



**CLIMBING WALL  
INSTRUCTOR**   
CANDIDATE HANDBOOK

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## PREFACE

This handbook has been designed to support candidates through Mountain Training's Climbing Wall Instructor qualification and Abseil Module. It contains useful information about the various stages in the scheme as well as the syllabus and guidance notes.

## PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Mountain Training recognises that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions. Mountain Training has developed a range of training and assessment schemes and associated supporting literature to help instructors manage these risks and to enable new participants to have positive experiences while learning about their responsibilities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed to the preparation of the contents of this handbook, by attending Mountain Training working party meetings and by making detailed and constructive comments on the draft. Grateful thanks are due to volunteers and staff from the Climbing Awards Review Working Group, national Mountain Training organisation council members, course providers, staff of the mountaineering councils, members of the Association of Mountaineering Instructors, Mountain Training Association, staff from the National Mountain Centres and members of The Association of British Climbing Walls for their help and support.

Thanks also to the following individuals whose photographs bring the handbook to life: Jessie Leong, Karl Midlane, NICAS, Rick Singh, Rob Greenwood and The Adventure Brand.

## ROCK CLIMBING



Throughout this handbook there are references to Rock Climbing by Libby Peter which we publish to support developing rock climbers and instructors. It is packed with essential information and techniques and we have listed the relevant section(s) for each syllabus area.



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# 1. SCHEME PATHWAY

## 1.1. INTRODUCTION

The Climbing Wall Instructor gives climbers the skills required to supervise participants on purpose built artificial climbing walls and boulders.

It is ideal for people who work at climbing walls or at venues with permanent or mobile climbing towers.

## 1.2. SCOPE OF THE SCHEME

A qualified instructor can:

- Teach climbing skills.
- Take people climbing and bouldering.
- Manage groups safely in these activities.

### TERRAIN

A qualified Climbing Wall Instructor can operate on:

- Indoor and outdoor artificial bouldering venues.
- Indoor and outdoor climbing walls.

### EXCLUSIONS

The scheme does not cover:

- The rock climbing skills needed to climb and/or supervise others on natural crags and quarries (these are covered in the Rock Climbing Instructor scheme).
- Multi-pitch rock climbing skills.
- The teaching or supervision of leading.
- The use of leader-placed protection.
- The supervision of high or low ropes courses.
- The supervision of ice climbing walls, including dry tooling.
- The assessment of candidates' personal qualities.
- Adaptive rope techniques for disabled climbers.

## 1.3. STAGES IN THE SCHEME

### 1.3.1. Registration prerequisites:

- You must be at least 17 years old (18 at assessment).
- You should have at least 6 months of experience of using a variety of climbing walls.
- You should have an interest in climbing and in supervising groups on climbing walls.
- You must be a member of a mountaineering council (British Mountaineering Council, Mountaineering Ireland, Mountaineering Scotland).

### 1.3.2. Training prerequisites:

- You must be registered on the scheme.
- You must have an understanding on the wider sport of climbing.

You must have an up to date logbook (preferably DLOG) with evidence of the following:

- Visits to 3 different climbing walls on at least 15 different occasions; this must include at least one major public wall.
- 10 led routes at Fr 4 on walls.



The Mountain Training Association is a voluntary membership organisation designed to support candidates working towards our qualifications and provide development opportunities for those who already have them. Anyone who is registered on one of our qualification schemes can join the Mountain Training Association and members get access to a wide range of supportive benefits, including access to CPD workshops, discounts on outdoor clothing and equipment and online resources.

### 1.3.3. Consolidation period

- Climb at a wide range of venues, both as an individual and when assisting with the supervision of others.
- All but the most experienced candidates should allow a minimum of six months between training and assessment.
- There is currently no time limit on the validity of a training course and some candidates may take several years to complete the qualification.

### 1.3.4. Assessment prerequisites:

- You must be at least 18 years old to attend the assessment.
- You must have attended a Climbing Wall Instructor (or Climbing Wall Award) training course or been granted exemption from training.
- You must be familiar with the syllabus.
- You must have logged a minimum of 30 visits to at least three different climbing walls.
- You must have led a minimum of 40 climbs on climbing walls.
- You must be confident at leading routes at Fr 4.
- You must have assisted in the supervision of at least 15 instructed sessions on at least two different walls, including a large public facility, in a variety of contexts. At least five of these sessions must have personal reflective comments recorded on DLOG.
- You must hold a current first aid qualification, relevant to your work as a Climbing Wall Instructor.

## 2. COURSE STRUCTURE

### TRAINING

Training will involve a minimum of 12 hours contact time delivered over a minimum of two days. The course must visit two climbing walls, one of which must be a public facility.  
Results: Completed, Not yet completed, Withdrew, Did not show, Exemption.

### ASSESSMENT

Assessment will involve a minimum of 6 hours contact time.  
Results: Pass, Defer, Fail, Not yet completed, Withdrew, Did not show.

There is no exemption from any element of the assessment.

## 3. COURSE DELIVERY

### TRAINING

Course directors must hold the Mountaineering Instructor Award or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements. Additional staff must be Climbing Wall Instructor or higher.

Min course size: 4, max course size: 12, max ratio: 1:6 (needs min 4 to practice role with a group).

