Rock Climbing Instructor

Guidance notes for trainers and assessors

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Introduction

These guidance notes should be used together with the Rock Climbing Instructor candidate handbook.

Candidate experience

- It is important candidates have the appropriate level of experience to allow engagement with course content. Candidates must satisfy the prerequisites for training and assessment courses. This must be evidenced in writing, we strongly prefer candidates record this information within DLOG.

- A thorough review of a candidate's logbook in advance of the course should provide the course director with information about their breadth, depth and currency of experience. It's important to scrutinise the quality, not just the quantity.

- Trainers should be mindful of experience levels of candidates when introducing content especially if techniques shown are on the fringe of the qualification scope.

Responsibility for safety

- Course directors and staff should remember that they are ultimately responsible for the safety of everyone, during any training or assessment course, and will do all they can to prevent accidents leading to physical or mental injury.

- Rock Climbing Instructor courses are for experienced climbers. While course staff should endeavour to maintain a safe working environment, participants should be reminded that they also have a duty to exercise judgment regarding their own personal safety and that of other members of the group.

- Trainers and assessors should be mindful of the psychological pressure candidates may feel to perform. This can be effectively managed by course staff through attentiveness to the group's needs, recognition of individual differences, and an understanding of how group dynamics and the environment interact. Course staff self-awareness is also essential; understanding one's own strengths, limitations, and training or assessment style supports informed decision-making and contributes to safer outcomes.

Venue choice

- Course directors should select venues carefully, bearing in mind the aims and objectives of the day. Venues should have sufficient routes at the required grade and there should be a plan for sub-optimal conditions that is shared with the candidates, reinforcing the practice of good decision-making.

Managing lead climbing

- Lead climbing needs to be carefully managed. Course staff should consider a lower grade warm-up route or top-rope exercise, or other suitable steps to ensure that lead climbing at the required grade is not their very first interaction with lesser-known candidates, for whom that grade may be their maximum. They should also share and discuss this process and rationale with the candidates – they are being trained/assessed in their judgement and decision making after all.

General

- Training and assessment courses should facilitate open discussion.

- Assessors should set realistic tasks or scenarios rather than request specific techniques be demonstrated. Tasks set should not demand solutions that use techniques beyond the scope of the qualification.

- If assessment candidates are unable to demonstrate competence initially, other opportunities should be given where possible or appropriate.

- Course staff should encourage candidates to engage in reflective practice recognising they, in turn, must foster this in participants they subsequently instruct.

In conclusion, Rock Climbing Instructor courses are for participants with considerable personal experience. While course staff should endeavour to maintain a safe working environment, participants also have a duty to exercise judgment regarding their own personal safety and that of other members of the group.

1. Equipment

Trainers:

Candidates should be encouraged to bring along their own equipment to the course. This can prompt good discussion on its use, care and maintenance in line with manufacturers' guidance. Additional items should be supplied by the course provider, particularly items which are widely used with groups. Good sources of additional information should be highlighted.

Indoor and outdoor venues should be chosen to maximise the candidates' contact with in-situ equipment, with time allocated for discussion around evaluating its condition and appropriate use. It is encouraged that discussions around equipment care, maintenance and use will feature as a topic throughout the course rather than an isolated session.

Assessors:

As with training courses, candidates should be encouraged to bring their own equipment to assessment courses. They should be able to talk through their choice of equipment, suitability, its history of use and maintenance. Candidates should know where to access information on appropriate use of equipment if they appear unsure. Candidates should understand the importance of adhering to the rules of the climbing wall when using fixed equipment.

Additionally, if a home research or question paper is used, a section on equipment should be included to ask more in-depth questions about equipment use, care and maintenance.

Top tips:

- Etiquette around using fixed equipment should be addressed on both training and assessment courses.
- Threading of lower-offs should be covered. If this is not possible, consider creating a lower-off simulator.
- Manufacturers produce great resources with detailed information on their climbing equipment. Consider using some of their materials to teach or to set tasks such as learning how to use a new piece of equipment or researching the storage and maintenance requirements.

- Differentiating between equipment appropriate for use as an independent climber and an instructor can be very productive. When doing so reference can be made to manual and assisted braking devices.

2. Anchors

Trainers:

Training courses should plan to visit a variety of different venues which offer ample opportunity to explore different anchor types. It may be useful to consider anchors in three categories:

- natural anchors such as spikes, blocks, threads, chock stones and trees.
- hand-placed anchors such as nuts, hexes, camming devices.
- fixed equipment such as bolts, climbing wall anchors, stakes and pitons.

It is useful to run a short session on anchors at the start of an outdoor session as a way of gaining an understanding of the candidates' current skill set and knowledge of what makes a sound anchor.

