



## SCOPE OF PRACTICE

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**Note:** *The American Mountain Guide Association (the “AMGA”) Scope of Practice (the “SOP”) applies to all AMGA Professional Members and AMGA Accredited Businesses.*

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### Introduction

The AMGA believes that all professional members and accredited businesses should operate under clearly defined minimum standards. The primary goal of SOP is to support and promote safety, quality of experience, and the public interest by establishing training and certification standards for the AMGA community of professional members and accredited businesses. Furthermore, the SOP will elevate the guiding profession and allow the AMGA to better promote guiding and instruction to the public, clients, land management agencies, and others in the community.

The SOP framework defines appropriate guiding roles and supervision needs for professional members at all levels of training and certification. It is the responsibility of all AMGA professional members and accredited businesses to familiarize themselves with the SOP and make every effort to comply with these standards. Guides and accredited businesses should, however, recognize that these are normally minimum standards. Each guiding role has unique demands and additional experience, skills, and mentorship beyond that described in the SOP may be appropriate.

The AMGA acknowledges that there are multiple approaches to training/guiding that will not fall into strict compliance with the guidelines of the SOP. These alternative courses and programs are not necessarily less appropriate than those that do comply with the requirements of the SOP; however, the AMGA believes that the consistency and quality encouraged by the SOP structure is important to the reputation and growth of the organization. Nevertheless, no training or certification structure, including SOP, can provide a guarantee of safety given the inherent and

other risks associated with climbing and skiing. Further, given variables in terrain and weather beyond the control of the AMGA instructor/guide, deviations from the SOP may be justifiable.

This document is intended to be utilized by AMGA professional members and accredited businesses. In addition, this document does not attempt to describe types of avalanche terrain that may be encountered in Ice Instructor, Alpine Guide, and Ski Guide terrain. Guides in potential avalanche terrain must rely on their avalanche training, obtained outside the AMGA, for the identification and understanding of said terrain.

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## **I. Definition of Terms for Supervision and Mentoring**

**Guide:** While, technically, there are differences between guiding and instructing climbing, for the sake of simplicity the term “Guide” will be used interchangeably throughout this SOP to identify guides and instructors, both certified and working through the AMGA training progression.

**Unsupervised:** Guides who are AMGA certified or trained for the terrain in which they work or who are Tenured Guides may work independently, without a Supervisor as identified for the various disciplines below.

**Supervision:** Supervision is a direct working relationship between Guides certified by the AMGA in a given terrain type and Guides in training for that terrain. Supervision implies working in close proximity during a given activity, such as two rope teams traveling near each other on a glacier, near each other on multi-pitch routes, on nearby routes at the same single-pitch crag, or in the same basin when ski guiding. Supervision includes AM/PM meetings, hazard assessment, and regular briefings and debriefings about route selection, strategy, and client care.

**Supervisors:** Supervisors are Guides who are certified by the AMGA for the terrain in which they work or Tenured Guides who have undertaken a supervisory role for that terrain—individually or within a company.

**Mentorship:** Mentorship is a developmental partnership between a Guide with significant experience and someone who wants to learn. Mentorship often includes communication, review of a guide's notebook, and plan for objectives, in person or otherwise, over an extended period of time to assist in an individual's professional development.

**Mentors:** Mentors are typically individuals who are certified by the AMGA for the terrain in which they work, Assistant Guides (as defined below), or Tenured Guides. Mentors should have a depth of experience and knowledge of the terrain in which they work, but just as important, should also

possess a willingness to share their knowledge in a way that advances the guiding profession and the abilities of the individuals with whom they work.

**Tenured Guide:** A Tenured Guide is a Guide working for an AMGA accredited business who was hired by that business before January 1, 2008, and who has continued to work for an accredited business since that date. A Tenured Guide who accepts work with a different accredited business is only tenured in similar terrain to that which they guided in previously. Tenured Guides are exempted from this SOP, but as identified below, are encouraged to engage in the Supervision and Mentoring of Guides in training. Tenured Guide status as described applies only within the AMGA accredited business employing that Guide, any exception requires approval in advance by the AMGA Technical Director.

