

Mountain Leader Skills Checklist

Introduction

This skills checklist is designed to enable you, as a Mountain leader (ML) candidate, to both record what you have covered as your training progresses e.g. as a technical diary and, at the close of your course, reflect on the syllabus topics covered during your Mountain Leader training allowing you to rate yourself using the 'Learning stage' described below.

It is hoped that this process will then assist you in completing your Action Plan (which you can share and discuss with your course director at your end of course debrief) which will guide you in consolidating and developing your experience and skills post training and pre-assessment.

When reflecting you might find it useful to refer back to the Mountain Leader Candidate Handbook. In addition the MTUK publication – "Hill Walking" – details many of the techniques that might be used by a Mountain Leaders and will be useful for refreshing your memory of specific techniques or skills covered at training.

How to appraise yourself

The syllabus is broken down into headings. Against each competency you can give yourself a 'learning stage' number – each number 1-3 corresponds with a description as detailed below. Learning stage 3 would very broadly equate with the degree of competency you'd expect from a qualified and experienced Mountain Leader.

Learning stage descriptions

Cognitive or understanding phase (Learning stage 1)

In the first stage of learning performances are inconsistent and success is not guaranteed. Performing the skill requires all of the candidate's attention and so they rely on the trainer for cues. This is a process of trial and error. Correct performances must be reinforced through external feedback.

Associative or verbal motor phase (Learning stage 2)

Performances are becoming more consistent as knowledge and skills are being formed. While the simpler parts of the performance now look fluent and are well learned, the more complex elements require most of the candidate's spare attention. The candidate is starting to get a sense of internal 'kinaesthetic' and 'cognitive' feedback when they perform or apply a skill well. They are starting to detect and correct their own errors.

Autonomous or motor phase (Learning stage 3)

In the final stage of learning, performances have become consistent, fluid and 'unconsciously competent'. The knowledge and skills involved are well learned and stored in the long-term memory. There is now spare attention which can be focused on group members and adapting appropriate leadership approaches and

techniques as applied to situations. To retain the new skill at this level, it must be regularly practiced to reinforce the motor and cognitive programmes.

1 Group management and the responsibilities of the group leader

Candidates must be familiar with the main areas of responsibility of the Mountain Leader.

1. General responsibilities	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. to individuals, to the group as a whole and where appropriate to parents/guardians.		
b. to the organising authority, committee or manager of the activity.		
c. to the general public, the environment, environmental bodies and organisations, local residents, land managers, the mountaineering fraternity, fellow leaders and Mountain Training.		
1.2 Specific responsibilities	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. to choose objectives appropriate to the experience, skills and motivation level of the group, the prevailing conditions and the leader's own experience and ability.		
b. to carry out or supervise relevant planning considerations e.g. parental consent, authority clearance, personal and medical information, finances, insurance and transport.		
c. to complete detailed preparations e.g. plan routes, check access, obtain weather forecasts and brief the group		
d. to ensure the group is appropriately prepared for the activity.		

e. to comply with current legislation relating to the activities.		
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1.3 Operational responsibilities in the mountains	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. to manage the group effectively by setting and reviewing targets, performing ongoing risk assessments, positive decision making, delegating where appropriate, group control, discipline and good communication.		
b. to meet the changing needs of the group paying particular regard to the health and fitness of its members, whilst maintaining confidence and enthusiasm.		
c. to provide a safe and rewarding experience for each group member through involvement, interest, enjoyment and achievement, through imparting appropriate technical skills and competence and through fostering environmental awareness.		
d. to evaluate the experience and motivate towards further participation.		
e. to supervise groups on unaccompanied sections of a walk or expedition.		
1.4 Personal and leadership skills	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. demonstrate a flexible leadership style and sound judgement with regard to the group and its objectives.		
b. demonstrate good practice with regard to individual skills: pace, rhythm, foot placement, conservation of energy, balance and coordination.		
c. make suitable route choices, interpret and evaluate terrain, revise routes where necessary.		
d. identify and manage risk.		

e. be able to manage a group on steep broken ground using appropriate techniques and demonstrate effective group management and supervision skills.		
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2. Navigation

It is essential that a Mountain Leader can navigate competently. Candidates will be expected to choose the appropriate navigation technique for the prevailing conditions and be able to introduce these skills to others.

