-in craft with grab loops/toggles/deck lines suitable for assisting rescue techniques.
- Spare paddle
- Visual signaling devices for day and night use: Waterproof white light plus signal mirror, dye and/or incendiary marine flares and/or marine smoke grenade. Chemical light source recommended in addition.
- Waterproof emergency strobe light, attached to PFD
- Dry storage containers with additional insulating personal clothing, matched to purpose and conditions
- Water supply; snack (readily accessible from cockpit)
- First aid kit for outdoor emergencies
- Compass attached to PFD (recommended marine compass for deck also)
- VHF marine radio suitable for immersion. Mobile phone recommended in addition.
- Fixed (on-boat) or belt-deployed towing system intended for sea kayak use.
- Knife, suitable for marine environment, readily accessible but secure

### Skills and Knowledge (in addition for those required for AFW rating):

1. Knot Tying: Demonstrate stopper knot, bowline, and hitch.
2. Forward stroke: Demonstrate efficient and powerful power and touring strokes
3. Stopping: From high forward speed, a full stop proceeding to reverse motion within four (4) strokes, command given by assessor
4. Maneuvering strokes: Bow and stern rudder strokes; execution of figure-8 course in forward and reverse
5. Draw strokes: Three different static methods, done up-and downwind (if conditions warrant); Draw on-the-move with control of bow angle relative to motion; Hanging draw with control of kayak relative to sideward motion
6. Bracing: Low and high braces performed with confidence. Significant leaning that would otherwise result in capsize expected. Low brace turn: both sides, from high forward speed, begun with opposite-side sweep.

# NACK Certification Levels: Paddler Proficiency

## Inland Coastal-IC, continued

7. Sculling for support: Performed with kayak hull at least 60° angle, for one (1) minute
8. Rescue: Demonstration of any four (4) of the following, performed in water with wave action of at least one (1) foot, moderate winds:
  - X-rescue (as rescuer and victim)
  - T-Rescue (as rescuer and victim)
  - Scoop rescue
  - Unconscious paddler rescue
  - Paddle float rescue
  - Bow /Paddle presentation rescue (Twenty [20] foot distance)
  - Sling rescue
9. Additional self-rescue: Roll on one side, with or without setup, within three attempts.
10. Towing: Contact tows done with victim's kayak in both bow—bow and bow—stern orientation for 200 yards, executing three turns and returning to start area (square circuit). Line tows done singly and with assisting/supporting paddler in contact with victim's kayak for ½ mile, upwind if conditions allow. Line tow with capsized victim: emergency disengagement/removal of tow line or belt.
11. Navigation: Demonstration of basic compass skills; taking bearing and determining back bearing to specified location; Interpretation of common chart symbols; Chart knowledge including compass rose and magnetic

variation; chart scale; Tide and current: knowledge of same, including that of tide chart time and height data. Must be able to plot simple course and determine average time needed to complete same.

Meteorological Knowledge: Know sources of weather information, forecast, and interpretation. Reading conditions: Awareness of changing patterns of sea, sky, wind.

## **NACK Certification Levels: Paddler Proficiency**

### **Open Water Paddler (OW)**

**Description:** This level is one of not only technique and skills, but of responsibility. The open water environment places paddlers in a rapidly-changing, challenging, and sometimes dangerous environment. In the sea, paddlers will not paddle alone, especially when challenging conditions are present or possible during the duration of the trip. A great deal of responsibility is required of the paddler, as the ability to paddle in the sea at night and in surf is understood. A paddler at this level of proficiency has sought out higher-level certified instruction in open water conditions and has practiced learned skills to gain confidence and experience. A paddler should have completed a series such as the ACA Open Water Coastal program, as well as attended multiple Club-sponsored paddling activities or seminars. Many will also seek individualized instruction to fine-tune their skills. Paddlers at this level will paddle in open water settings, crossings, and ocean conditions, including surf up to three (3) feet and winds up to force 5 (11-16 Kn). Currents up to 3 Kn, with ferrying, eddys utilized. They will be able to participate in extended trips in excess of 15 miles with limited shore access, and may choose to embark upon overnight outings. The ability to be an effective, active group member, providing support for group leader is understood.

**Required equipment for assessment** (in addition to that required for IC rating):

- Fully-outfitted sea kayak (or equivalent) with a combination of bulkheads, hatches, installed floatation, and recovery accessories is required. Few sit-on craft will meet this specification.
- Helmet (for surf conditions)
- Repair Kit

**Skills and Knowledge** (in addition to that required for IC level):

All skills at this level are to be performed with confidence in the above conditions. The ability to blend strokes continuously, choose correct strokes for particular situations, and react quickly to novel demands is expected. This assessment will also include scenarios that test a paddler's ability to perform "real life" rescues in challenging conditions and situations.

# NACK Certification Levels: Paddler Proficiency

## Open Water Paddler (OW), continued

Note: assessment requires and depends upon above environmental conditions being present. The assessment location may change, and a number of venues and sessions may be required to properly assess required skills for this level.

1. Launching and Landing: In surf, forward launching and landing, under control, using safe method. Landing in reverse, under control.
2. Control: A high degree of craft edging evident. Holding edge throughout maneuvers.
3. Draw Strokes: Four (4) demonstrated; combination of static and dynamic.
4. Recovery: In conditions, the ability to prevent and recover from capsize, then transition immediately to forward or reverse motion.
5. Comfort and Handling: Shown in a variety of sea states and conditions. Head, beam, quartering, following. In following seas, ability to maintain heading using surfing, rudder strokes.
6. Surf Zone: Surfing, broaching, sidesurfing, and waveback skills (surfing prevention) demonstrated.
7. Rescue: In surf zone; rescue of paddler and craft, and swimmer rescue.
8. Rolling: Ability to perform two (2) different rolls, on each side. One without setup or in surf conditions.
9. Holding Position: Within and outside surf impact zone, the ability to keep kayak in relative stationary position.
10. Towing: Through the full surf zone, including assisted launching and landing. Towing in following seas. Emergency release of tow after capsize (with boat under tow in full-reverse)

## **NACK Certification Levels: Paddler Proficiency**

### **Advanced Open Water Paddler (AOW)**

The paddler at this level has attained a level of skill that reflects a high degree of personal motivation and dedication. The advanced open water paddler might be called “expert” yet is constantly involved in further training, knowledge enhancement, and skill-building. The ocean environment, including tidal overfalls, fast-moving currents, and large swells and surf, is actively explored. Night training, including navigation and rough water exercises may be enjoyed. This paddler generally sets his or her limits for what is considered safe. Decisions are made with a high level of understanding of environmental conditions and human capability. This paddler knows not only what is possible, but what is dangerous or involves unnecessary risk. The avoidance of needless risk and the ability to enjoy conditions that exclude many other craft is a skill that is only found through determined training and expert instruction.

### **Skills and Knowledge:**

In-process. Available soon.

## **Rates:**

NOTE: assessment fees are non-refundable. If assessment is cancelled within the allowed time (see above), a credit will be issued that may be redeemed at the session the applicant attends. Failure to attain a particular level or to pass an assessment that has been attempted will not result in reimbursement of fees or a credit.

NACK Members—

Flatwater/F1— \$ 25.00

Advanced Flatwater/AFW— \$ 25.00

Inland Coastal/IC—\$35.00

Open Water/OW-- \$50.00

Advanced Open Water/AOW—60.00

Non-Members:

Flatwater/F1—\$ 50.00

Advanced Flatwater/AFW—\$50.00

Inland Coastal/IC--\$75.00

Open water/OW—\$100.00

Advanced Open Water/AOW—100.00