Choosing a controlled environment, such as the base of the crag, where a range of placements are available allows them to be explored and reviewed methodically to assist the candidates in developing a system for selecting and placing a sound anchor.

The progression from anchor selection should lead into the set-up of single, then multiple anchors for a belay. A range of methods for linking anchors together should be demonstrated. Trainers should facilitate discussions regarding the suitability of the system for the given situation, with an emphasis that no one system can be implemented across the variable nature of crags and situations.

Assessors:

The assessment of a candidate's ability to select and place a sound anchor should be a theme which runs throughout the whole course, with candidates given tasks to complete that require them to explore and select anchors. Reviewing all anchors that candidates place throughout the course is required to gain an overall impression of their performance. Use of effective questioning with the candidate to establish their understanding of the quality of their anchor should also be used rather than solely assessing the placement itself.

Candidates need to demonstrate that they can attach themselves to single and multiple anchors in a logical and safe way which makes the anchors independent, equally loaded and with their stance (sitting or standing) best suited to the situation. On assessment, candidates will normally build their belay following a lead climb, however it may be pertinent to set a task of creating an anchor/belay in a more controlled setting before deploying candidates on lead climbs.

Top tips:

- Selecting solid anchors should be a theme throughout the whole training and assessment course.
- Teach a simple scoring system for the quality of anchors to assist the candidates' understanding of what makes a good placement.
- Visit crags of different rock types to help make candidates aware of the differing characteristics and how this might affect the selection of anchors.
- Consider the course structure so that course staff are able to judge the competence of candidates before exposing them to higher risk environments or activities.

3. Belaying

Trainers:

Tying onto the harness should follow the manufacturer's guidelines, which typically are printed on the harness. Discussion should take place around the advantages and disadvantages of tying in directly versus clipping in with a karabiner and how these techniques may differ depending on the circumstances. The progression of this skill is to then supervise others connecting themselves to the rope in a safe and appropriate manner.

Top and bottom-rope systems should be covered practically during the course with time given to review what situation would favour one over the other. In both systems, the use of a direct or semi- direct belay system should also be covered.

Competent belaying and being able to hold a fall or slip and carry out controlled lowers are all essential skills. Throughout the training course candidates should be encouraged to

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demonstrate model belaying technique appropriate to the device, ensuring both their safety and that of the climber, whilst providing an 'expert model' example for their future groups.

In addition to the technical aspects of belaying, instructors should emphasise key principles regarding belayer positioning, including:

- **Positioning relative to runners/clips**: The belayer should anticipate the direction of pull and position themselves accordingly to maintain control.

- **Proximity to the wall/crag**: Staying close to the wall/crag minimises excess rope between the belayer and climber, improving stability, response time and control.

- **Managing weight differences**: Strategies should be taught for handling differing body weights between the belayer and climber, and understanding the associated implications for holding a fall.

- **Clear and agreed-upon communication**: Standardised and simple calls between the climber and belayer should be agreed upon to ensure clear communication.

- **Focused attention**: The belayer must maintain undivided attention on the climber at all times to ensure prompt response to any movement or potential falls.

Assessors:

Candidates should be queried on their choice of tie-in method. They should be able to clearly explain their reasoning and its limitations in different contexts.

Giving candidates a 'fictitious' practical scenario to complete will clearly show the depth and understanding of their knowledge and experience. This approach is preferable to setting specific tasks to complete. For example, asking a candidate to set up a roped climb for a particular group at a particular section of the crag will require them to consider many more factors than simply being asked to set up a top-rope.

Assessing a candidate's belaying skills goes beyond the physical action of belaying and should include the selection of an appropriate device for the given scenario. Choice of belay device and method should also consider the properties of the rope, the venue, route and the climber. The assessment of belaying skills needs to encompass the candidate's decision-making process.

Specific sections of the syllabus, such as 'holding falls and controlling lowers' should be part of a wider scenario and visited on several occasions throughout the assessment in a variety

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of different contexts. A close level of supervision in a controlled situation is required with this aspect of the syllabus where the assessor can easily intervene if required.

Top tips:

- Tying in and belaying skills should form part of each day of the course with plenty of time dedicated to training and assessing.
- Training and assessing of belaying skills requires close, effective oversight and if required, a back-up.
- Use a variety of different belay devices, ropes (varying diameters) and venues (indoor slab, overhanging etc.) to give a broad context to the skills.
- Lead belaying skills should be addressed including a wide ranging discussion.
- Candidates taking and holding lead climber falls is not required as part of the syllabus.

