



Competition Coaching – Guidelines for Safe Coaching

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Contents

The Coach as a Risk Manager	3
Defining Suitable Competition Coaching Venues	5
Carrying Out Risk Assessments	7
Safety in Equipment	8
Coach Safety Skills	9
Participant Safety Skills	10
Guidelines for Safe Coaching: Environment 1 – Flat Water Static	14
Guidelines for Safe Coaching: Environment 2 – Flat Water Long Distance	15
Guidelines for Safe Coaching: Environment 3 – White Water Static	16
Guidelines for Safe Coaching: Environment 4 – White Water Long Distance	17
Safe Coaching Checklist	18

The Coach as Risk Manager

There is an inherent risk associated with all water based activities that separates them from more mainstream sports. Managing this risk is a key skill of any canoeing coach or instructor and canoe-sport coaches are expected to take every reasonable step to ensure these risks are minimised for the athletes in their charge.

The Irish Canoe Union strategy for dealing with risk includes the following:

- Compulsory First Aid Qualification for all coaches
- Core Safety Training Workshops on all Coach Training Courses
- Mandatory ISA certification for coaches using a powerboat.
- Strict terms of reference on what constitutes a suitable coaching venue.
- Strict terms of reference on the environmental limitations of a competition coaching qualification
- Extended *Guidelines for Safe Coaching*, for each of the 4 competition canoeing environments.

The Coach as a Risk Manager:

The diagram below sums up what is expected of a competition coach. Unlike their counterparts in the Instructor scheme, Competition Coaches do not have to be competent paddlers themselves and may conduct all their coaching from the bank. However, they are expected to put all reasonable safety precautions in place and appropriately *manage* the risks involved, as follows:

1. Coaches are only qualified to work within the definitions of a **Suitable Competition Coaching Venue** as laid out in these guidelines.
2. Coaches must undertake an extensive **Risk Assessment** for every coaching location and activity.
3. Coaches must ensure that minimum **Equipment Standards** are met.
4. Coaches must achieve a certain proficiency in **safety skills and knowledge**. Training will be provided on ICU coach training courses, with first aid and powerboat training conducted externally.
5. Coaches must ensure their **participants** are competent enough to be in a competition coaching environment.

Safety Training and Support:

Flat Water Coaches

Competition coaches must complete the following safety training modules as part of their coach training period if they wish to coach in flat water environments (both static and long distance):

- External First Aid Qualification
- Coach Training Course Safety Workshops

White Water Coaches

Coaches wishing to coach in white water environments (static or long distance) must complete the following course in addition to the flat water requirements:

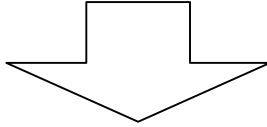
- White Water Safety for Competition Coaching (1 day course)