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## **II. Supervision and Mentoring**

Supervision and Mentoring are critical components of an individual's AMGA continuing training ("Apprenticeship"). Apprenticeship is considered by the AMGA as important to the development of the many skills that often cannot be completely addressed in a formal training system. Because of this, the AMGA relies on AMGA accredited businesses, Supervisors, and Mentors to provide Apprenticeship. It is imperative that accredited businesses, Supervisors, and Mentors thoughtfully consider their role and determine whether they have the appropriate mindset, tools, and skills to provide effective Apprenticeship.

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## **III. Definition of Terms for AMGA Training and Certification Levels**

**Instructor:** An individual who has passed the Climbing Wall Instructor Certification Course, Single Pitch Instructor Assessment, Rock Instructor Exam, Multi-Pitch Instructor Course and Exam, or Ice Instructor Exam.

Example: An individual who has passed the Climbing Wall Instructor Certification Course is a Climbing Wall Instructor.

**Apprentice Guide:** An individual who has successfully completed any first level course including the Rock Guide Course, Alpine Guide Course (completion of Alpine Rock Module, and Snow & Glacier Module, or the combined AGC program), or Ski Guide Course.

Example: An individual who has successfully completed the Ski Guide Course is an Apprentice Ski Guide.

Note: An individual who has successfully completed the Alpine Skills Course is an Alpine Skills Course Graduate and must work under Supervision.

Note: The titles for individuals who have successfully completed either the Alpine Rock or Alpine Snow & Glacier Modules are: Alpine Rock Module Graduate, Alpine Snow & Glacier Module Graduate.

**Assistant Guide:** An individual who has passed the exam component of an advanced level course.

Example: An individual who has passed the Advanced Rock Guide Course and Assistant Exam is an Assistant Rock Guide.

**Aspirant American Mountain Guide/Aspirant IFMGA Guide:** An individual who has passed the Assistant Exam component of all three advanced level courses.

Example: An individual who has passed the Rock, Alpine, and Ski Assistant Exams is an Aspirant American Mountain Guide/Aspirant IFMGA Guide.

**Certified Guide:** An individual who has passed a Guide level Exam (Alpine, Rock, or Ski).

Example: An individual who has passed their Alpine Exam is an Alpine Guide. An individual who has passed their Rock Exam, Alpine Assistant Exam, and Ski Guide Course is a Rock Guide/Assistant Alpine Guide/Apprentice Ski Guide.

**American Mountain Guide/IFMGA Guide:** Any Guide who has passed all three Guide level exams is an American Mountain Guide.

Note: A Splitboard Guide who has passed all three Guide level exams is an American Mountain Guide.

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## **IV. Rock and Alpine Complexity Scale**

The following scale classifies terrain based on its complexity for Rock, Alpine, and Ice on approaches, ascents, and descents. As complexity increases, guides must manage overlapping hazards and apply multiple techniques while still managing client rewards. Although the terminology is the same as the Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale (ATES), this terrain complexity scale is not in reference to avalanche terrain.

### **Simple:**

Simple terrain can be managed with straightforward guide techniques. Approaches and descents have minimal or no short-rope. Hazards rarely overlap at one time.

This terrain typically includes but is not limited to:

- Traditional pitching in 5th class terrain for the duration of a route
- Minimal short-rope to access the base of a climb or to manage easy terrain at the top
- Long roped glacier travel that requires minimal rope transitions to navigate

- Descents that are walk-offs, or easy to access rappels

### **Challenging:**

Challenging terrain requires more demanding guide techniques. Approaches and descents present extended short-roping challenges. Overlapping hazards that require management and prioritization may be common.