4. Personal climbing skills

It is expected candidates will lead trad and sport routes during training and assessment courses. Before all lead climbing course staff must completely assure themselves that individuals can safely undertake the activity, likely through progressive practical tasks and careful questioning. This will likely include setting up and using top and/or bottom ropes, for example. Careful consideration should also be given to the prevailing crag and weather conditions before lead climbing.

In all cases, careful consideration must be given to the choice of routes, avoiding climbs that are poorly protected or notorious for being deceptive in difficulty ("sandbag" routes). Course staff will typically know the routes well and can offer guidance, subtly influencing candidate decision-making. It is essential that all chosen routes offer adequate protection.

Where candidates regularly climb at a higher lead standard, it may be appropriate for them to lead more challenging routes during the course. However, candidates must first demonstrate competence on lower-grade climbs. This also allows them to 'warm up' and reflect on broader themes.

Trainers:

Candidates will be entering the training course as climbers with measurable experience in trad, sport, bouldering and climbing on artificial structures.

During bouldering sessions on rock and artificial structures, refinements can be made which may include giving input on movement skills and common bouldering tactics such as route reading, downclimbing, jumping off and landing safely.

The training course will spend time evaluating and expanding their knowledge with the aim that candidates then complete several lead climbs placing traditional protection and lead climbing on indoor lead climbs. There is no requirement to climb at any particular standard which gives the trainer the ability to adapt the activity to the needs of the candidates and prevailing conditions. This may be covered while on a bottom-rope or on ungraded ground if the situation merits it.

Lead climbing skills are an opportunity for the candidates to learn about taking people climbing, therefore being able to choose a suitable route from the guidebook and give appropriate briefings to their client(s) should both form part of the training course.

Once qualified Rock Climbing Instructors may choose to lead routes during their courses belayed by participants they consider able to do so safely. The purpose would be to engage participants in 'real' climbing, bottom up, or rig climbs where the anchors are not accessible from the top, for example.

Candidates should be trained to direct belayers to avoid problems occurring rather than formally teach lead belaying, for example, 'Please stand closer to the wall' or 'Please belay me until I shout, safe' etc.

Trainers should advise caution if candidates chose to undertake this activity as qualification holders and discuss mitigation strategies to manage the associated risk. This will likely include careful consideration being given to the following, for example:

- Nature of the venue, route, environment and participants.
- The instructor climbs a route well within their capabilities and leading ability.
- Competency and currency of the belayer, likely vetted through careful questioning and prior practical observation.
- Familiarity of belaying equipment used.
- Verbal and visual checks to confirm the belayer is ready before climbing.
- Watching the belayer closely on the initial moves.

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- Other practical interventions to improve safety e.g. other participants (or a staff member) tailing the rope.

Assessors:

Candidates should be able to move with confidence on boulder problems of their choosing following a warm up. There is no requirement to climb at a particular grade.

In an ideal setting, candidates would be visiting unfamiliar crags and having to use a guidebook to seek out suitable routes to lead. Candidates will need to have experience of leading Severe graded climbs in their logbook and discussion with them individually should take place to verify this experience. The ability of the candidate to lead at Severe on assessments is also required should suitable conditions allow. This will inevitably mean the course staff will find themselves balancing the syllabus requirements with the ability of the candidates and the prevailing conditions on the crag and working out the safest most appropriate way to manage this element of the assessment course.

This may require a reordering of the course programme or in exceptional circumstances that the lead climbing is demonstrated at a lower grade or with top rope security. In these cases their DLOG will help inform the assessor that they can climb at the required grade.

Candidates need an understanding of basic principles relating to safe and efficient links within the belay system (referred to as the safety chain). Assessing each candidate's knowledge of the safety chain and fall factors should be done during the practical aspects of the course and extended through questions in the home paper and additional questioning.

When leading it is expected that candidates remain aware of the actions of the belayer to ensure safe activity. Given that qualified instructors may be belayed by participants on their courses, candidates on assessment must demonstrate they are able to maintain good visual and verbal communication throughout when leading routes and use appropriate mitigation strategies to manage the associated risk.

Top tips:

- Trainers and assessors should use a selection of different guidebooks or topos on courses.

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- When lead climbing activities take place, the trainer or assessor should be able to give the candidate detailed feedback on their runner placement and belay set-up.
- A low level traverse route/exercise can offer useful coaching and observation opportunities with lower risk to all parties, as part of a progression.
- An early review of the candidate's DLOG and their lead climbing experience by the training staff is essential as part of this process.

5. Abseiling

Training:

Abseiling forms two parts of the training course. The first is the candidate having an ability to abseil themselves with a suitable back-up (such as a prusik) and the second as an activity with groups using a back-up rope and commonly involving a releasable system.