### ASSESSMENT

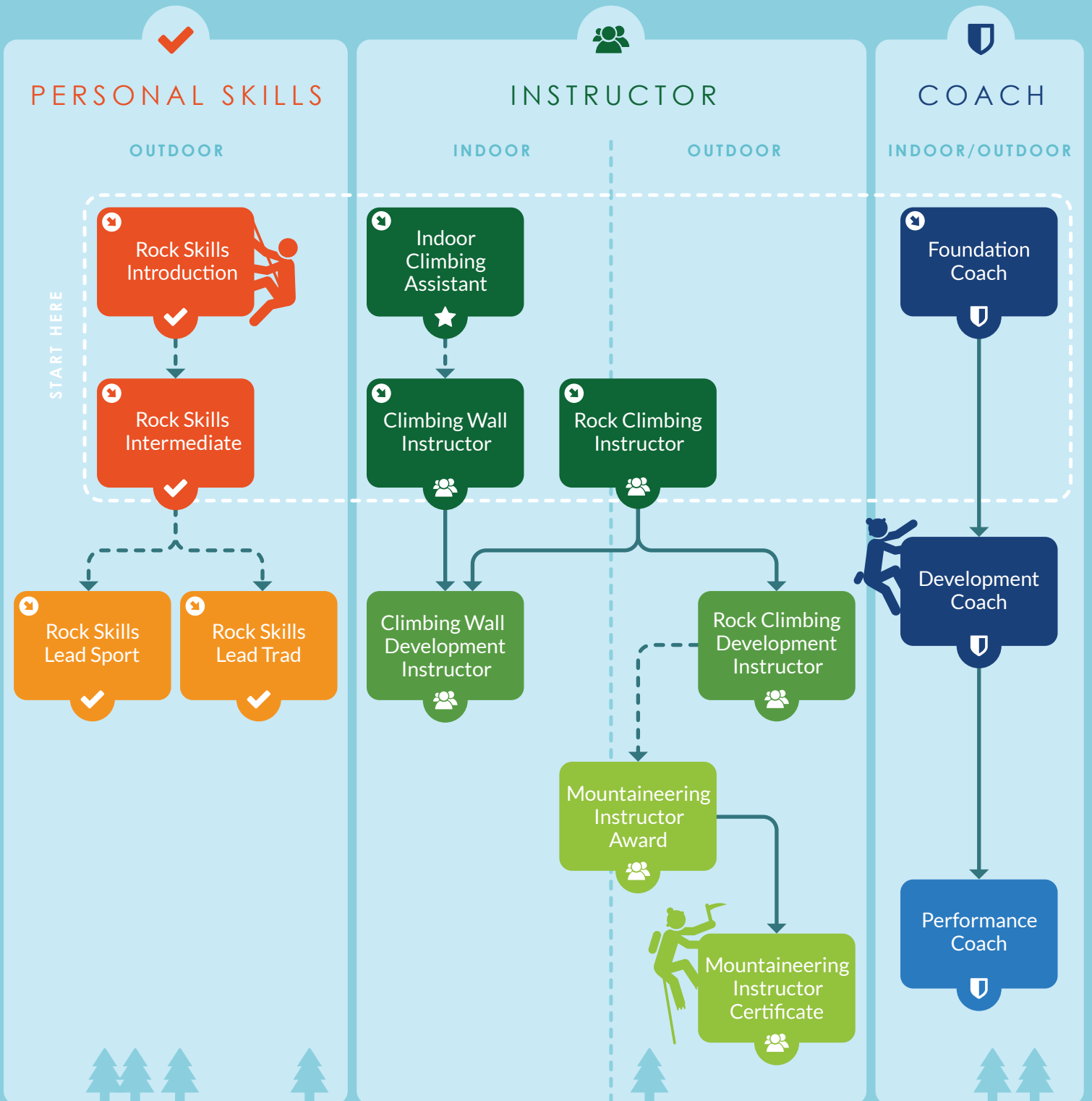
Course directors must hold the Mountaineering Instructor Award or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements. Additional staff must hold the Mountaineering Instructor Award or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements.

Min course size: 2, max course size: 8, max ratio: 1:4.

## 4. AWARDING ORGANISATIONS

- Mountain Training Cymru
- Mountain Training England
- Mountain Training Scotland
- Mountain Training Board of Ireland

# CLIMBING PATHWAY





Climbing Wall Instructors will be able to identify and evaluate commonly used indoor climbing equipment and demonstrate its use to individuals during a climbing session. They will be personally competent in a range of indoor climbing techniques and be able to provide clear demonstrations and effective tuition to novice climbers. They will be able to:

## SYLLABUS

### 1. EQUIPMENT

- 1.1.** Select and fit suitable climbing equipment for personal and group use.
- 1.2.** Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of personal climbing equipment and ensure appropriate use, care and maintenance in line with manufacturers' guidance.
- 1.3.** Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of climbing wall equipment and ensure appropriate use of:
  - 1.3.1.** In-situ ropes.
  - 1.3.2.** Auto-belays.
  - 1.3.3.** Fixed matting.
  - 1.3.4.** Holds.
  - 1.3.5.** Anchors/lower offs and fixed equipment.

### 2. BELAYING

- 2.1.** Tie into the rope. Attach group members to the rope.
- 2.2.** Demonstrate the use of direct and indirect belay systems, and choose the most appropriate for a given situation.
- 2.3.** Set up bottom rope systems and choose the most appropriate for a given situation.
- 2.4.** Demonstrate the skills of a competent belayer including holding falls and controlling lowers.
- 2.5.** Supervise others belaying.



## ROCK CLIMBING

**Section 6.6:** Equipment  
**Section 6.6.6:** Belay Devices  
**Section 8.4.3:** Belaying

# GUIDANCE NOTES

## EQUIPMENT

A sound knowledge of equipment is important for a Climbing Wall Instructor because it is an integral element of climbing safely. Misuse of climbing equipment can have dangerous consequences. As an instructor you are also likely to offer advice to novices on choice and suitability of equipment which cannot be done well if you do not have appropriate knowledge and understanding.

Climbing equipment such as footwear, helmets, harnesses (including full body harnesses), belay devices (including assisted braking devices) and karabiners come in a variety of different styles and sizes to suit different user groups. Some equipment is better suited for use with groups and some is more suitable for developing climbers; developing your technical competence will help you decide which is which and enable you to offer advice accordingly. For example, the decision making process around when, and what type of helmet should be worn is important.

Any in-situ equipment in a commercial climbing centre should be fit for use and climbing wall managers will appreciate your support if items are starting to look worn. You may also find yourself operating in non-commercial settings and you will need to have thought about how you are going to make decisions about whether or not the in-situ equipment is in good working order.

