

Climbing Wall Instructor

Guidance for trainers and assessors

INTRODUCTION

- These guidance notes should be used together with the Climbing Wall Instructor handbook.
- 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 and this must be evidenced in writing, ideally in DLOG.
- Trainers should be mindful of experience levels of candidates when introducing content especially if techniques shown are on the fringe of the qualification scope. Training and assessment courses should facilitate open discussion.
- Assessors should realistic set 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 candidate to engage in reflective practice.
- In conclusion, Climbing Wall 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.

TECHNICAL COMPETENCE

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 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. 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.

Where bottom-rope systems are not in-situ candidates should be taught different ways to set them up in a safe and efficient manner. Different bottom-rope systems will be applicable to different situations. Candidates should be aware of a range of different techniques and their advantages and disadvantages in different circumstances. Candidates should understand the difference between direct and indirect belays and how they are applicable to the climbing wall environment. Candidates should be taught to consult facility staff if unsure about the appropriate use of specific in-situ anchors.

Competent belaying is an essential skill. 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 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.

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.

Bottom-ropes are commonly used to deliver climbing sessions. Candidates should be able to quickly and efficiently set up and use them. 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 wall will require them to consider many more factors than simply being asked to set up a bottom-rope.

Candidates should be able to safely attach belayers to appropriate ground anchors. It is ideal if a variety of ground anchors are available, prompting direct and indirect attachment.

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 take into account 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 control lowers' should be part of a wider scenario and visited on several occasions throughout the assessment in a variety 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

- Give the candidates a flash card outlining a particular context. Ask them to set up a bottom-rope system applicable to that context. Ask the other candidates to comment on what would be an appropriate context for the system shown.
- 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.

3. PERSONAL SKILLS

Trainers

Candidates will be entering the training course as climbers with measurable experience in sport and indoor climbing. The training course will spend time evaluating and expanding their knowledge with the aim that candidates then complete several 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 if the situation merits it.

Refinement may include giving input on technical aspects and movement skills. Whilst refining technique trainers must clearly explain that the teaching of leading is beyond the scope of a Climbing Wall Instructor.

Assessors

Candidates will need to have experience of leading climbs at French 4 (minimum) in their logbook and discussion with them individually should take place to verify this experience. The ability of the candidate to lead at French 4 on assessments is also required. This will inevitably mean the course staff will find themselves balancing the syllabus requirements with the ability of the candidates, and working out the 'safest' most appropriate way to manage this element of the assessment course.

Candidates should be able to move with confidence leading on French 4 (min.) climbs. To be assured of competence assessors may request candidates climb multiple routes. Candidates should be able to choose their own routes. A candidate may wish to climb at a higher grade but should feel under no pressure to do so. Although demonstrating competence in leading may naturally progress to other areas of the syllabus (e.g. setting up bottom-ropes) candidates should not be pressurised whilst leading.

Top tips

- On training courses it may be possible for more experienced candidates to teach those lesser experienced as part of a personal skills task.
- Trainers may take the opportunity to demonstrate good technique themselves so candidates have an understanding of the expectation at assessment.
- Videos may support the candidate's understanding of smooth and relaxed climbing.

4. BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Trainers

The beginning of all training courses should outline the role and philosophy of Mountain Training and its schemes, the mountaineering councils, climbing clubs and the National Indoor Climbing/Bouldering Award Schemes. 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, NIBAS.

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.
- The mountaineering councils produce excellent online resources available in digital and hardcopy form. These resources can be used to address key syllabus elements. The value of supporting the mountaineering councils can be outlined when doing so.
- Climbing walls regularly advertise climbing events and competitions run by councils and clubs. These advertisements can prompt further discussion.

MANAGEMENT AND DECISION MAKING

5. PLANNING AND STRUCTURE OF SESSIONS

Trainers

Candidates should be made aware of the variety of climbing sessions instructors can deliver. This could range from fast paced, U18 taster sessions to 1:1 climbing instruction. Effective planning should be based on a clear set of desired outcomes. The importance of prior communication with all involved parties should be emphasised to candidates.

Candidates should be encouraged to be flexible and be able to adopt the most appropriate plan according to the circumstances. Using two venues that differ significantly on training courses will support this understanding.

Trainers should make candidates aware of different employers, authorising organisations and groups who engage the services of instructors. Trainers should facilitate a thorough discussion to address issues around the heightened Duty of Care an instructor holds, especially with minors.

Assessors

Assessors should monitor the ability of the candidates to cope with changing circumstances and their capacity to modify their plan accordingly. Candidates should be able to demonstrate that they are able to plan inclusive sessions.

Candidates should recognise their responsibilities as instructors. If they are uncertain in key areas they should be aware of appropriate sources of supporting information.

Top tips

- Candidates should be able to consider the wide range of parties they may need to communicate with when planning their session.
- Consider the structure in which you teach planning e.g. Safe Enjoyable Learning – SEL.
- Trainers can lead by example outlining how they planned the course itself.
- Candidates can be ‘sign-posted’ to appropriate sources of information as opportunities arise e.g. Mountain Training’s National Guidelines, ABC Code of Practice etc.

6. MANAGEMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

Trainers

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 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.

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.

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 applicable to different groups and situations, throughout the course.

Trainers should give examples of clear and concise briefings during the course. Candidates should be given ways to structure their own briefings. Sessions are commonly restricted by time constraints. Trainers should encourage candidates to remain mindful of how long common tasks take to deliver with differing groups and plan accordingly.

Problem avoidance is a key focus of the Climbing Wall Instructor scheme, 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 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.

Candidates should be encouraged to experiment with a range of basic techniques and the limitations of each. For reference the candidate guidance notes state; *There is no need for a Climbing Wall Instructor to carry out roped rescues on the wall without further, site specific training.* Trainers therefore should not introduce strategies which involve the instructor leaving the ground, other than on a top-rope to offer non-technical support. Prusiking, counter balance abseils, and 'snatch rescues' are beyond the scope of the Climbing Wall Instructor scheme.

In the case of an incident it is very likely that external help is close to hand. Candidates should know how to call for help and must be aware of the simple steps necessary to stabilize the situation and provide immediate care until external help arrives. In doing so candidates should be able ensure the safety of the rest of the group and the casualty.

Assessors

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 perform which 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.

Candidates should be effective communicators and be able to structure briefings in a concise and clear manner. They should be aware of different styles and approaches appropriate to different groups.

Assessors should request candidates demonstrate effective warming up activities appropriate for different groups in different environments. It is ideal if the activity forms a progression to the climbing session.

Top Tips

- Trainers could consider giving specific guidance on pre-course communication i.e. what should we communicate to participants prior to sessions?
- As activity recommences after a break the opportunity could be taken to introduce a different warm up technique.
- It may be worth compiling a list of realistic common problems that occur in climbing walls. These can be passed around the group for comment/solutions on training courses. The focus needs to be on the avoidance of issues, rather than the solving of problems.
- Flash cards can be produced which highlight the types of individuals who might require additional support. These might prompt discussion about how to deliver inclusive sessions and provide guidance on relevant sources of information.

7. DECISION MAKING

Trainers

Discussion and activity on training courses should put candidates in a position where they need to consider multiple factors before deciding on an appropriate method or technique. Having a dynamic approach to decision making will also contribute towards a successful activity. The decision making process should always include the group's safety and wellbeing in addition to their abilities and objectives.

The importance of situational awareness ('eyes in the back of the head') and best positioning for monitoring risks, when managing a group, should be emphasised to candidates.

Using two significantly differing venues on training courses allows good discussion.

Assessors

The assessor will need to see and discuss a candidate's decision making process. Setting tasks and scenarios will require the candidate to make decisions, and it then falls to the assessor to question the rationale and process the candidate has gone through as part of their decision making process.

Top Tips

- On entering facilities candidates can be asked to complete a dynamic risk assessment during a 'walk around'. Consideration can be given to the use of the facility for different groups.
- On training courses you can simulate a group session. Can candidates see all the key risk points from their position (belay systems, attachments, other climbers, fall lines etc.)?

8. KNOWLEDGE AND DEMONSTRATION OF TECHNIQUES

Trainers

A key skill of a Climbing Wall 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 on the skills of: fitting a harness, tying-in, and belaying.

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 weight over the 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 the relevant candidates towards the FUNdamentals of Climbing courses developed by the mountaineering councils for further training in this area.

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.

Facilities 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.

Climbing Wall 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, the 'knowledge and demonstration of techniques' can be assessed in isolation, for example, 'demonstrate effective belaying'. The 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.

- Ask the candidates to write down all the different types of groups they might instruct in a climbing wall. Ask them to choose appropriate activities for each group. For each of these groups ask them how they might extend the learning.
- 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?

9. 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.

TEACHING AND LEARNING SKILLS

10. 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. 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 Climbing Wall 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.

THE CLIMBING ENVIRONMENT

11 ACCESS

Trainers

It is important that candidates understand the issues and problems affecting access to climbing walls. 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.

Candidates must 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.

Candidates may find themselves in a position where there are no set rules at the facility. In this case they should be encouraged to abide by 'normal practice' and, if necessary, encouraged to seek further information from reliable sources.

Assessors

Candidates should understand the importance of adhering to facility rules and the potential outcome of not doing so.

Top tips

- A range of facilities' rules can be given to the candidates to compare and contrast.
- Candidates could be asked to bring a copy of their local facility rules to stimulate discussion.
- Using local climbing wall staff to contribute to this part of the course is very effective.

12. ETIQUETTE AND ETHICS

Trainers

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.

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

Candidates should be able to cope in busy, hectic environments and deal with common complications (e.g. sections of the wall being closed).

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

- Choose a busy climbing wall where group management is challenging.
- Restrict the sections of the wall candidates are able to use on assessments.
- Ask candidates to outline what the traits of a high and low impact instructor would be.

Climbing Wall Instructor Abseil Module

Guidance for trainers and assessors to follow.