Candidates may be required to abseil to retrieve stuck equipment following a climb, or to get close to someone in difficulty. Personal safety is a key theme throughout abseiling and close supervision is required from the trainer. Candidates could theoretically arrive on training with no abseiling experience. Trainers should never underestimate the value of a safety rope when exploring the effectiveness of personal abseil back-up systems with candidates.

Candidates need to understand what makes a good venue for abseiling, both for themselves and as a group activity. Avoiding conflict with other climbers and avoiding damaging the venue should also be taken into consideration.

Discussion should take place on how to avoid running into common problems when abseiling, as most are foreseeable and so should not occur. Methods of solving simple problems should be covered at training, but the emphasis should be placed on the skills and judgements required to prevent problems from occurring in the first place. Examples of simple abseiling problems include:

- tangled ropes
- jammed abseil device
- abseiler moving off-route
- inversion

Assessors:

Candidates should clearly demonstrate that they are able to abseil independently using a suitable back-up (such as a prusik). In addition, they should be able to set up and competently manage a group abseil using a releasable system.

In both cases this should involve appropriate anchor selection and effective personal safety. If an assessor has any cause for concern about a candidate's ability, then a safety rope should be considered.

Candidates must be able to safely supervise an abseiling activity for a group of novices. This will involve a releasable system. The assessment of the candidates' skills should include selecting appropriate abseil venues and rigging appropriate safety systems to avoid simple problems occurring. In addition, it should include all aspects of group management, particularly in managing the group at the top of the crag prior to abseiling. Emphasis on good and effective communication skills is needed throughout the activity.

Top tips:

- The use of prusik back-ups should be practised in a controlled environment.
- Dealing with abseiling problems should be realistic requiring simple steps to solve and not involve the candidate putting themself or anyone else at risk.
- Make use of rope protectors to minimise damage to the ropes and also the crag.

6. Background knowledge

Trainers:

The beginning of all training courses should outline the role and philosophy of Mountain Training and its qualifications, the mountaineering councils, climbing clubs and NICAS. This may be in the form of a presentation or discussion which involves the whole group, and their knowledge and experiences should feed into this.

Awareness should be drawn to the grading system, history, traditions and ethics of climbing in the UK and Ireland through ongoing discussions or as opportunities present themselves. The use of guidebooks and publications can assist with this.

Candidates should also be made aware of how Mountain Training's work dovetails into the work of the mountaineering councils and other national training schemes e.g. NICAS.

Assessors:

Throughout the assessment candidates can be questioned about many of these topics. In some cases it may be difficult to find the time to thoroughly cover all aspects of this syllabus area, therefore the use of a home research or question paper should be considered. It is important that the questioning references the UK and Ireland, and that discussion is not just focused on the local area.

Top tips:

- Make use of a home research or question paper.
- Setting short (5 minute) presentation tasks assesses a candidate's research ability and knowledge as well as their communication skills.
- Encourage candidates to use digital platforms as these are increasingly used in sports education.

7. Instructor responsibilities

Trainers:

Candidates should be made aware of some of the formal requirements of the planning process such as gaining parental consent, organising insurance and obtaining organisational permissions. Risk assessments for all climbing activities should be undertaken and trainers should signpost to relevant safeguarding training. Trainers should discuss with candidates how best to carry out initial preparation and budgeting exercises and how to complete detailed planning before delivering sessions.

Trainers should ensure that candidates are made aware of the importance of assessing the strengths, weaknesses and needs of the group and plan the climbing activity accordingly.

Candidates should be encouraged to develop a range of management strategies applicable to different circumstances and groups. It is ideal if those management strategies allow full group participation. Either way, candidates should be reminded that their responsibility is for

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the whole group, irrespective of whether they are directly involved in the climbing activity or not. Participants may require additional support to join in the activity and trainers may need to make adjustments for these individuals. Although instructors should commonly be able to facilitate this, trainers should make candidates aware that they may require additional training to do so.

Assessors:

Assessors should examine the candidate's ability to undertake risk assessments for climbing activities and their strategies for dealing with emergency situations. Planning skills can initially be assessed with a presentation or written task, but they should not be looked at in isolation from a candidate's practical ability to lead a group effectively during climbing activities. Questioning and tasks can be set to examine candidates' knowledge on safeguarding, duty of care, obtaining informed consent and information on participants, contingency and emergency planning, supporting special needs and planning appropriate objectives.

Top tips:

- Setting scenario-based open questions or tasks, whether verbally or in writing, will best determine the candidates' knowledge and thought processes with regard to planning.
- Candidates' activity planning should show considerable adaptability to anticipate changes in conditions, the group or the environment. This can be tested at climbing venues either for real or by setting different scenarios.