## BELAYING

Belaying is a crucial element of roped climbing and belayer error is a potential cause of serious accidents. Your personal competence and ability to supervise others in this task is therefore of the utmost importance. You need to be familiar with ways of tailing and understand the consequences of not doing this properly.

There are many knots that can be used for tying in. You should consider the pros and cons of commonly used knots and their variations. You should consider when it may be acceptable to use a karabiner to connect the harness to the rope and the extra checks this requires.

Most of the time you will be belaying directly from the harness or rope tie in loop but you need an understanding of when it might be appropriate to use an indirect system involving sandbags or ground anchors.



## KEY PRACTICE POINTS

### EQUIPMENT

- Practise fitting a range of different helmets and harnesses. Research why there may be differences in the overall design or features.
- Take time to familiarise yourself with your own equipment by reading the manufacturer's guidance label each time you buy a new piece of kit.
- Develop an effective methodology for demonstrating the fitting of equipment to a group of novices.
- Seek out guidance on the storage of climbing equipment in particular for ropes and harnesses.

### ANCHORS

- Take time to make sure you are 'expert' at tying on as you will be in a role modelling situation.
- Practise lead climbing and lead belaying so that you can do this safely and efficiently should you need to put a rope up.
- Become proficient in using manual and assisted braking devices for both personal and group climbing.
- Be aware of the interaction between different ropes, karabiners and belay devices. Alongside the belayer's experience this should inform your choice of equipment used.





## SYLLABUS

### 3. PERSONAL SKILLS

- 3.1.** Choose and lead routes suited to personal ability (minimum French 4).
- 3.2.** Demonstrate a basic understanding of the safety chain and fall factors.
- 3.3.** Move with confidence on appropriate routes and boulder problems.



### ROCK CLIMBING

**Section 2:** A brief history of British and Irish climbing

### 4. BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

- 4.1.** Describe an awareness of the history, traditions and ethics of climbing in the UK and Ireland.
- 4.2.** Describe the role and philosophy of Mountain Training and its schemes, the mountaineering councils, climbing clubs and the NICAS/NIBAS schemes.
- 4.3.** Describe the development of climbing walls in the UK and Ireland.
- 4.4.** Describe the structure of competition climbing.
- 4.5.** Describe the grading systems used in the UK and Ireland.

# GUIDANCE NOTES

## PERSONAL SKILLS

Being a good role model is an essential part of being a Climbing Wall Instructor. When you are climbing, regardless of the grade on which you are operating, you should look smooth, relaxed, unhurried and able to climb with the minimum of effort by demonstrating good, appropriate, movement skills.

You need to understand how the risks of lead climbing might be managed differently by climber and belayer when the climber is near to the ground compared to when they are higher up a climb.

You also need to understand how the position of the belayer may affect the forces they feel in the event of a fall.

## BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Candidates registering on the Climbing Wall Instructor scheme will be a member of their mountaineering council, and so join a large community of climbers, walkers and mountaineers.

Mountaineering Scotland, Mountaineering Ireland and the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) publish good practice resources, deliver training events, and campaign to protect the freedoms of their members and the wider climbing, walking and mountaineering community, and so their work supports Mountain Training candidates.

In partnership with Mountain Training, the councils seek to help climbers develop their skills or undertaking Mountain Training schemes. You could consider volunteering your time to support your mountaineering council to learn more about their work.

As a Climbing Wall Instructor, you should understand something of the history of climbing walls and how they fit into the wider world of competition climbing, outdoor climbing and mountaineering. In your role as a Climbing Wall Instructor you should be prepared to operate on walls of any style or age, using whatever grading system is in operation.

You should also have knowledge of how Mountain Training works and the schemes they offer. You can then advise others for whom a Mountain Training scheme will support their own personal development.



## KEY PRACTICE POINTS

### PERSONAL SKILLS

- When leading a route remember you are a role model. You will need to climb well, clip well and generally 'look the part'.
- Always 'buddy check' your partner before they climb.
- Practise lead climbing and lead belaying in different venues with different partners.

### BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

- Consider taking part in a competition or volunteering for a mountaineering council competition during your consolidation period.
- Explore Mountain Training's and your mountaineering council's website to gain a greater understanding of their roles and the work they do.
- Familiarise yourself with the National Indoor Climbing Award Schemes: <http://www.nicas.co.uk/>



Climbing Wall Instructors should be able to independently organise, plan, manage and deliver sessions to a wide range of participants, often with support from an assistant. They should be able to:

## SYLLABUS

### 5. PLANNING AND STRUCTURE OF SESSIONS

- 5.1.** Plan individual sessions and programmes of activities with appropriate aims and objectives.
- 5.2.** Demonstrate flexibility when planning activities; respond to changing circumstances.
- 5.3.** Demonstrate an awareness of responsibility to any authorising organisation, parents/guardians, individual group members, the group as a whole and other site users.
- 5.4.** Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of weather when climbing on artificial structures.
- 5.5.** Be aware of Mountain Training’s National Guidelines.



### ROCK CLIMBING

**Section 21:** The law & risk management  
**Section 20:** Incidents

### 6. MANAGEMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

- 6.1.** Select appropriate management techniques to safeguard all participants, irrespective of whether or not they are directly involved in the climbing activity.
- 6.2.** Utilise effective communication skills to:
  - 6.2.1.** Set and review targets.
  - 6.2.2.** Identify and react to the needs of the group in relation to involvement, interest, enjoyment and achievement.
- 6.3.** Demonstrate an understanding of warming up and injury avoidance techniques.
- 6.4.** Brief individuals and the group appropriately.
- 6.5.** Manage time appropriately in relation to the plan, activity and conditions. Avoid common roped climbing problems.
- 6.6.** Avoid common roped climbing problems.
- 6.7.** Solve common problems if they occur.
- 6.8.** In the case of an incident describe how to call for relevant assistance.
- 6.9.** Communicate with the group and individuals to identify whether anyone has an injury or disability that may require reasonable adjustments to be made to enable them to participate in the session.