Exemptions

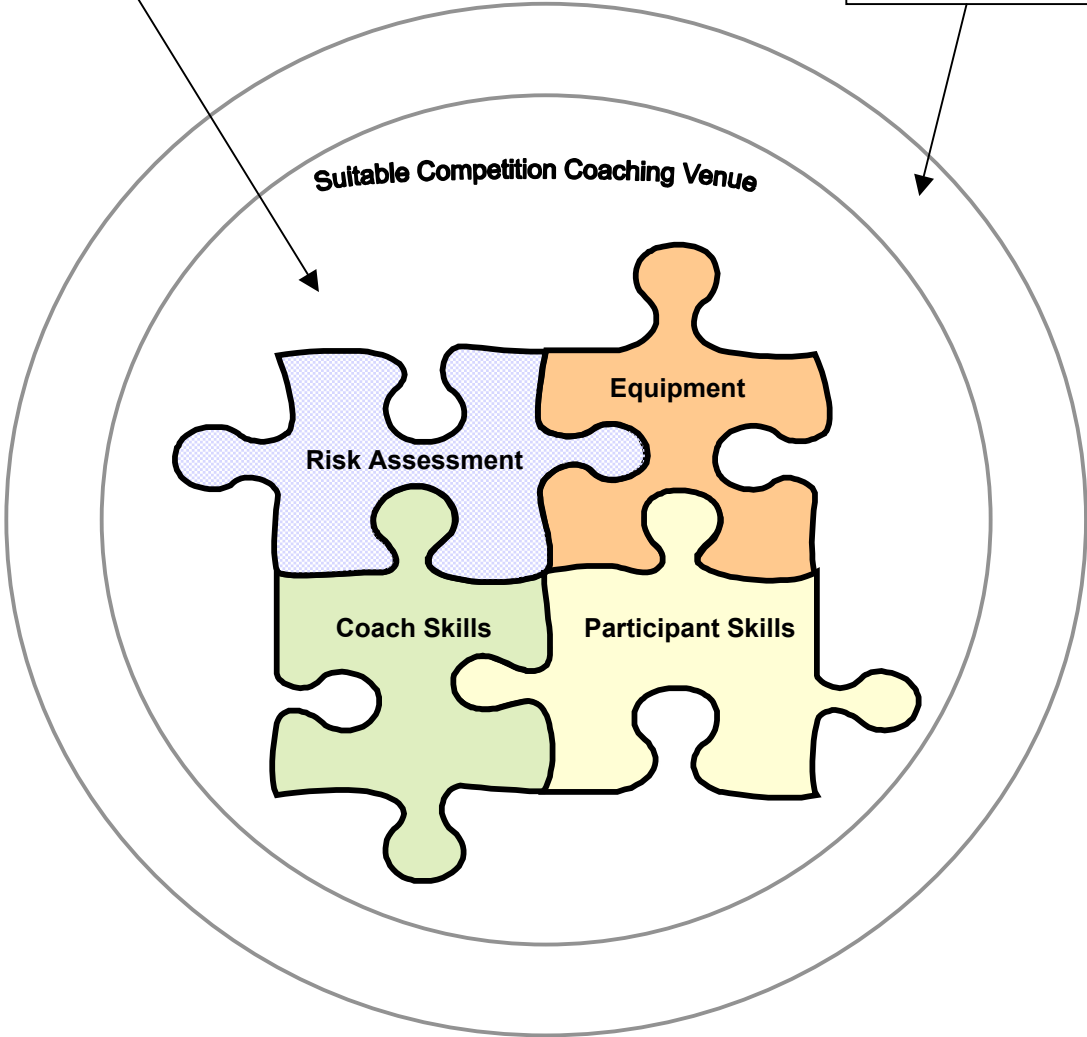
All aspirant coaches must hold a valid first aid certificate and attend the Safety Workshops on their Coach Training Course. If coaches hold a Level 3 Instructor Qualification (Kayak) then they are exempt from attending the 1 day *White Water Safety for Competition Coaching* course.

The Coach As Risk Manager

Suitable Coaching Venue:
Ensure all 4 elements of the safety guidelines are in place.



Advanced Environments:
employ suitably qualified Instructor (separate qualification)



Defining Suitable Competition Coaching Venues

It is important that coaches are aware of the environmental limitations of their qualification. The ICU Instructor Qualifications remain the only awards which qualify coaches to operate in remote, wild or adventurous environments, such as rough seas or advanced white water.

Suitable Competition Coaching Venues are defined as:

Locations which present athletes with technical and performance challenges, but where the consequences of capsizing, swimming or poor boat control are relatively mild.

Guidelines for Flat Water Training Venues

- Water conditions similar to Beaufort force 4 or above render a venue unsuitable for a competition coach.
- Location of the training site (e.g., Canal, open lake) will be selected on the basis of the water conditions and the perceived risk of swamping, capsizing and unfavourable kayak drift.
- Long Distance courses must retain proximity to shore.
- Open lake crossings of over 2 miles are not permitted *unless* a power boat is provided for safety cover.
- Very sheltered tidal locations are permitted, such as sheltered harbours or estuaries, but only where there is minimal risk of being blown to sea.
- Locations with busy shipping lanes or commercial traffic are not permitted.

Guidelines for White Water Coaching Venues

There is an internationally recognised river grading system which grades white water rivers from 1-6. The grade allocated to a rapid represents both the *difficulty* and *risk* associated with running that rapid.