This terrain typically includes but is not limited to:

- Short 3rd or 4th class sections on the ascent or descent
- Short-roping at the bottom of a rappel or into a rappel
- Short sections of broken glacier with route finding that is generally uncomplicated but may require rope transitions to navigate
- Terrain that requires advanced solutions such as transitions from parallel to caterpillar and vice versa
- Challenging route finding

### **Complex:**

Complex terrain requires advanced guide techniques. Approaches and descents have significant sections of short-roping. Creative solutions and multiple transitions are common. Many overlapping hazards may exist that require advanced awareness and prioritization.

This terrain typically includes but is not limited to:

- Extended 3rd or 4th class sections on the ascent or descent
- Extensive short-roping
- Anchors that are challenging to access or complicated to build
- Many transitions where reconfiguring the rope to manage hazards is required
- Terrain that requires creative solutions such as a mid route rappel into a section of short-roping followed by further pitched climbing
- Difficult or demanding route finding

### **Distance and Emergency Egress:**

In addition to the terrain complexity scale above, a guide must also consider the distance of the objective from the trailhead and the options for emergency egress when identifying suitable objectives within their AMGA Scope of Practice. Climbs that are further from the trailhead or which present challenges to emergency egress will require additional preparation, resources, and management from the guide. For example, a climb with a complexity rating of Simple that is accessed by an arduous off-trail approach in an area that is far from emergency assistance will demand a higher level of responsibility from a guide compared to a Simple climb near the road. Guides should consider the distance from the trailhead and the options for emergency egress—and their ability to manage these components of an outing—when selecting an appropriate objective.

**Timing and Conditions:**

As guides use the complexity scale to inform terrain choices, it is important to recognize the complexity of an objective may change over time. The conditions on a route may change from season to season due to lower or greater snowfall, changing glaciers, washouts, rockfall, etc. The conditions may also change over the course of a single season. For example, a commonly guided glacier climb on a Pacific Northwest volcano could be considered Simple under early season conditions but could change significantly to Complex under late season conditions. Guides should recognize and anticipate changing conditions to determine if their level of training meets the scope of practice for working in that terrain.

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**V. Terrain, Supervision, and Mentoring****Terrain Descriptions:**

Terrain for guides is defined based on these categories: Climbing Wall, Rock, Alpine, Ice, and Ski. Descriptions and Scope of Practice can be found below. These descriptions are further clarified by the [draft AMGA Route Catalog](#) which contains commonly guided climbs from around the United States including specifics on required training and certification levels for guiding each route.

**CLIMBING WALL TERRAIN****Climbing Wall Terrain:**

Climbing Wall terrain is indoor or outdoor artificial climbing structures designed specifically for rock climbing activities. There are two AMGA certification levels for this terrain: Lead Climbing Wall Instructor and Top Rope Climbing Wall Instructor.

Top Rope Climbing Wall Instructors are eligible to teach climbing movement and top rope climbing skills instruction on artificial climbing structures.

Lead Climbing Wall Instructors are eligible to teach lead climbing skills on single pitch artificial climbing structures in addition to the skills taught by Top Rope Climbing Wall Instructors.

Neither certified Lead nor Top Rope Climbing Wall Instructors are certified to teach climbing on naturally occurring rock formations. Any guide trained at the certified Single Pitch Instructor level or above may work in climbing wall terrain. The AMGA recommends that anyone focusing a significant portion of their work in this terrain to seek Climbing Wall Instructor training and certification.

## ROCK TERRAIN

### Single Pitch Rock Terrain:

Single Pitch Rock terrain is Simple terrain up to Grade I, that is climbed without intermediate belays. Approaches and descents to and from climbing venues present no difficulties such as significant route finding, scrambling, or short-roping. The routes should not exceed Grade I or be more than one pitch in length.