# GUIDANCE NOTES

## PLANNING AND STRUCTURE OF SESSIONS

Effective Climbing Wall Instructors recognise that prior planning and good structuring of sessions commonly results in participants having a safe and enjoyable time. In many ways, preparation is the hallmark of high quality instruction. As a Climbing Wall Instructor you may be required to work with a group over a number of sessions. You should be able to plan a series of sessions which might be spread over a number of weeks. Each session will need clear objectives to achieve the overall aims of the course. Each session should have a clear structure and show progression.

As a Climbing Wall Instructor you should understand the responsibilities assumed when you take charge of a group and the fact that you will be assumed to have a higher level of 'duty of care'.

Outdoor structures are exposed to the full effects of weather conditions and instructors should be mindful of this when planning climbing sessions. Temperature changes can loosen holds, even indoors, if they are not pinned.

## MANAGEMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

Climbing Wall Instructors need to be very mindful of the environment within which they are operating. The physical space may not have been designed with your purposes in mind and you will need to adapt your management of your group accordingly.

Clear communication is paramount; groups need clear and concise targets and expectations to be set. Instructors need the empathetic skills required to recognise when change is required and communicate this in a sensitive but authoritative manner.

You must have a clear grasp of the principles of warming up. You need to have a range of activities in your repertoire so you can work effectively with a range of age groups and with people of differing levels of mobility.

Time management is always a balancing game for instructors; being well prepared before a session is key. The pace of a session at a climbing wall can be relatively fast and you may need to adapt your management style or have strategies in place to deal with this safely. You will need to be able to adjust the time allowed for particular activities within a session in order to respond to the needs of your group.

In typical bottom roping situations roped problems are very rare. Focus on belaying and tying on to the rope as your first priority. Training and practising lowers low down on a route will prevent many issues. If you need extra security then a knot behind the belay plate, on the dead rope, will give you peace of mind whilst you consider your actions.

Problems should be foreseen and avoided by sound training, clear briefs and two way communication. There is no need for a Climbing Wall Instructor to carry out rope rescues on the wall without further, site-specific, training.



## KEY PRACTICE POINTS

### PLANNING AND STRUCTURE OF SESSIONS

- Observe how other instructors plan and structure climbing sessions based around their clients' aims and objectives and how this might change with different circumstances.
- Make yourself familiar with the legal aspects of taking people climbing, in particular with under those under the age of 18.

### MANAGEMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

- Experiment with different ways to engage with your group e.g. games and ice breaker activities.
- Practise delivering briefings and instructions to novice climbers and evaluate what methods work well and understand why.
- Consider how you would adapt practice to support different needs. For example, supporting a light belayer/heavy climber, a timid climber, a hearing impaired climber. etc.
- Most accidents happen in bouldering walls – don't relax here. Focus on how experienced instructors keep control and build up participants' skills and safety.



 SYLLABUS

## 7. DECISION MAKING

**7.1.** Demonstrate dynamic risk assessments throughout a climbing session.

**7.2.** Assess the abilities and objectives of the group participating in the session.

## 8. KNOWLEDGE AND DEMONSTRATION OF TECHNIQUES

**8.1.** Deliver technical instruction to individuals and the group including:

**8.1.1.** Choice and fitting of suitable harnesses.

**8.1.2.** Attaching the rope to the harness.

**8.1.3.** Effective belaying.

**8.2.** Demonstrate the use of bouldering activities with groups, using appropriate games and activities, including setting simple boulder problems.

**8.3.** Teach and demonstrate basic climbing movement skills.

**8.4.** Supervise a group of novice climbers in the following activities:

**8.4.1.** Belaying and tying-in.

**8.4.2.** Climbing (including bouldering).

# GUIDANCE NOTES

## DECISION MAKING

Learning to make good decisions is a challenging and enjoyable part of being a Climbing Wall Instructor. It takes time, practise and self-reflection and will ultimately lead to more successful sessions for you and your clients so it is worth the effort.

## KNOWLEDGE AND DEMONSTRATION OF TECHNIQUES

Climbing Wall Instructors need to build up a portfolio of knowledge and demonstration techniques to effectively facilitate a session. Often, instructors will find themselves working with large groups of novices, where a simple skill such as fitting a harness will need a well thought out demonstration.

The key aspect of demonstrating skills is to ensure that you know your subject well and have practised it a number of times, ideally with feedback and criticism to allow for greater development. See also syllabus section 10 Teaching and learning skills.

Traversing is a useful way of teaching movement skills and this may require clear boundaries as ascent tends to be the human default setting.

Climbing games can be a great way of motivating groups and getting everybody involved at a level which suits them. You should however, have a critical eye on the purposefulness of any games being used and not just reproduce something you have been shown regardless of its suitability for the group in front of you.

Your training course will cover teaching movement skills so that your group can enjoy their climbing session to the full. The emphasis should be placed on getting individuals actively involved in the activity rather than their long-term development. For a more in-depth appreciation you may consider attending a FUNDamentals of Climbing workshop delivered by the mountaineering councils; and the Mountain Training Foundation Coach scheme; all of which will develop these skills in much greater depth.

When roped climbing the instructor's eyes will constantly monitor the belayer's actions. To do this you must be well positioned to see all belayers all the time. With novices the instructor will need to constantly check every connection in the safety chain.

Supervising bouldering requires excellent organisation, communication and constant vigilance. You will need to know when and how to spot individuals to support their safety.



## KEY PRACTICE POINTS

### DECISION MAKING

- Read Mountain Training's National Guidelines and research the Health & Safety Executive's approach to sensible risk management, controlling risks and risk assessment.
- Observe how other instructors plan and structure climbing sessions based around their clients aims and objectives and how this might change with different circumstances.

### KNOWLEDGE AND DEMONSTRATION OF TECHNIQUES

- Develop systematic ways of fitting helmets and harnesses. Watching experienced instructors working is the best way to do this. Instruction needs to be clear, concise and accompanied by flawless demonstration.

