Climbing Wall Instructor Abseil Module

Guidance for trainers and assessors

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.* **These guidance notes should be used together with the Climbing Wall Instructor Abseil Module syllabus and candidate guidance.**

- **Platforms or stances designed for top-roping and abseiling are incorporated into walls and towers in a variety of ways. Some stances may be inappropriate for both abseiling and top-roping, and others may be dual use.**

- **Walls may not permit public access to their top-roping and abseiling facilities, and even where access is available, it may be necessary to undergo a separate induction before such facilities can be used.**

- **Training and assessment courses will need access to one abseil platform/stance each but it would be advantageous if these offered the ability to set up different systems in order to discuss their pros and cons. It is preferable for assessments to take place at a different venue to the candidates' training venue/s.**

TECHNICAL COMPETENCE

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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 when top roping and abseiling with groups. Good sources of additional information should be highlighted.

Indoor abseiling and top roping venues should be chosen to maximise the candidates opportunities in coming into contact with in-situ equipment with time allocated for discussion around evaluating its condition and appropriate use for abseiling and/or top roping.

Different walls provide a variety of top-rope anchors. The greatest variation is likely to be in anchor type, anchor height and distance relative to the belaying position. However, it may not be possible for trainers to demonstrate this variation practically at a single venue.

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 for top roping and abseiling should be addressed on both training and assessment courses.

- 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 top roping and/or abseiling 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

Top rope and abseil systems are often not left in situ. Candidates should be taught different ways to set them up in a safe and efficient manner. Different top 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 abseil and top rope 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 candidates should be encouraged to demonstrate model belaying technique appropriate to the device, ensuring both their safety and that of the climber being belayed, whilst providing an 'expert model' example for their future groups.

Top-roping venues vary greatly with regard to access to stances, anchor type and location. Candidates should understand principles for setting up a top-rope and demonstrate systems that can be adapted to suit circumstances.

Top-roping often requires managing groups at a distance or parts of the same group simultaneously – one at the top and another at the bottom of the wall. As well as being able to manage rope systems competently, candidates should appreciate when top-roping may, or may not, be an appropriate activity and know a range of group management strategies.

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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.

Candidates should be able to quickly and efficiently set up top rope and abseil systems, 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 top rope 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 top-rope.

Top tips

- Give the candidates a flash card outlining a particular context. Ask them to set up a top 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.

3. ABSEILING

Trainers

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

Personal safety is a key theme throughout abseiling and close supervision is required from the trainer. Candidates could theoretically arrive on training with no abseiling experience. Trainers should never underestimate the value of a safety rope when exploring the effectiveness of personal abseil back-up systems with candidates.

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

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

There is great variation in the construction and design of top-roping and abseiling facilities, and trainers should make candidates aware of management strategies that would be appropriate for a variety of situations. There are perhaps two distinct issues to consider:

· Accessing the top of a wall

· Safeguarding a group once at the top of a wall.

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Access may be straightforward, such as a staircase, or more involved, such as top-rope access only. Once positioned at the top, there may be a secure area for groups to congregate, requiring limited direct management. Alternatively there may be a platform with no railings or other security, necessitating a clear strategy to safeguard both supervisor and group.

Adaptable systems should be demonstrated and typical set-ups discussed.

Assessors

Candidates should clearly demonstrate they are able to abseil independently using a suitable back-up (such as a Prusik). In addition they should be able to set up and competently manage a group abseil using a releasable system. Purpose-built abseil stations may be used, with conveniently placed high anchors, as well as stances that may commonly be used for top-roping. Candidates should be able to adapt their rope systems and group management styles to suit different locations.

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

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

Top tips

- The use of Prusik back-ups should be practised in a controlled environment.
- Dealing with abseiling problems should be realistic requiring simple steps to solve and not involve the candidate putting them self or anyone else at risk.

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4. PLANNING AND STRUCTURE OF SESSIONS

Trainers

Trainers should ensure candidates have an understanding of the impact of weather when abseiling on artificial structures. This can be covered by selection of a real venue or through discussion of images of examples of outdoor structures

Assessors

Assessors should ensure candidates demonstrate an understanding of the impact of weather when abseiling on artificial structures. This can be covered by selection of a real venue or through discussion of images of examples of outdoor structures (this might be an aspect that can be covered via a home paper if one is used).

5. Management of participants

Trainers

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

- Tangled ropes
- Jammed abseil device
- Abseiler moving off-route

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 or abseil to offer non-technical support. Prussiking, counter balance abseils, and 'snatch rescues' are beyond the scope of the Climbing Wall Instructor scheme.

Assessors

Candidates should be given a range of scenarios to perform which demonstrates their knowledge and communication skills and seek to avoid 'common problems' occurring. Assessors should use scenario based approaches to set tasks which require the candidate to make judgements in a more realistic way.

Assessors should then build upon the scenarios set above 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 members.

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.

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

Top Tips

- It may be worth compiling a list of realistic common top rope and abseil 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 to how to deliver inclusive sessions and provide guidance on relevant sources of information.

6. Managing/supervising other staff

Trainers

Assistants are commonly deployed to support instructors with abseiling activities. 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.

7. Decision making

Trainers

Discussion and activity on training courses should be created which 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 groups 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.

Assessors

The assessor will need to see and discuss a candidates' 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 running an abseil session is their ability to demonstrate sound abseil technique. During training, candidates should see and discuss what makes an effective demonstration on the skills of abseiling: fitting a harness, threading the abseil rope through the device, and body positioning. The training course should give good opportunity for each candidate to practise demonstrations, for active discussion among the group and subsequent feedback to take place.

Trainers should introduce candidates to a range of current, commonly used abseil equipment and give examples on 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 they are comfortable running sessions with a range of groups with limited experience. This will involve top roped climbing and abseiling. 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 candidate's prior experience.

Assessors

Unlike many aspects of the syllabus which are assessed as part of a wider scenario, the "deliver technical abseiling instruction to individuals and the group" can be assessed in isolation, for example, 'demonstrate an effective abseil'. 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 abseiling. 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.

Top tips

- Ask the candidates to write down all the different types of individuals and groups they might have to abseil. 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?

TEACHING AND LEARNING SKILLS

9. TEACHING AND LEARNING SKILLS

As for the CWI

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