8. Leadership and decision-making

Trainers:

Trainers should emphasise to candidates that underpinning their role as an instructor are the values, beliefs, ethos and philosophy that shape our view of what leadership should be.

The 'Vision, Support, Challenge' model used by Mountain Training provides a framework that candidates can use to plan, execute and review their leadership behaviours. In this way, groups who receive the right balance of the three categories can be encouraged to perform beyond their own expectations.

Transformational leadership is a model of positive (INSPIRE) behaviours that instructors can use to promote the best outcomes for their groups. Mountain Training's ethos of developing competence and independence should be contrasted with other approaches.

Training in leadership needs to be a balance between a theoretical and practical approach to group management and the leader's responsibilities. Trainers should highlight that leadership attributes can be learned, trained, and developed.

Trainers should highlight that whilst leadership attributes allow us to make good decisions and lead well, our decision-making is influenced by the 'situation and environment', the instructor, and the group.

All instructors tend to have preferred behaviours that are heavily influenced by their personality, experience, ethos and beliefs, as do their groups. Trainers should stress that instructors will need to adapt their preferred behaviour to an appropriate behaviour required by balancing the needs of both the situation and the group.

Teaching of leadership works best if it is integral to every task and situation during training. Trainers should include the more commonplace leadership tasks that occur, for example managing a group's arrival at a busy venue. Training staff should recognise that they are acting as role models for candidates through their own practice during a course.

The 'Vision, Support, Challenge' (VSC) model can help trainers frame discussions, sessions, and feedback regarding leadership and decision-making. They should discuss the seven leadership attributes:

- Leadership style: controlling versus non-controlling
- Decision-making: what informs this & how to make them
- Instructor observations: what they should be & how to make them

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- Instructor communication skills: verbal and non-verbal, listening
- Experience and ability: how this influences decision-making
- Emotional intelligence: to support individualised leadership
- Group management: techniques, styles and influences

Realistic target setting and subsequent review commonly leads to a successful outcome. Candidates should be taught that effective communication underpins this, and the importance of being mindful of prior experience when managing participants. Candidates should be aware that communication with groups prior to the session can be very revealing and is to be encouraged.

Trainers should ensure candidates know what they are trying to achieve with regard to the 'Individual and group satisfaction and performance'. Importantly how do they – the instructor – know what this is? How do they monitor it? And how do they achieve it?

Whilst there are challenges with setting scenarios involving peers during training, trainers may find that modelling leadership behaviours, then using the Vision Support Challenge model to review the task, can support candidates' understanding of the practical application of the Mountain Training leadership model.

The following are examples of other options for structuring leadership tasks:
- Use of scenario cards to promote discussion and reflection amongst the group.
- Having the group involved in decision-making and route/climbing activity choice
- Having the group plan breaks/food stops for the day.

Trainers should be well versed in the literature on leadership and the responsibilities of an instructor, as specified for candidates, in addition to developing their own resources. Trainers should draw on their own and the candidates' experiences to discuss and expand this topic in the classroom and during the course.

Assessors:

It can be challenging to provide genuine leadership situations on assessment. For example, groups of assessment candidates are not likely to react like a novice party. Much assessment however can be achieved by careful questioning throughout the course as situations arise. Assessors should consider introducing the Vision Support Challenge model at the beginning

of the assessment and use this to help frame the assessment process and manage candidates' expectations.

Assessors should be clear in their own minds as to which aspects of leadership they can assess within the structure of the course. They should carefully consider how they use simulated situations for assessment and should make clear to candidates what is being assessed at any given time. Self-evaluation (using Vision Support Challenge as a framework) should be encouraged because being an effective leader depends upon leaders being aware of their behaviours, strengths and limitations.

Assessors may consider using questions based around the factors underpinning leadership and decision-making competencies e.g. can you briefly explain your personal leadership style and beliefs? How does this align with the Mountain Training ethos?

Candidates' understanding of different styles and modes of leadership should be assessed. Candidates should be able to identify their preferred behaviour(s) and therefore the style with which they are most comfortable and be able to make judgements about when changes of behaviour might be appropriate when leading a group. Assessors should give candidates opportunities to show understanding of the issues surrounding effective management during a variety of climbing activities. During practical assessment candidates should also be presented with some common emergency situations.

Certain aspects of group management, such as briefings and communication are relatively easy to evaluate, as are the choice and preparation of personal equipment, selection of venues and climbing activities and reaction to set emergency situations. However, the best course of action for an unanticipated situation must be weighed carefully against possible alternatives. It is common for these situations to be used as further training for the benefit of all concerned.

