



Lowland Leader Award Skills Checklist

Introduction

This skills checklist is designed to enable you, as a Lowland Leader 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 Lowland 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 Lowland Leader Candidate Handbook. In addition the MTUK publication – "Hill Walking" – details many of the techniques that might be used by a Lowland Leader 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 Lowland 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.

The leader of walking groups needs a wide range of skills and knowledge in order to operate effectively. Not only is it necessary to be able to perform each element in isolation but it is also vital that leaders can combine several skills at any one time. For example, they may need to manage the group and navigate at the same time.

1. Leadership Skills and Group Management The leader should be aware of:	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. their responsibilities to the group and individuals within it, parents/guardians, employing authorities, other outdoor users and the general public, including the choosing of venues and planning and recording of routes.		
b. current legislation that relates to the care of groups under their charge, including legislation relating to the care of young people and vulnerable adults.		
c. specific responsibilities to choose appropriate objectives, to complete detailed preparations and ensure that the group is adequately equipped and briefed for the activity.		
d. the health and fitness benefits of walking, and be able to explain them to a group.		
e. communication strategies whilst leading groups.		
f. group management strategies and the need to adapt to differing groups and situations.		
g. the variety of barriers to participation, including mental and physical disability, ethnicity, fitness/health and be aware of the impact of various medical conditions.		
h. the progress of those under their charge and motivate them towards further participation where appropriate.		
i. national walking initiatives.		

2. Walking Skills	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. Demonstrate an appropriate level of personal fitness		
b. Set a sensible pace for the group, understand how to conserve energy and demonstrate balance and co-ordination		
c. Identify potential hazards and manage risk		
<p>3. Planning a Walk Adequate planning of a walk is crucial to the enjoyment and safety of the participants and the confidence of the leader. It can vary from a few minutes thought to a pen and paper exercise. When planning a walk, a leader should consider the group's abilities, the terrain to be covered, the weather forecast and the plan for any potential emergencies.</p>		
	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. Understand the scope of the Lowland Leader Award scheme and plan walks that lie within this terrain.		
b. Know where to find information to assist with the planning of walks		
c. Understand what is required to plan and successfully lead a walk		
d. Understand common health problems and disabilities and the impact they may have on the walk		
f. Weather forecasts – sources, interpretation and assessing impact on planned walks and equipment requirements		
e. Understand why and when group and personal insurance is necessary		
g. Be able to identify significant risks and appropriate methods to manage risk, both in the planning stage and during the journey		
h. Demonstrate awareness of any policies and guidance for the planning and recording of walks that differing organisations might require.		

4. Basic Mapwork and Route Finding Skills

The ability to efficiently navigate along a planned walk is a fundamental skill for any walk leader; indeed without that skill very little can be accomplished. Candidates should be able to:

	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. Use a variety of commonly used maps and understand the use of scales and symbols.		
b. Understand and use the information given on maps with regard to rights of way and access to land		
c. Understand how to find uphill and downhill sections using contours and printed heights and identify major land features		
d. Understand and provide six figure grid references		
e. Find which direction to walk in by orientating the map either in relation to surrounding features or with a compass.		
f. Use the compass to determine the direction of a path or feature		
g. Find out how far apart two points are on the map and calculate how long it will take to walk between them		
h. Understand 'tick off' and 'catching' features and how to use them to aid route finding.		
i. Recognise linear features such as walls and streams on a map.		
j. Identify position on the map.		
k. Navigate competently (using the above skills) in poor visibility due to weather conditions or darkness.		
l. Understand the benefits and limitations of using handheld GPS devices.		

5. Equipment Leaders should be familiar with, and able to advise participants on:	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. Suitable personal clothing and equipment		
b. Additional equipment carried by the leader		
c. Appropriate food and liquids to carry		
d. Use of walking poles		
e. Appropriate maps and compasses		
6. Hazards and Emergency Procedures Leaders should be familiar with strategies for managing groups when encountering the following hazards:		
	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Badly eroded trails, uneven and wet sections • A variety of man-made features e.g. stiles, stepped decking, steps etc • Animals; both livestock and wild • Roads and traffic • Other users and their needs e.g. runners, bikers and horses • Working environments e.g. farmyards, quarries, forestry operations • Water features such as rivers or lakes • Poor visibility • What to do if the path becomes indistinct and /or signs are missing • Weather conditions 		
6. Hazards and Emergency Procedures cont/		