Candidates should be familiar with the following:	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. maps, scales and conventional signs		
b. contours and other methods of showing relief		
c. topographical features		
d. relating the map to the ground and vice versa		
e. measuring distance on the map and the ground		
f. navigating across country with map alone		
g. compasses and other navigation aids		
h. methods of identifying features and position		
i. methods of relocation		
j. methods for navigating across country in poor visibility and/or in darkness		

k. route planning, including methods of recording routes		
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3. Access and the environment Candidates should:	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. aim to inspire and enthuse their groups in the mountains and continuously expand their knowledge and understanding of the environment.		
b. demonstrate knowledge of relevant legislation regarding rights of way and access and the significance of access agreements and codes		
c. demonstrate knowledge of land management in upland areas and its multiple uses, e.g. hill farming, forestry, water collection, grouse shooting and deer stalking.		
d. demonstrate knowledge of current relevant conservation legislation and appreciate the problems of conservation with respect to flora, fauna and erosion. They should also understand the nature of specially designated areas and any limitations on their use and be aware of long term effects of human pressures on the upland environment.		
e. know how to get information about access to wild country e.g. from appropriate guidebooks, maps, countryside agencies, relevant mountaineering bodies and websites.		
f. be familiar with relevant codes in the countryside and understand the individual's responsibility to minimise impact on the environment.		

4 Hazards and emergency procedures

There are a number of distinct types of hazard that might arise in the mountains. These are best considered under separate headings, although avoiding or dealing with them may involve many of the same principles

4.1 Hazards of steep ground

Mountain Leaders should be familiar with techniques to ensure safe travel through steep and broken ground. This should be through a combination of planning, route choice and group management. However, situations may arise where the rope is necessary to safeguard members of the group. The candidate should recognise such difficulties and potential dangers leading to the need to use simple rope techniques to provide confidence or assistance. It is emphasised that the techniques used are not those suitable for rock climbing.

Candidates should be familiar with the following:	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. suitability of different types, sizes and lengths of rope.		
b. rope management.		
c. appropriate knots.		
d. appropriate methods of belaying, including choice of safe anchors.		
e. use and limitations of the rope alone:	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
i. how to protect a short scramble type descent or ascent for the whole party.		
ii. how to safeguard a single party member.		

iii. how to safeguard themselves in descent on scrambling type terrain.		
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4.2 Environmental hazards	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
Environmental mountain hazards include loose rock, flooding and lightning. A mountain leader should exercise sound judgement to avoid these hazards but should know how to deal with them if necessary.		
4.3 Water hazards (including marshes, streams and rivers)	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. preparation, skills and safety procedures for leader and group members.		
b. dangers and methods of avoidance.		
c. selection of the best crossing points.		
d. selection of appropriate unroped techniques to assist in crossing.		
4.4 Emergency procedures	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. methods of search and evacuation.		
b. a basic understanding of how Mountain Rescue is organised.		
c. improvised mountain rescue techniques - application and limitations.		

d. emergency bivouac skills.		
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4.5 Medical Candidates should meet the first aid requirements of the Mountain Leader scheme and have an understanding of the following conditions, their causes, signs, symptoms, prevention and treatment:	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. mountain hypothermia (exposure) and its treatment both in the field and at base.		
b. cold injuries.		
c. heat disorders.		
d. allergic reactions.		
e. common medical problems, e.g. asthma, diabetes, blisters, sprains.		
5 Equipment Candidates should demonstrate knowledge of:	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
5.1 personal and group equipment required for mountain walks and camps, taking into account various weather conditions.		
5.2 additional equipment required by a leader.		