Supervision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Single Pitch Instructors, Multi-Pitch Instructors, Rock Instructors, Apprentice Rock Guides, Assistant Rock Guides, Rock Guides, Apprentice Alpine Guides,* Assistant Alpine Guides, Alpine Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides can work <u>Unsupervised</u> in this terrain.</li><li>• Graduates of the Single Pitch Instructor Course or Alpine Skills Course can work under <u>Supervision</u>.</li><li>• Supervisors for this terrain are Single Pitch Instructors, Assistant Rock Guides, Rock Instructors, Multi-Pitch Instructors, Rock Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides.</li></ul>



### Rock Terrain:

Rock terrain includes Simple, Challenging, and Complex terrain with approaches and descents to and from 5th class rock climbs. The approach and/or descent should not require movement on snow or ice. Guides, unless qualified through the Alpine Guide track, should refrain from guiding in terrain where the preponderance of the climbing is 3rd and 4th class and is alpine in nature – terrain that is more akin to Alpine Terrain.

Supervision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rock Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides can work <u>Unsupervised</u> in Complex rock terrain at any commitment grade.</li><li>• Assistant Rock Guides can work <u>Unsupervised</u> in Complex terrain up to Grade IV.</li><li>• Assistant Rock Guides can work under <u>Supervision</u> in Complex terrain up to Grade V.</li><li>• Rock Instructors can work <u>Unsupervised</u> in Challenging terrain up to Grade III.</li><li>• Multi-Pitch Instructors can work <u>Unsupervised</u> in Challenging terrain up to Grade II.</li><li>• Multi-Pitch Instructors and Rock Instructors can work under <u>Supervision</u> in Challenging and Complex terrain up to Grade III and in Simple terrain up to Grade IV.</li><li>• Apprentice Rock Guides can work <u>Unsupervised</u> in Simple terrain up to Grade II.</li><li>• Apprentice Rock Guides can work under <u>Supervision</u> in Complex terrain up to Grade II and in Simple and Challenging terrain up to Grade III.</li><li>• Supervisors for this terrain are Rock Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides.</li></ul>

## ALPINE TERRAIN

### Alpine Terrain:

Alpine terrain includes Simple, Challenging, and Complex terrain with approaches, ascents, and descents that may include snow, ice, rock, and glaciated terrain. The routes can be long and involved with the majority of the terrain being 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> class with significant steps of 5<sup>th</sup> class. Guides, unless qualified through the Rock Guide track, should refrain from guiding long sections of high standard 5th class climbing—terrain that is more akin to Rock terrain.

#### Supervision

- Alpine Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides can work Unsupervised in Complex alpine terrain at any commitment grade.
- Assistant Alpine Guides can work Unsupervised in Complex terrain up to Alpine Grade IV.
- Assistant Alpine Guides can work under Supervision in Complex terrain up to Alpine Grade V.
- Apprentice Alpine Guides\* can work Unsupervised in Challenging terrain up to Alpine Grade III without significant ice climbing.
- Apprentice Alpine Guides\* who have also completed the Ice Instructor Course can work Unsupervised in Challenging terrain up to Alpine Grade III with significant alpine ice climbing.
- Apprentice Alpine Guides\* can work under Supervision in Complex terrain up to Alpine Grade IV.
- Alpine Rock Module Graduates\* can work Unsupervised in Simple alpine rock terrain up to Alpine Grade III and under Supervision in Challenging alpine rock terrain up to Alpine Grade III.
- Alpine Snow & Glacier Module Graduates\* can work Unsupervised in Simple alpine snow and glacier terrain up to Alpine Grade III and under Supervision in Challenging snow and glacier terrain up to Alpine Grade III.
- Alpine Skills Course Graduates\* can work under Supervision of an Assistant Alpine Guide, Alpine Guide, IFMGA Guide, or Tenured Guide for routes up to Alpine Grade II.
- Supervisors for this terrain are Alpine Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides.