The leader should be able to:	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. Select an appropriate first aid kit and additional group equipment		
b. Deal with common injuries and medical problems		
c. Manage self and group in a variety of different weather conditions including heat, cold, rain and high wind.		
d. Take appropriate action in the event of an incident or accident including knowing how to get appropriate assistance		
e. Plan and follow 'escape routes', using appropriate navigational techniques, to nearby assistance.		
f. Manage a group to perform a small scale search for a missing person		
7. Environmental Awareness, Conservation, Access and Land Ownership		
Access considerations Leaders should understand and be familiar with the following:	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
a. their responsibility to minimise impact on the environment and applicable national codes (such as the Country Code).		
b. current applicable legislation concerning access to the countryside including the law relating to rights of way and access to land and, the nature of specially designated areas and limitations on their use		
c. how and where to get information about access to the countryside e.g. from appropriate guidebooks and maps, Mountaineering Council sources, local and National Access Forums and from the various countryside agencies and local authorities.		
7. Environmental Awareness, Conservation, Access and Land Ownership cont/		

Environmental Awareness Leaders should seek to develop and extend their:	LEARNING STAGE	NOTES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of countryside flora and fauna 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of local history, place names, etc. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of how walking can impact on the environment and other people 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of conservation programmes such as 'Leave No Trace' and apply those principles in order to minimize the impact of their activities 		



Lowland Walking Leader ACTION PLAN

What is the timescale for doing your assessment?	
How many Quality Days (QD) – that meet ALL of the QD criteria in the Lowland Leader handbook – have you logged?	
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 Lowland Leader skillset?	
Given your answers to the above briefly outline your way forward for becoming a Lowland Leader?	

Assessment requirements

Prior to assessment all candidates must have completed an absolute minimum of 20 logged walks in lowland countryside. Duplicated walks must not be counted in this total and walks should encompass a breadth of different lowland terrains i.e. coast, forest, farmland.

Experience gained in other mountain activities is useful, but not a pre-requisite. Some non-UK/ Ireland experience may be included, but should be in terrain and conditions that are similar to those in the UK/Ireland and must be unguided. Normally any overseas days would be considered as additional experience and should not form a substantial part of the required total.

Complete an appropriate first aid course.

Terrain Definition for Lowland Leader Award

The Lowland Leader Award is designed to train and assess the skills and knowledge required to operate as a leader of walking parties in rural countryside and forest following paths and tracks. Walks must follow paths or tracks that are clearly marked on a map and normally visible on the ground. There will always be situations where crop growth, ploughing or simply heavy leaf fall might obscure a path temporarily, however entry and exit points to such areas will normally be easy to locate. Routes should not require navigation across untracked areas. The navigational demands of routes should be such that the use of the map alone would normally suffice with the compass simply being needed to orientate the map or indicate path direction.

There should be no requirement to cross any hazardous terrain such as very steep slopes or cliffs although it must be recognised that some paths in appropriate lowland terrain may be steep and broken.

The terrain should be fairly close to access points so that the leader can easily cut short a walk or gain help. As a general rule no point on planned walks should be more than around 3km from an access point such as a car park, lay-by or populated area where assistance or evacuation would be available.

Any 'escape routes' from the planned walk should also be through terrain that lies within the scope of the Lowland Leader Award. A long route that ran 3 km away from, and parallel to, a road but which had a high moorland ridge between it and that road could therefore fall outside the scope.

Walks should at all times use bridges or other recognised water crossing points such as stepping stones or fords when needing to cross any stream that could constitute a hazard to the party.

Walks must only take place in summer conditions (ie when there is no unavoidable snow or ice on any part of the route). It should be noted that such conditions may well be found at any time of the year; the Lowland Leader should operate according to the conditions underfoot rather than the season.

Definition of Quality Day

Experience gained in areas other than the UK and Ireland can be recorded if in similar conditions to those found in the UK were encountered.

The majority of your experience however, at least 50% of the days recorded, should be in the UK.

A Quality Day will involve most, if not all, of the factors below:

- The individual takes part in the planning and leadership.
- Navigation skills are required.
- Knowledge is increased and skills practised.
- Attention is paid to safety.
- Adverse weather and poor underfoot conditions may be encountered.
- Four hours or more journey time.

These criteria mean that days as a course member under instruction, a member of a group practising skills, or days spent repeating familiar routes are very unlikely to meet the requirements of a Quality Day. However these can be recorded in the appropriate place in your logbook even though they are not suitable for use in meeting the minimum requirements for attending assessment.