- Consider how you instruct individuals belaying climbers. Your instruction should be applicable to the group and situation. Experiment with different devices and strategies to ensure you are able to cope in different circumstances. Also consider using assisted braking devices in the teaching progression.
- Spend time in bouldering walls watching experienced instructors supervising and teaching novices. This is skilled work that takes great concentration (see Mountain Training's Bouldering Guidance Notes).



## SYLLABUS

### 9. MANAGING/SUPERVISING OTHER STAFF

**9.1.** Explain the role and scope of an assistant. Describe the opportunities and liabilities presented by using an assistant in a session.

**9.2.** Manage an assistant.

# GUIDANCE NOTES

An assistant is any person who supports an instructor in the delivery of their session but who does not direct or make decisions about the management of the session.

Assistants and unqualified staff can be of enormous benefit to a session provided that they are managed appropriately. They can support the talented, those with individual requirements, their peers, or their own students and children, and can be powerful role models for the participants. An assistant can help further with clearly defined technical roles such as fitting personal climbing equipment and backing up belayers. However the judgements as to what activities are to be undertaken, and how they are to be managed, remain with the instructor.

Assistants and other staff come with a wide range of experience and competencies and you are wholly responsible for assessing these. If in doubt you should not use an assistant and not be

compelled to work with them either. By definition an assistant or an unqualified member of staff cannot work independently and you are responsible for the group and the actions of an assistant at all times. All assistant deployment should be risk assessed before each session begins.

It is essential that assistants are appropriately supervised by you, the instructor, so that there can be constant communication and guidance given.

It is not possible to give specific guidance on instructor/student ratios with assistants as this will vary with the situation. For example, a disabled climber may benefit from the support of two or more assistants working very closely with an instructor whilst a talented academy group may benefit from an assistant working in sight of the instructor in a bouldering wall. The qualified instructor remains ultimately responsible for the group and must always be in a position to intervene if necessary.



## KEY PRACTICE POINTS

- Practise briefing an assistant about their role and remit.
- Practise maintaining a position of maximum effectiveness, keeping assistants within sight and easy communication at all times.
- Get into the habit of discussing your session with an assistant to give and receive feedback.







Climbing Wall Instructors will frequently need to give tuition and support to a range of climbers in a variety of climbing related techniques. They should be able to:

## SYLLABUS

### 10. TEACHING AND LEARNING SKILLS

- 10.1.** Create and maintain a positive learning environment for all participants.
- 10.2.** Communicate effectively and appropriately with a group and individuals, checking for understanding.
- 10.3.** Demonstrate an ability to adapt the teaching style to meet group needs.
- 10.4.** Help participants develop a positive attitude towards climbing and introduce the idea of lifelong participation.
- 10.5.** Identify and use appropriate tasks to develop effective and safe climbers.
- 10.6.** Demonstrate an understanding of the reasons for evaluating a session and success of the outcome.

# GUIDANCE NOTES

Climbing Instructors need to quickly create an environment of trust and confidence within their group so that participants feel safe and comfortable to tackle new and challenging activities. Age, ability, individual requirements, confidence and energy levels amongst the group will influence the best approach to achieve this.

Good communication skills are key. The foundations of effective teaching include the ability to create rapport, communicate at an appropriate level, use positive language, provide a variety of demonstration techniques, check for understanding through skilled questioning and give useful feedback and encouragement to individuals.

In addition to these communication skills effective teaching requires instructors to be able to observe and assess participants' abilities and confidence levels. They then need to calibrate the

appropriate level of challenge and structure a task to stimulate and stretch the climber but not to intimidate or defeat them. Instructors also need to be adaptive in their approach. If a particular technique or activity is not working well then they should adapt their approach to better suit the needs of the group.

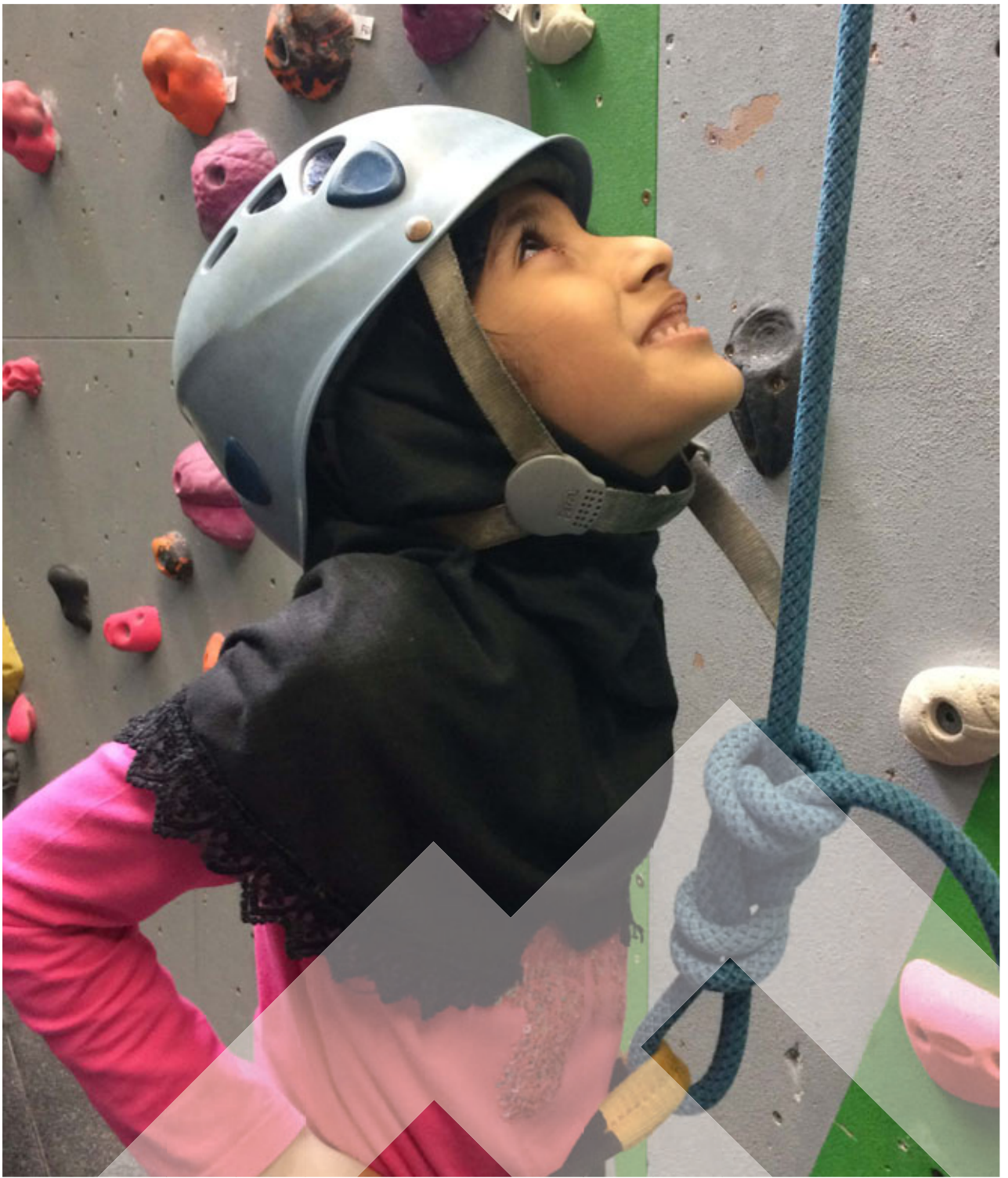
Remember that assistants can offer a valuable resource to support you with your teaching. Assistants are often connected with the group and will know about their individual needs and potentially how best to deliver information to them. All instructional sessions are different due to the nature of the group and the conditions of the day. Instructors should reflect upon the outcome of each session and consider changes in delivery style or content that may improve the outcomes of the next one.