Assessors should give daily debriefs, with special regard to leadership aspects. Such sessions will provide a vital platform for discussion and opportunities to compare the perceptions of all parties involved.

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Top tips:

- Encourage candidates to think of observable behaviours that demonstrate the leadership competencies. The Vision Support Challenge and situational leadership models can help with this.
- Ask candidates to describe or enact leadership behaviours on the course as relevant situations arise e.g. 'What would you say/do to a mixed ability group before starting climbing activities to create an inclusive and positive team spirit for the day?'
- Set tasks that require technical focus (e.g. teaching knots or belaying or introducing movement techniques) and also demand positive group management. Can they manage both?
- Home research tasks and brief interviews can examine candidates' knowledge of leadership models and their own ethos of leadership.

9. Knowledge and demonstration of techniques

Trainers:

A key skill of a Rock Climbing Instructor is their ability to demonstrate sound technique and have a good level of knowledge around indoor climbing. During training, candidates should see and discuss what makes an effective demonstration of: fitting a harness, tying-in and belaying and abseiling.

Additionally, candidates will need to develop good demonstrations on fundamental climbing movement skills which can be applied to the climbing wall environment. The training course should give good opportunities for each candidate to practise demonstrations, for active discussion among the group and for feedback to take place.

The teaching of movement skills should introduce the basic concepts of efficient climbing, briefly touching on balance, footwork, and keeping the climber's weight over their feet. If appropriate, the concept of the centre of gravity and its effect on climbing movement can be explored. Exercises and games that develop good movement should be introduced. This is not a coaching movement course however and trainers should be able to signpost towards the FUNdamentals of Climbing courses developed by the mountaineering councils for further training in this area.

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Trainers should introduce candidates to a range of current, commonly used equipment and give examples of how they might instruct others on its use. This should include personal, group and in- situ climbing equipment.

Indoor facilities/artificial structures may dictate how equipment is used during sessions. Candidates should be encouraged to consider the rules of the facility prior to running the session. If unsure they should be encouraged to seek further clarity.

Rock Climbing Instructors commonly work with novices. For this reason it is important that they are comfortable running sessions with a range of groups with limited experience. This will involve roped climbing and bouldering. Instructors should be able to teach these activities in a fun, engaging and progressive way. Trainers should develop these skills drawing on their own and the candidates' prior experience.

Assessors:

Unlike many aspects of the syllabus which are assessed as part of a wider scenario, knowledge and demonstration of techniques can be assessed in isolation, for example: demonstrate effective belaying. Candidates should be given the opportunity for timely feedback and if required this aspect can be revisited on several occasions throughout the assessment. There is benefit in reviewing this task within the whole group as a way of sharing more information and if appropriate giving further training to enhance the knowledge and skills of the candidates.

Assessors should ensure candidates are able to supervise novice groups. Activity should be safe, progressive and fun for all. Candidates should be aware of the needs of the participants and be able to switch between different activities to ensure full engagement.

Candidates should be comfortable developing movement skills whilst bouldering and roped climbing. They should be aware of a range of strategies to do so, applicable to different groups. They should understand where to direct participants to extend their development.

Top tips:

- Input on movement skills would naturally compliment a session on supervising bouldering, introducing games and warm up exercises. It should not dominate a course but can usefully be referred to throughout any climbing sessions.

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- Candidates can be asked to demonstrate a range of techniques to real students or their peers. In all cases they should check for understanding.
- Introduce an example of facility rules that will dictate that various strategies may or may not be used. Ask them why this might be so?

10. Hazards and emergency procedures

Trainers:

Discussion should be had upon arrival at each venue during the training course about its suitability for use with groups. Attention to the approach, descent, terrain at the base and objective dangers should be considered and this is best done as a practical session with group discussion to follow.

Warming up is key in injury avoidance and preparing for activity and should be an engaging activity in its own right. A creative approach commonly inspires good participation. Candidates should be encouraged to experiment with multiple, effective methods of warming up relevant to different groups and situations, throughout the course.

Problem avoidance is a key focus of the Rock Climbing Instructor qualification, therefore a good amount of dedicated time is required during the course to help candidates build knowledge about management techniques. This will assist them in identifying potential and common issues along with simple strategies to avoid them, and as a last resort, deal with them appropriately. Given that most issues can simply be avoided, only minor additional skills are required to deal with less likely issues.