Grade 1	The water is very slow moving and without obstructions.
Grade 2	The way down the river is clear but simple obstructions do exist. Small stoppers and small drops can be present. There are places where the flow accelerates. There is a choice of routes.
Grade 3	There is a route which is easily recognisable from the water. Waves can be irregular. Boulders and obstructions can be numerous. Stoppers and small eddies exist.
Grade 4	The route is not always clear. Inspection is advisable. Rapids are continuous and breakouts are few and small. Stoppers are powerful. The paddler is required to manoeuvre continually with precise control and good decision making.
Grade 5	Inspection is essential because serious dangers can exist. The paddling can include large drops, narrow passages, very complex boulder fields, ever-changing water, and difficult holes. Difficulties are continuous.
Grade 6	The very limit of what is possible in a kayak. The consequences of a mistake are extremely serious.

A competition coach may only operate on water up to and including Grade 3 difficulty, which meets the requirements for a "Suitable Coaching Venue" below.

The coaching venue must not contain any hazards which could give it a higher risk factor than its technical difficulty would suggest.

- For example, Sluice weir on the Liffey would be considered a grade 2 rapid, with pools above and below, bank access and no major hazards along its course. It is a suitable White Water Static coaching venue.
- However, if the same rapid contained a fallen tree across part of its course causing a strainer, it would cease to be a suitable training venue until the tree is removed. Examples of other unacceptable hazards include undercuts, siphons, sieves and deep re-circulating stoppers.

Wild, remote rivers are not considered suitable training venues. A training venue must have ready access to the road and support vehicle and must be clear of high risk hazards. Adventure trips on wild and remote rivers may only be undertaken with a qualified ICU Kayak Instructor.

The coach must have an intimate knowledge of the entire stretch of river they plan to use, prior to running a coaching session on it. It is the coach's responsibility to identify places of higher risk and protect them accordingly, with experienced bank or boat based rescuers. Competition venues will be within the remit of the competition organisers therefore relevant training and competition should comply with their guidelines.

NB: These definitions have been drawn up to encompass the majority of commonly used training venues. If a coach wishes to extend their sessions into more advanced environments, they must enlist a suitably qualified Kayak or Sea-Kayak Instructor.

Carrying Out Risk Assessments

Conducting a thorough assessment of the risks involved for each coaching session is a vital first step in ensuring maximum levels of safety for participants.

It is the duty of a coach to carry out an extensive risk assessment for every session they coach. A risk assessment should be made up of three parts: possible scenario, worst case consequence of that scenario and preventative measures.

For example:

Possible Scenario	Worst Case Consequence	Preventative measures
Capsize on rough water	Head injury, knocked unconscious, drowning	Participant suitably skilled for rough water. Helmets for closed cockpit paddlers. Other participants skilled at unconscious casualty technique. Coach skilled in throw bag technique and first aid.

When drawing up the list of possible scenarios, coaches must also consider off-river hazards. For example:

Possible Scenario	Worst Case Consequence	Preventative measures
Participant hit by car on busy road while inspecting slalom course	Serious injury, death.	Participants briefed on road safety. Supervision for younger participants. Coach skilled in first aid.

When making decisions about whether to run a session at a particular location, the coach must consider the following:

1. Ability and experience of participants
2. Weather and water conditions

High levels of participant skill and experience will reduce the likelihood of accident while favourable weather and water conditions should reduce the consequence.

It is the responsibility of the coach to ensure that a thorough risk assessment has been completed for every coaching session they run and that they are conducting the session after carefully considering the risks involved.

In the event of an accident, the questions that will be asked of a coach are as follows:

1. Were they **qualified**?
2. Did they conduct a full **risk assessment**, taking into account participant ability and the prevailing conditions?
3. Were they coaching within the **environmental limitations** of their qualification?
4. Was the **equipment** suitable?
5. Were they suitable skilled and prepared in **bank based rescue** technique and first aid?
6. Were their **participants competent** enough to be receiving coaching from a competition coach and were they skilled in appropriate participant safety techniques?

Safety in Equipment

Equipment used in canoeing should be fit for the use intended and offer the participant appropriate levels of protection from injury.

It is expected that coaches use ICF regulation craft for the discipline they are coaching. However, coaches may find themselves working with groups in general purpose boats. In these cases, coaches are expected to use their discretion to decide on the safety of the GP craft being used.

Discipline specific safety requirements are listed below:

Flat water racing (Sprint and Marathon)

Boat – well maintained, structurally sound and with adequate buoyancy (as per ICF regulations)

Buoyancy Aid – for **all** participants.