## KEY PRACTICE POINTS

- Learn some effective games/activities to engage learners at the beginning of a session and to enable you to observe group dynamics.
- Make sure everyone can see and hear you clearly.
- Experiment with different ways of checking for understanding.
- Practise different delivery styles and think about when/with whom you might use them.





## SYLLABUS

### 11. ACCESS

**11.1.** Explain an awareness of both general and locally important rules and regulations, and demonstrate an ability to obtain and comply with this information.

### 12. ETIQUETTE AND ETHICS

**12.1.** Describe your responsibilities to the general public, other facility users and the wider climbing community.

**12.2.** Operate a flexible programme of activities in order to accommodate other site or facility users.

**12.3.** Describe the hazards presented to other site users by the actions of a group, and act in such a way that these are minimised.

# GUIDANCE NOTES

You must manage your group in a manner which shows respect to other users of the space. You will also need to be mindful about where you would like non-participants to locate themselves and the level of interaction you are prepared for them to have with the group. You will need to be very clear with your group about expectations and be prepared to enforce these expectations in a way which supports their learning and does not

diminish the experience for anyone else in the same area.

Each and every climbing wall will have its own operating procedures. These do have much commonality but, you should look out for any special conditions which apply to each venue. The Association of British Climbing Walls may be a good source of information - [www.abcwalls.co.uk](http://www.abcwalls.co.uk)

## ! KEY PRACTICE POINTS

- Always talk to the management of a climbing wall about suitable areas to manage your group – particularly in a bouldering wall.
- Be considerate to other climbers who may wish to climb routes/problems your group are using. Don't monopolise an area for long.
- Don't leave equipment on the ropes or lying around on the floor/matting.





# 1. SCHEME PATHWAY

## 1.1. INTRODUCTION

This module is optional and is designed to equip Climbing Wall Instructors with the skills and techniques required for managing top-roping and abseiling groups on purpose-built artificial climbing walls and structures. Awareness of the skills outlined in the main Climbing Wall Instructor syllabus is assumed and not repeated here.

## 1.2. SCOPE OF THE SCHEME

A qualified Climbing Wall Instructor who has gained the Abseil Module can:

- Run top-roping sessions.
- Run abseiling sessions.
- Manage groups safely in these activities.

### TERRAIN

A qualified Climbing Wall Instructor who has gained the Abseil Module can operate on:

- Indoor and outdoor climbing walls which are designed for top-roping or abseiling.

### EXCLUSIONS

The scheme does not cover:

- Via ferrata courses on artificial walls.

## 1.3. STAGES IN THE SCHEME

### 1.3.1. Registration prerequisites:

Registration on the Climbing Wall Instructor Abseil and top roping module is given to candidates automatically when they register on the Climbing Wall Instructor scheme.

### 1.3.2. Training prerequisites:

- You must have completed Climbing Wall Instructor training.
- You must be registered for the Abseil Module (this is added automatically when you register for the Climbing Wall Instructor qualification).

You must have an up to date logbook (preferably DLOG) with evidence of the following:

- Experience of at least 5 abseils from more than one location.

### Consolidation period

- Climb and abseil at as wide a range of venues as possible, both as an individual and when assisting with the supervision of others.
- Mountain Training recommends that all but the most experienced candidates allow a minimum of three months between training and assessment.
- There is currently no time limit on the validity of a training course and some candidates may take several years to complete the module.

### 1.3.3. Assessment prerequisites:

- You must have completed the Abseil Module training course or have been granted exemption from training.
- You must have passed Climbing Wall Instructor assessment.
- You must have observed or assisted on a minimum of 5 abseil/top-rope sessions.

### 1.3.4. First aid

Qualified Climbing Wall Instructors who have gained the Abseil Module must hold a current first aid certificate.

## 2. COURSE STRUCTURE

### TRAINING

Training will involve a minimum of 4 hours contact time.

Results: Completed, Not yet completed, Withdrew, Did not show, Exemption.

### ASSESSMENT

Assessment will involve a minimum of 2 hours contact time.

Results: Pass, Defer or Fail, Not yet completed, Withdrew, Did not show.

## 3. COURSE DELIVERY

### TRAINING

Course directors must hold the Mountaineering Instructor Award or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements. Additional staff must be Climbing Wall Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements.