Some suggested simple strategies for instructors to avoid common problems include:

- Comprehensive participant gear and equipment checks – make sure everything fits and is done up.
- Appropriate venue and route choice.
- Effective and clear briefings to participants.
- Challenge through choice – consider having participants climbing a short distance up a climb before being lowered down.
- Keeping the rope tight on the climber at all times.
- Maintaining constant awareness of the location and activities of other site users.

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The majority of common roped problems are foreseeable. Examples of common issues include:

- Climber stuck on a ledge.
- Climber moving off route.
- Climber refusing to be lowered.
- Climber inverting when being lowered.

An instructor should be able to approach from above or below (using conventional climbing techniques) but does not need to interact with the climber in a technical way. Trainers need to demonstrate simple procedures to avoid common problems and, in the worst case, safely deal with common issues. Techniques used should ideally be applicable to many situations and should ensure the safety of the whole group.

Given the prevalence of auto-belays in climbing walls and the unique nature of some of the incidents that have occurred, candidates should be made familiar with identifying and mitigating common hazards such as snag hazards on the climber, helmet hangup, climber not clipping in to auto-belay, being lowered side-on to the wall as well as not letting go of the auto-belay attachment karabiner until it is clipped back to its anchor.

Beyond these issues things become more complex and should be described as rare occurrences and are therefore classed as unforeseeable. In these circumstances external support or assistance may be required.

Instructors also need to have an emergency plan in mind for visiting outdoor venues. Trainers should facilitate a discussion with candidates about what would constitute an emergency, along with how to call for suitable help. Trainers should also familiarise themselves with the venues they use during courses to further aid the discussion with candidates.

Assessors:

Candidates can be tasked to review the suitability of a given venue for a particular group as a way for the assessor to gauge their knowledge. The home research or question paper can be used to address in more detail some of the subjects surrounding organising sessions and emergency procedures.

Assessors should use scenario-based approaches to set tasks which require the candidate to make judgements in a realistic way. Candidates should be given a range of scenarios to

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enable them to demonstrate their knowledge and communication skills as they seek to avoid 'common problems' occurring.

Assessors should then build upon the scenarios and consider what common occurrences may happen given the setup, location and group. These additional scenarios should be realistic for the given environment and used to prompt further discussion within the group.

Top tips:

- Get candidates to individually assess a venue for risks and opportunities. This can be reported back verbally or in writing.
- Use a scenario-based approach to group management to help draw in wider issues.
- The focus needs to be on the avoidance of issues, rather than the solving of problems.
- Avoiding, and if required, resolving common problems should be a discreet part of the course and should not stray into complex additional issues.
- Prusiking, counter-balance abseils, and snatch rescues are beyond the scope of the Rock Climbing Instructor qualification.

11.   Personal safety

Trainers:

Throughout any training course there will inevitably be times when all or some of the group will be operating from or near the top of the crag. Trainers should teach the candidates a range of techniques for safeguarding themselves which can be applied to a variety of different venue types.

Assessors:

The assessment of personal safety is a continual process throughout the assessment course. Candidates need to demonstrate they can choose appropriate methods to safeguard themselves which are effective and efficient. Personal safety is of the utmost importance for Rock Climbing Instructors; therefore this aspect of the syllabus should have a strong theme to it and feature throughout the course.

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12.   Managing/supervising other staff

Trainers:

Candidates need to understand that a qualified instructor remains responsible, and therefore liable, for the actions of any assistants and volunteers supporting their sessions. The instructor must assess the competence of each individual, and the demands of the situation before deploying them.

Scenario-based discussions on the role and management of assistants could be used to illustrate the range of judgements and decisions that an instructor will need to make. Trainers may also want to model management styles using course members in scenario-based roles.

Assessors:

Assessors should explore the candidates' judgement of an assistant's capabilities and the role they give to them. Assessors should also examine how the candidate supervises other staff given specific scenarios. These could be demonstrated using 'live' groups and attending assistants or could be modelled within the assessment course. Appropriate supervision requires the ability to intervene if necessary and candidates should be able to justify that their decisions and actions were appropriate.

13.   Teaching and learning skills

Trainers:

Candidates need to pass on their knowledge and enthusiasm effectively to their students. However, inspiring is not the same as impressing and a fruitful discussion can be had on the role of the instructor and the values that Mountain Training espouses. It is often worth spending some time looking at group communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal. Reference to specific techniques that a trainer may have expert knowledge in can sometimes be useful here.

Time should be spent looking at how instructors can alter their activities and delivery style to teach the same topic to different groups both during short single sessions and as a progression over several sessions. Being able to alter their language, calibrating the level of

challenge, gamifying activities, introducing competition where appropriate, letting students experiment, giving clear demonstrations, and setting appropriate goals are all essential teaching tools.