5.3 design and construction of equipment, including its material characteristics, care and maintenance.		
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6 Expedition skills Candidates should have knowledge and experience of the following aspects of mountain camping:	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
6.1 Equipment a. packing and carrying personal and communal equipment. b. selection and safe use of camping stoves and fuel.		
6.2 Food a. selection of suitable foods, their quantities and packaging. b. preparation and cooking.		
6.3 Other Skills a. selection of campsites (both valley bases and remote locations). b. siting and pitching of tents. c. organisation of camp and individual tents. d. group and personal hygiene and sanitation. e. use of huts, bothies and other shelters. f. bivouac skills.		
7 Weather 7.1 Candidates must have relevant knowledge and understanding of the weather. They must gain practical experience in relating regional weather forecasts to mountainous areas and develop their ability to make short-term forecasts from observed meteorological conditions. Candidates should also have an understanding of:		
	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. sources of information on weather.		
b. elementary interpretation of weather maps.		
c. weather developments associated with different air masses, major cloud forms, changes in wind direction and in atmospheric pressure.		
d. elementary practical identification of cloud types, wind speeds and temperatures.		
7.2 Effects of weather on route selection and level of activity.		

Mountain Leader ACTION PLAN

What is the timescale for doing your assessment?

How many QMDs – that meet ALL of the [QMD criteria](#) in the Mountain Leader handbook – have you logged?

Have you completed the pre assessment criteria of 8 nights camping?
If not, do you have the skills to gain this experience or do you think you need additional training to accomplish this part of the assessment criteria?

List three syllabus areas that you feel/ think particularly confident or practised in.

List three syllabus areas that you feel/ think require further practice.

What opportunities can you foresee for gaining experience to develop your Mountain Leader skillset?

Given your answers to the above briefly outline your way forward for becoming a Mountain Leader.	
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Appendix

Assessment requirements

During the period between training and assessment, candidates are expected to gain personal experience in mountain areas. This should preferably include some practise in leading parties in easy hill country. Working under the guidance of a suitably experienced leader in more difficult terrain is also recommended. Every opportunity should be taken to practise the skills learned during training.

Before you book onto a Mountain Leader assessment, make sure you have done the following:

- You must have attended a Mountain Leader training course (or have been granted exemption)
- You must be familiar with the syllabus
- You must have logged a minimum of 40 Quality Mountain Days in three different regions of the UK and Ireland
- You must hold a current first aid certificate, minimum 16 hours and relevant to your work as a Mountain Leader
- You must have logged at least 8 nights camping, including at least 4 nights wild camping

Experience gained in other mountain activities is useful but not a prerequisite. Some non-UK experience may be included but should be in terrain and conditions that are similar to those in the UK. Normally these days would be considered as additional experience and should not form a substantial part of the required total of QMDs. The Mountain Leader scheme is designed for the terrain and conditions encountered in the UK and Ireland.

Mountainous country

For the purpose of the Mountain Leader scheme, 'mountainous country' may be defined as wild country which may contain unavoidable steep and rocky ground where walkers are dependent upon themselves for immediate help. In the United Kingdom and Ireland mountainous country includes:

- Snowdonia
- Brecon Beacons
- Lake District
- Mountains of Mourne
- Scottish Highlands
- Galloway Hills
- Cork & Kerry Mountains
- Galway & Mayo Mountains
- Donegal Mountains
- Dublin & Wicklow Mountains

1. Quality Mountain Days (QMDs)

In terms of experience, the quality of a mountain day lies in such things as the conditions experienced both overhead and underfoot, the exploration of new areas, the terrain covered and the physical and mental challenge. Such days make a positive contribution towards a person's development and maturity as an all-round mountaineer.

Usually some or all of the following criteria would be fulfilled:

- the individual takes part in the planning and leadership.
- navigation skills are required away from marked paths.
- experience must be in terrain and weather comparable to that found in UK and Irish hills.
- knowledge is increased and skills practised.
- attention is paid to safety.

- the journey is five hours or more.
- adverse conditions may be encountered.
- ascent of a substantial peak would normally be included in the day.