Min. course size: 2, max. course size: 12, max ratio: 1:6.

### ASSESSMENT

Course directors must hold the Mountaineering Instructor Award or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements. Additional staff must hold the Mountaineering Instructor Award or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements.

Min. course size: 2, max. course size: 8, max. ratio: 1:4

## 4. AWARDING ORGANISATIONS

- Mountain Training Cymru
- Mountain Training England
- Mountain Training Scotland
- Mountain Training Board of Ireland



## SYLLABUS

### 1. EQUIPMENT

- 1.** Select and fit suitable climbing equipment for top-roping and abseiling.
- 2.** Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of personal abseiling equipment and ensure appropriate use, care and maintenance in line with manufacturers' guidance.
- 3.** Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of climbing wall equipment and ensure appropriate use of:
  - 3.1.** In-situ ropes.
  - 3.2.** Anchors/lower offs and fixed equipment.

### 2. BELAYING

- 2.1.** Tie into the rope. Attach group members to the rope with and without a karabiner.
- 2.2.** Demonstrate the use of direct and indirect belay systems at the top of a climbing wall, and choose the most appropriate for a given situation.
- 2.3.** Set up top-rope systems and choose the most appropriate for a given situation.
- 2.4.** Hold falls and control lowers.

- 2.5.** Supervise others belaying.

- 2.6.** Attach self and others to the belay system and abseil ropes.

### 3. ABSEILING

- 3.1.** Abseil without requiring a back-up safety rope.
- 3.2.** Demonstrate methods of safeguarding a novice abseiling.
- 3.3.** Utilise belay points for both abseil and safety ropes.
- 3.4.** Use common devices for abseiling competently and choose the most appropriate for a given situation.
- 3.5.** Demonstrate techniques for managing the safety of participants at the top of walls.



## ROCK CLIMBING

**Section 6.6:** Equipment

**Section 8.5:** Abseiling in a single pitch environment

# GUIDANCE NOTES

Many of the skills required in this 'bolt-on' module spill over from those required of a Climbing Wall Instructor. The figure of eight descender is still probably the most used specialist abseil device and an awareness of how it should be used correctly and an understanding of typical misuse should be pursued. The prusik loop will only be required as a back-up when abseiling alone without a safety rope.

In the case of managing abseils the instructor will normally be at the top of the abseil. You should be able to manage the abseil using a direct belay system using in-situ anchors. It is common for students to abseil with the abseil rope clipped directly to their harness with a screw gate (or equivalent) karabiner. Take care with long tails on the safety knot or the safety rope twisted around the abseil. If these situations occur you should take the time to adjust your system accordingly.

You should be comfortable abseiling without a backup rope; as with the climbing elements, you

must be able to perform as a good role model. You may choose to abseil with a French prusik back up, but also consider using a specialist abseil protection device like a Shunt. It is important you understand the limitations of using a prusik as a back-up.

When demonstrating how to safeguard a novice there is no better way than with a safety rope from above. You will normally be abseiling from fixed platforms which have built in anchors placed at an ideal height. Some abseil towers have anchors quite close to the edge and this will require management to get the abseiler weighting the rope. You will need to understand the pros and cons of different anchor positions.

You will need to be very clear when managing people at the top of abseils, clear demarcation of areas is essential, clear instruction on how many people should be where and the use of safety ropes and other means of protecting novice abseilers should be applied.



## KEY PRACTICE POINTS

- When transferring people from 'safe' ground to the abseil you should protect them very carefully.
- Keep your hand on the safety rope of the abseiler at all times.
- Keep the anchors, abseiler and the descent all in line to create stability.







## SYLLABUS

### 4. PLANNING AND STRUCTURE OF SESSIONS

**4.1.** Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of weather when abseiling on artificial structures.

### 5. MANAGEMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

**5.1.** Select appropriate management techniques to safeguard all participants, irrespective of whether or not they are directly involved with the abseiling activity.

**5.2.** Utilise effective communication skills to identify and react to the needs of the group in relation to involvement, interest, enjoyment and achievement.

**5.3.** Manage the safety of those arriving at the top of a wall.

**5.4.** Brief individuals and the group appropriately.

**5.5.** Avoid common abseiling problems.

**5.6.** Deal with common abseiling problems if they occur.

### 6. MANAGING/ SUPERVISING OTHER STAFF

**6.1.** Describe the role and scope of an assistant. Describe the opportunities and liabilities presented by using an assistant in a session.

**6.2.** Manage an assistant.

### 7. DECISION MAKING

**7.1.** Carry out dynamic risk assessments throughout each abseiling session.

### 8. KNOWLEDGE AND DEMONSTRATION OF TECHNIQUES

**8.1.** Deliver technical abseiling instruction to individuals and the group.

# GUIDANCE NOTES

Outdoor abseil towers can be quite exposed to the weather, so you should dress and equip your groups accordingly.

You must give your group a clear brief on how the abseil is going to work so that they can visualise the sequence of events. You need to identify safe zones and incorporate scope for the group to support and photograph each other. You need to be well positioned to offer support to the abseiler when going over the edge and to be able to observe them down to the ground.

You should be conversant with the common problems which might occur when abseiling. These might include loose garments, rope ends or

even hair catching in the abseil device. Take care and time to avoid this happening, make sure hair is tied back, baggy clothing is tucked securely out of the way and there are no loose ends of rope in reach of the abseil device. Figure of eight descenders can Lark's foot themselves if dragged over edges and jam.

Common abseil problems can usually be prevented and are rare. If an abseiler does become stuck then by far the easiest solution is to tie off the safety rope and release the tension on the abseil rope. This is easily achieved with a releasable abseil set up. You will need to be capable of tying off an Italian hitch or a belay plate when it is under load quickly and efficiently.



## KEY PRACTICE POINTS

- Practise releasing the abseil rope under load to become slick and confident at this technique - that is reassuring to the victim and the rest of the group.