Reflective practice is the key to improving teaching skills and candidates should be encouraged to approach more experienced instructors for feedback and to experiment by modelling different behaviours with groups. The Mountain Training Rock Climbing Instructor Skills Checklist and Action Plan are useful tools for facilitating this process.

Assessors:

Candidates need to be able to command the attention of their groups and deliver knowledge and instructions to their participants with clarity. There should be a good structure to what they say, and they should have developed a habit of checking for understanding from their group using a range of methods.

They should be able to plan and adapt activities that are appropriate for the group and that achieve defined outcomes. They should keep the group engaged and enthused by facilitating the appropriate type of activity, level of challenge and pace of delivery. Candidates should also be able to evaluate students' progress and signpost them to appropriate avenues for further development.

Written and verbal self-evaluation will give the assessor good insight into the candidate's ability to reflect on and adjust their approach. All these skills can be modelled with peers but a truer assessment of a candidate's ability to teach and facilitate learning will be better observed with a student group.

Top tips:

- Setting scenario-based lesson plans is a good way to assess a candidate's choice of activity and delivery.
- Look for behaviours that can be described, recorded and fed back to the candidate, e.g. voice characteristics, eye contact, use of names, body position and language, quantity of talk and activity, pace, attention to individuals, giving feedback and encouragement etc.
- Setting different teaching scenarios for the same skill development will test candidates' abilities to adapt their plan and style of delivery.

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14. Access

Trainers:

It is important that candidates understand the issues and problems affecting access to climbing areas. This responsibility is increased when working with novice groups, therefore a sympathetic understanding of the range of ethical considerations and the needs of other users should be considered.

Trainers need to be aware of access issues on a national level and not just focus on those within the local area. They should provide a range of resources to share with candidates that cover both local and national issues. Mountaineering councils' access databases, National Trust or national parks' information centres may provide accurate, up-to-date information.

Candidates must also understand the importance of adhering to facility rules. Trainers should ensure candidates understand why common rules exist (e.g. no bouldering with harnesses on) and why rules differ between different facilities. If candidates understand why particular rules are set it will support their learning.

Assessors:

Awareness of access can be assessed in a variety of ways. Upon each visit to a crag on the course, candidates should be questioned about access issues and sources of up-to-date information. In addition to this, the home research or question paper should have a section dedicated to access which can then be reviewed.

Top tips:

- Guidebook access plus more up-to-date information should be used on courses.
- Home research or question paper can be used.
- Where national access databases exist for an area, trainers and candidates should use them during the course. Candidates should be educated on how to use them for other climbing areas.

15. Conservation

Trainers:

During the training course, candidates need to be made aware of the potential impact that climbers may have on the local environment and start developing knowledge around this subject which can then be passed onto their future groups.

Trainers should provide a basic level of input on the geology, flora and fauna (often referred to as natural history) by using a variety of resources. The work and publications of the mountaineering councils and environmental bodies are good sources of information to share with candidates, providing resources to support the delivery of this syllabus area.

Assessors:

Candidates will need to demonstrate respect for the climbing environment and as such this topic should be assessed continually throughout the course via discussion, questioning and the use of home research or question papers.

The assessor should also take opportunities to further candidates' knowledge as a way of additional training once they have been satisfied that the candidate has demonstrated a basic understanding of the topic.

Top tips:

- Be prepared to recommend some books, apps or articles that provide information on natural history. Encourage candidates to understand what they are climbing on, how it formed and how this relates to friction properties and protection.

16. Etiquette and ethics

Trainers:

Rock climbing within the UK and Ireland has a long history of traditions which make up a widely accepted unwritten code of conduct. Although the code of conduct is based on the history and traditions of the sport as a whole it is also continually changing as activities, techniques, equipment and aspirations evolve.

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Trainers should discuss the behaviour and attitudes of instructors using crags and climbing walls and emphasise the responsibilities of the instructor to avoid any potential conflict with other users or local codes of conduct. Candidates will benefit from climbing in a wide range of locations to immerse themselves more into the world of climbing, which will help give greater understanding of the ethics and etiquette required.

Assessors:

This section of the syllabus is commonly assessed through an open discussion among candidates. This will highlight how wide ranging the subject is once candidates draw and share from their experiences. In addition to the discussions, assessors should use questioning with candidates individually to gauge a more accurate understanding of the candidate's knowledge.

Top tips:

- Trainers should make sure candidates are aware of any long-established codes of conduct and ethical traditions.
- Ask candidates to discuss different ethical approaches to climbing e.g. leading on-sight vs. practising on a top-rope first.
- Visit a busy climbing wall where group management is challenging. Discuss how an instructor might manage a group at a popular crag.

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