For rough water marathon races (e.g., Liffey Descent) buoyancy aids must be worn at all times. Buoyancy aids must comply with current ICF regulations.

Freestyle

Boat – well maintained, structurally sound and with adequate buoyancy. Cockpit must allow for easy exit in turbulent water. Any straps inside the cockpit should be fitted with quick release buckles.

Volume pods, over thrusters, beach balls or similar devices used to enhance spraydeck rigidity must be free standing and must fall clear of the paddler in the event of a wet exit.

Buoyancy aid – to be worn at all times, both in the kayak and when close to the water's edge. Must be CE approved or equivalent.

Helmet - to be worn at all times, both in the kayak and when close to the water's edge. Must be CE approved or equivalent.

Slalom

Boat – well maintained, structurally sound and with adequate buoyancy (as per ICF regulations)

Cockpit must allow for easy exit in turbulent water.

Any straps inside the cockpit should be fitted with quick release buckles.

Buoyancy aid – must comply with ICF regulations and be worn by all participants at all times.

Helmet - must comply with ICF regulations and be worn by all participants at all times.

Wildwater Racing

Boat – well maintained, structurally sound and with adequate buoyancy (as per ICF regulations)

Any straps inside the cockpit should be fitted with quick release buckles.

Buoyancy aid – must comply with ICF regulations and be worn by all participants at all times.

Helmet - must comply with ICF regulations and be worn by all participants at all times.

Canoe Polo

Boat – well maintained, structurally sound and with adequate buoyancy (as per ICF regulations)

Buoyancy aid – must comply with ICF regulations and be worn by all participants at all times.

Helmet - must comply with ICF regulations.

Face Guard

Paddles – must be of ICF regulation thickness.

Coach Safety Skills

In addition to being competent risk managers, coaches are expected to have a minimum standard of safety and rescue skills.

First Aid Skills:

All coaches must hold a valid first aid certificate. First Aid training is available from a number of agencies. For the purpose of Competition Coaching, the following courses are recommended:

Rescue Emergency Care (REC) Level 2
2 days / 16 hours

Red Cross Basic First Aid (BFA)
2 days / 16 hours

These courses cover basis skills in first aid, scenario management and leadership. Other first aid certification may also be considered. Queries should be directed to the Irish Canoe Union office.

Note: Most first aid certification requires re-validation every 3 years. Coaches are expected to hold a *current* first aid certificate.

Use of a powerboat:

If a coach wishes to use a powerboat, they must be in possession of the appropriate qualification – the Irish Sailing Association National Powerboat Certificate.

Courses run at ISA centres around the country and take 2-3 days to complete.

Bank Based Rescue Technique:

All coaches must have a minimum proficiency in basic bank-based rescue technique. They must be skilled at using a 15m throw bag as follows:

- Knowledge of rope specifications
- Awareness of hazards of misuse – the clean line principle
- Appropriate positioning
- Strong stance
- Accurate throwing technique
- Simple body belay
- Accurate re-coil throws

Boat Based Rescue Technique:

Coaches must be familiar with and able to advise participants on appropriate methods of boat based rescue as follows:

- Deep water rescue for a variety of craft
- Unconscious casualty rescue for closed cockpit boats
- Stern and bow carries for swimmers
- Safe white water swimming positions

Participant Safety Skills

Participant knowledge and skill is a cornerstone of safety in coaching environments, particularly where the coach is to be bank based. Participants may only be accepted for coaching by a competition coach if they are of a certain minimum standard.

Assessing Participant Skills – the Level 2 & 3 Skills Awards

The ICU currently administers a skills awards scheme for white water kayak, sea kayak and open canoe. Training and assessment for these awards is carried out by suitably qualified ICU instructors.

The standards laid down in these awards will be used as the benchmark for competition coaching participants as follows:

Level 2 kayaking skills is an appropriate minimum standard for participants who wish to be coached on flat water (environments 1 & 2).

Level 3 is appropriate for participants who wish to be coached on white water (environments 3 & 4).

Participants may only be accepted for coaching by a competition coach if they are in possession of the suitable certificate **or** if they are judged by an assimilated Level II competition coach to be of an equivalent standard and their name recorded and forwarded to the ICU.