## SYLLABUS

### 9. TEACHING AND LEARNING SKILLS

- 9.1. Communicate effectively and appropriately with a group and individuals, checking for understanding.
- 9.2. Explain the reasons for evaluating a session and success of the outcome.

# GUIDANCE NOTES

Climbing Instructors need to quickly create an environment of trust and confidence within their group so that participants feel safe and comfortable to tackle new and challenging activities. Age, ability, special needs, confidence and energy levels amongst the group will influence the best approach to achieve this.

Good communication skills are key. The foundations of effective teaching include the ability to create rapport, communicate at an appropriate level, use positive language, provide a variety of demonstration techniques, check for understanding through skilled questioning and give useful feedback and encouragement to individuals.



## KEY PRACTICE POINTS

- A good demonstration saves a thousand words – focus on the abseiler's posture.
- Practise at ground level with novices before going to height.



# APPENDIX 1 – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

## COURSE DELIVERY

Mountain Training courses are delivered by approved providers throughout the UK and Ireland. Providers of Climbing Wall Instructor courses will appoint a course director for each course.

Courses can be found by searching on the Candidate Management System (CMS) <https://mt.tahdah.me> or on our website <http://www.mountain-training.org/find/find-a-course>.

Your training and assessment result will be recorded on the Candidate Management System (CMS).

## EXEMPTION FROM TRAINING

Experienced climbers who already have substantial personal climbing experience and experience of supervising groups on climbing walls may apply for exemption from training. To qualify for exemption candidates must, at the very least, meet the minimum experience requirements for attendance at an assessment course and demonstrate that they have received relevant training in the management of climbing groups and assistants.

Further details of the exemption process can be found on the Mountain Training website.

There is no exemption from assessment.

## FURTHER EXPERIENCE

Once you have passed the Climbing Wall Instructor assessment you are responsible for remaining current and up to date with good practice for as long as you are using your qualification. Mountain Training would like to encourage you to regularly dedicate some time to your development both as a climber and as a Climbing Wall Instructor.

The Mountain Training Association is a membership association designed to support both trainee and qualified candidates by providing access to developmental workshops, conferences and peer learning events among other member benefits.

The responsibility for ensuring that instructor receive refresher training must lie with the provider of the service, or the individual in the case of self-employed leaders. Climbing Wall Instructors who wish to operate beyond the scope of their qualification(s) by virtue of their additional experience and/or training, for example a Rock Climbing Instructor taking a group climbing at a sport climbing quarry may be enabled to do so either through in-house training and/or within the context of a site specific scheme.

Mountain Training publishes a digital document called the National Guidelines which provides advice on good practice for anyone with a responsibility for climbing, walking and mountaineering related activities, and encompassing the principles of safety management.

# CANDIDATE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND DLOG

Mountain Training uses software powered by *tahdah* to record your journey through our schemes.

You can use the system to:

- register for a qualification
- search for a training or assessment course
- join an association or mountaineering council
- buy recommended books from the Mountain Training shop
- record your experience in DLOG (the digital logbook)
- access e-learning modules

<https://mt.tahdah.me>

## LOGGING YOUR EXPERIENCE

The foundation of your success as a Climbing Wall Instructor is your experience. It is this experience that enables you to learn from the training course, consolidate your learning, pass an assessment and then continue to develop as an instructor and climber.

There are fourteen activities you can log, including indoor climbing, trad climbing and outdoor bouldering and all of them start by searching the database. There are some information boxes on the screen - please read these to help with the logging process.

Top tips:

- 'Indoor climbing' should be used to record any personal climbing or instructing/assisting on artificial structures.
- You can use the 'Frequency' drop down to insert multiple records in one go. For example, if you ran a similar session each week for four weeks, select 'Weekly' from the drop down menu, select the appropriate date range and when you save the record, it will create four entries.
- If you can't find the climbing wall/tower/centre you are looking for please let us know and we will add it to the database.

## UPLOADING PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

If you have recorded your experience in another format already and want to start using DLOG, you can upload your existing logbook as a file to the Files tab. (The Files tab accepts various file formats including word, excel, pdf, jpg and png.)

Many candidates who do this also choose to create DLOG records for their most recent or most significant sessions.

## SHARING YOUR DLOG

When you book on to a training or assessment course, your logbook will become visible to the course director. If you would like some feedback prior to this, you can share your logbook with a mentor/friend/future course director by clicking on the Share tab, entering their email address and selecting the length of time they can access it.



The **Mountain Training Association** is a voluntary membership organisation designed to support candidates working towards our qualifications and provide development opportunities for those who already have them.

It is committed to fostering progression and encouraging good practice amongst its members so that others can enjoy professionally-led activities.

Join the MTA and get the support you need to succeed.

*"The workshops I've done have been brilliant and have definitely made me a better leader"*

- Alex Kendall (MTA member, 2016)

### WHO CAN JOIN

Anyone that has registered for a Mountain Training qualification is welcome to join the Mountain Training Association. The sooner you join the quicker you can take advantage of all of the great benefits on offer.

### HOW TO JOIN

Membership is annual. Simply pay online via your Mountain Training account or visit the website for more information.

### MEMBER BENEFITS

- Access to accredited CPD workshops
- Quarterly magazine and monthly e-newsletter
- Big savings on outdoor gear and courses
- Specially negotiated rates for civil liability insurance\*
- Online resources and guidance
- Regional networking and training events
- MTA branded merchandise
- Advertise and promote yourself online\*
- Use the MTA logo to promote yourself\*

\*full members



# MOUNTAIN TRAINING – PUBLICATIONS

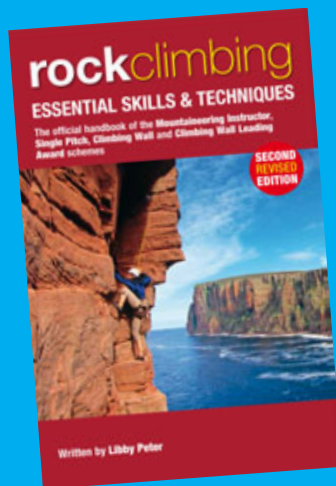
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