Note: Competition coaches are *not* qualified to administer ICU Skills awards, but Assimilated Level II competition coaches can assess the competency of their participants using the discipline specific skills awards as a guideline.

As the current awards are written primarily for plastic recreational craft, the following is a list of equivalent skills, tailored for the competitive disciplines. Full syllabi of the awards can be downloaded from www.canoe.ie

Level 2 Kayaking Skills Award (adapted for competition craft)

- Flat water & Grade 1 rivers
- Entry, exit
- Forward, reverse, stop
- Turn using sweep strokes
- Simple draw stroke
- Low brace support
- Edging
- Capsize
- Assist in X rescue
- Trunk rotation

Level 2	Polo	Wildwater	Slalom	Freestyle	Racing
Entry, exit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Forward, reverse, stop	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Turn using sweep strokes	✓	✓	✓	✓	x ¹
Simple draw stroke	✓	x ²	✓	✓	x ²
Edging	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Capsize drill	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
X rescue	✓		✓	✓	
Trunk rotation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

General Notes:

- Assessed on flatwater or Grade 1 Applies to both canoe and kayak disciplines.
- Ideally be conducted in discipline specific boats.
- Spraydeck must be worn throughout (except in K-boats).

Notes:

1. Turn using rudder in K-boats for racing discipline.
2. Not applicable with winged paddle in wild-water or racing (except in canoe discipline).
3. Apply appropriate support strokes.

Level 3 Kayaking Skills Award (adapted for competition craft)

- Grade 2 water
- Level 2 skills plus:
- Sculling, high brace, stern and bow rudder
- Ferry gliding, breaking in and out
- Eskimo rescue or craft specific rescue.
- River awareness

Level Three	Wildwater	Slalom	Freestyle	Racing
Forward Paddling	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reverse Paddling	✓	✓	✓	✓
Turning with Sweeps	✓	✓	✓	
Draw Stroke		✓	✓	
Bow Rudder		✓	✓	
Stern Rudder		✓	✓	
Support Strokes	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sculling draw		✓	✓	
Sculling for support	✓	✓	✓	x ¹
Reverse paddling	x ²	✓	✓	x ²
Turn using bow rudder	x ²	✓	✓	x ²
Simple draw stroke	x ²	✓	✓	x ²
High brace support	x ³	x ³	x ³	✓
Ferrying	✓	✓	✓	✓
Breaking in & out	✓	✓	✓	x ¹
Edging	✓	✓	✓	
Capsize	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eskimo rescue	✓	✓	✓	x
X rescue	x	✓	✓	x
Swim Test*	✓			
River Theory**	✓	✓	✓	✓

General Notes:

Bi-lateral performance of skills should be encouraged.

Explain & demonstrate all skills on a river of at least Grade II difficulty

*Swim Test: 50m in pool or lake/river necessary for WW long distance

****River Theory encompasses:**

1. Safety Rules
2. An understanding of the use of defensive swimming
3. An understanding of Eddies, Standing waves, V-waves, stoppers, and easy river routes on a class II rapid.
4. An awareness of other river users and on-water communication.

Participant Rescue Skills:

As other participants in a competition coaching environment are likely to be the first responders in the event of accident, they must be competent in the following basic rescue skills:

Self rescue

Unconscious casualty

T-rescue

X / Deep Water Rescue

Throw Line Rescue

Craft Specific Rescues

Guidelines for Safe Coaching in Environment 1 – Flat Water Static

An area of flat water, where participants are in constant view of the coach¹.

Eg: Canoe Polo pitches, short flat water racing and flat water slalom courses. This definition also extends to flat water situations where a coach moves with an athlete – for example, following a racing boat along a river bank or in a motor boat.

Risks:

- Capsize.
- Entrapment (in closed cockpit boats).
- Paddle injuries.
- Drowning.

Safety Guidelines:

Equipment:

- All participants must wear a suitably approved buoyancy aid (CE or equivalent)
- Closed cockpit competitors must wear helmets in a slalom or canoe-polo environment.
- Polo players must wear face guards in a canoe-polo environment
- Boats must have adequate buoyancy in accordance with ICF competition regulations.

The Coach must:

- Be qualified in First Aid,
- Have access to a first aid kit,
- Know how to use a 15m throw rope to rescue a swimmer,
- Provide for the effective rescue and recovery of a capsized boat and swimmer (either themselves or through proficiency of other athletes or assistants)²

Use of powerboat – coaches using a powerboat must:

- Wear a buoyancy aid
- Hold the ISA National Powerboat Certificate³
- Carry alternative means of propulsion.

The participant must:

- Be of a skills standard equivalent to the ICU Level 2 Kayak Skills Award, prior to commencing a competition coaching programme.⁴

¹ Please refer to “Definitions of Suitable Coaching Venues”

² The coach must ensure that if someone capsizes, there is someone on the water capable of performing a basic X rescue and unconscious casualty rescue. This may be the coach themselves or it may be an experienced paddler in the group.

³ This is a 2 day course, available from ISA centres nationwide. <http://www.sailing.ie/inside/default.asp?pageId=210>.

⁴ This is proved either by participants holding the Level 2 Award OR by an Assimilated Level 2 Competition Coach conducting a basic skills test, in line with the discipline specific skills test (Name and skills level of the participant must be recorded and forwarded to the Irish Canoe Union.

Guidelines for Safe Coaching in Environment 2 – Flat Water Long Distance

*A flat water course, where the competitor is out of the coach's line of sight for part of the time.*⁵

Eg: Flat water marathon.

Risks:

- Capsize.
- Entrapment (in closed cockpit boats).
- Exposure / Hypothermia
- Drowning.

Safety Guidelines:

Equipment:

- All participants must wear a suitably approved buoyancy aid (CE approved or equivalent)
- Boats must have adequate buoyancy in accordance with ICF competition regulations.

The Coach must:

- Be qualified in First Aid,
- Have access to a first aid kit,
- Know how to use a 15m throw rope to rescue a swimmer,
- Provide for the effective rescue and recovery of a capsized boat and swimmer (either themselves or through proficiency of other athletes or assistants)⁶
- Know the expected times of each athlete and raise the alarm if they are running over time.

Use of powerboat – coaches using a powerboat must:

- Wear a buoyancy aid
- Hold the ISA National Powerboat Certificate⁷
- Carry alternative means of propulsion.

The participant must:

- Be of a skills standard equivalent to the ICU Level 2 Kayak Skills Award, prior to commencing a competition coaching programme.⁸
- Be capable of performing a boat to swimmer rescue.
- Display competence in static site sessions before attempting a long distance course.
- Complete a 50m swim test.⁹
- Stop to assist another athlete if they are in trouble.

⁵ Please refer to “Definitions of Suitable Coaching Venues”

⁶ The coach must ensure that if someone capsizes, there is someone on the water capable of performing a basic X rescue and unconscious casualty rescue. This may be the coach themselves or it may be an experienced paddler in the group.

⁷ This course is available from ISA centres nationwide. <http://www.sailing.ie/inside/default.asp?pageId=210>.

⁸ This is proved either by participants holding the Level 2 Award OR by a Level 2 Competition Coach conducting a basic skills test, along the lines of the level 2 syllabus.

⁹ Participants should demonstrate their ability to swim a distance of 50m. The coach should provide adequate safety cover during the swim test and the athlete should wear clothing appropriate to the task and environment.

Guidelines for Safe Coaching in Environment 3 – White Water Static

A white water site of not greater than Grade 3 difficulty and without serious hazards¹⁰, where the athlete is in plain view of the coach at all times.

Eg: Slalom courses, freestyle venues, downriver sprint racing courses. The definition extends to situations where the coach can move unimpeded along the river bank with the athlete.

Risks:

- Capsize.
- Entrapment (in closed cockpit boats).
- Foot entrapment for swimmers.
- Pinning and broaching.
- Head injuries – from capsize in moving water.
- Shoulder dislocation and similar injuries.
- Drowning.

Safety Guidelines:

Equipment:

- All participants must wear a suitably approved buoyancy aid (CE or equivalent).
- All closed cockpit participants must wear helmets.
- Boats must have adequate buoyancy in accordance with ICF competition regulations.

The Coach must:

- Be qualified in First Aid,
- Have access to a first aid kit, mobile phone and throw bag,
- Know how to use a 15m throw rope to rescue a swimmer in white water,
- Provide for the effective rescue and recovery of a capsized boat and swimmer (either themselves or through proficiency of other athletes or assistants)¹¹

The participant must:

- Be of a skills standard equivalent to the ICU Level 3 Kayak Skills Award, prior to commencing a competition coaching programme on white water.¹²
- Skills assessment should in compliance with the discipline and craft specific guidelines.

- Be capable of performing a boat to swimmer rescue in white water.
- Know how to swim defensively and offensively in white water.¹³
- Watch for the safety of each other.

¹⁰ Please refer to “Definitions of Suitable Coaching Venues”

¹¹ The coach must ensure that if someone capsizes, there is someone on the water capable of performing an appropriate rescue (e.g., eskimo rescue, unconscious casualty rescue, stern and bow carry of a swimmer and boat and paddle recovery). This may be (a) the coach themselves or (b) an experienced paddler in the group.

¹² This is proved either by participants holding the Level 3 Award OR by an Assimilated Level 2 Competition Coach conducting the approved skills test for that specific discipline.

¹³ Athletes should know how to swim in white water to avoid a foot entrapment, how to receive a throw rope and how to swim aggressively to cross an eddy line.

Guidelines for Safe Coaching in Environment 4 – White Water Long Distance

A white water section of not greater than Grade 3+ difficulty and without serious hazards¹⁴, where the athlete is out of plain view of the coach for some of the time.

Eg: long distance wild water racing courses

Risks:

- Capsize.
- Entrapment (in closed cockpit boats).
- Foot entrapment for swimmers.
- Pinning and broaching.
- Head injuries – from capsize in moving water.
- Shoulder dislocation and similar injuries.
- Exposure / Hypothermia
- Drowning.

Safety Guidelines:

Equipment:

- All participants must wear a suitably approved buoyancy aid (e.g., CE or equivalent).
- All participants in closed cockpit boats must wear helmets.
- Boats must have adequate buoyancy in accordance with ICF competition regulations.

The Coach must:

- Be trained in First Aid,
- The coach must have access to a first aid kit, mobile phone and a throw bag
- Know how to use a 15m throw rope to rescue a swimmer in white water,
- Provide for the effective rescue and recovery of a capsized boat and swimmer (either themselves or through proficiency of other athletes or assistants)¹⁵
- Perform a risk assessment and organise a sweep boater to come down the river behind the group of racers, if deemed prudent
- Perform a risk assessment and organise pre-placed protection at rapids and hazards if deemed prudent
- Ensure that the more experienced paddlers will follow after less experienced paddlers, if deemed prudent
- Ensure that individual athletes set out at appropriate intervals to maximise safety.

The participant must:

- Be of a skills standard equivalent to the ICU Level 3 Kayak Skills Award, prior to commencing a competition coaching programme on white water.¹⁶
- Undergo training in a white water static environment before being allowed on long distance white water.
- Be capable of performing a boat to swimmer rescue in white water.
- Know how to swim defensively and offensively in white water.¹⁷
- Watch for the safety of each other.

¹⁴ Please refer to “Definitions of Suitable Coaching Venues”

¹⁵ The coach must ensure that if someone capsizes, there is someone on the water capable of performing an appropriate rescue (e.g., eskimo rescue, unconscious casualty rescue, stern and bow carry of a swimmer and boat and paddle recovery). This may be (a) the coach themselves or (b) an experienced paddler in the group.

¹⁶ This is proved either by participants holding the Level 3 Award OR by an Assimilated Level 2 Competition Coach conducting a skills test, according to the discipline specific guidelines.

¹⁷ Athletes should know how to swim in white water to avoid a foot entrapment, how to receive a throw rope and how to swim aggressively to cross an eddy line.

Safe Coaching Checklist:

Before conducting any competition coaching session, answer the following questions:

1. Are you **qualified**?
2. Have you conducted a full **risk assessment**, taking into account participant ability and the prevailing conditions?
3. Are you coaching within the **environmental limitations** of your qualification?
4. Are you using suitable **equipment**?
5. Are you skilled and prepared in **bank based rescue** technique and first aid?
6. Are your **participants competent** enough to be receiving coaching from a competition coach and are they skilled in appropriate participant safety techniques?

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