\*Apprentice Alpine Guides have completed the Alpine Guide Course (either the 9-day pre 2025 AGC Course, the 8-day AGC, or BOTH the alpine rock and snow & glacier modules). The title and scope of an Apprentice Alpine Guide does not apply to graduates of the Alpine Skills Course, Alpine Rock Module or the Alpine Snow & Glacier Module.



## ICE TERRAIN

### Single Pitch Ice Terrain:

Single Pitch Ice terrain is Simple terrain up to Grade I, that is climbed without intermediate belays with approaches that do not require short-roping. Objective hazards such as avalanche and icefall should be minimized by practicing terrain avoidance.

Supervision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ice Instructors, Assistant Alpine Guides, Alpine Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides can work <u>Unsupervised</u> in this terrain.</li><li>• Graduates of the Ice Instructor Course can work <u>Unsupervised</u> in this terrain.</li><li>• Single Pitch Instructors, Multi-Pitch Instructors, Rock Instructors, Rock Guides, Apprentice and Assistant Rock Guides, Apprentice Alpine Guides, can work under <u>Supervision</u> in Simple single pitch terrain where they do not lead.</li><li>• Supervisors for this terrain are Assistant Alpine Guides, Ice Instructors, Alpine Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides.</li></ul>



### Multi-Pitch Ice Terrain:

Multi-Pitch Ice terrain includes Simple and Challenging terrain, up to Grade III, with approaches and descents that require minimal short-roping. The approach and/or descents should have only short sections of low angle ice or other hazards that require minimal management.

Supervision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ice Instructors, Alpine Guides, Assistant Alpine Guides, IFMGA Guides, Rock Guides who are a graduate of the Ice Instructor Course, and Tenured Guides can work <u>Unsupervised</u> in this terrain.</li><li>• Multi-Pitch Instructors and Rock Instructors, who are graduates of the Ice Instructor Course can work <u>Unsupervised</u> in Simple and Challenging terrain up to Grade II.</li><li>• Apprentice Alpine Guides and Apprentice Rock Guides who are also graduates of the Ice Instructor Course can work <u>Unsupervised</u> in Simple terrain up to Grade II.</li><li>• Guides/Instructors on multi-pitch ice routes that have significant avalanche hazard should have Professional Avalanche Training 1 (Pro 1) or Avalanche Level 2 training (prior to 2018).</li></ul>

## SKI & SPLITBOARD TERRAIN

### **Ski & Splitboard Terrain:**

Ski & Splitboard terrain includes glaciated, and non-glaciated terrain, ascents and descents that may involve short-roping on moderate rock and mixed terrain. Guides, unless qualified through the Alpine Guide track, should refrain from short-roping on difficult rock and ice terrain—terrain that is more akin to Alpine terrain.

#### **Supervision and Mentoring**

- Ski Guides, Splitboard Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides can work Unsupervised in this terrain.
- Assistant Ski & Splitboard Guides can work Unsupervised on non-glaciated terrain and under Supervision on glaciated terrain.
- Apprentice Ski & Splitboard Guides with Professional Avalanche Training 1 (Pro 1) can work under Supervision or Mentorship (see below) on non-glaciated terrain that does not involve rope work.
- Apprentice Ski & Splitboard Guides with Professional Avalanche Training 2 (Pro 2) can work Unsupervised on non-glaciated terrain that does not involve rope work.
- Apprentice Ski & Splitboard Guides can work under Supervision on non-glaciated terrain that involves rope work.
- Supervisors and Mentors for this terrain are Ski Guides, Splitboard Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides.
- Mentorship includes at a minimum: a review of the mentee's AM/PM forms, Run List and hazard assessment for each day.

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## **VI. In-House Training**

AMGA courses are considered the standard for technical training for specific terrain types. In-house training is a means of preparing Guides to meet the specific operational needs of a business. In-house training in conjunction with AMGA training and certification, may serve to develop well-rounded and competent Guides and employees.

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## **VII. Variances**

Professional members may anticipate situations in advance where working outside the SOP is difficult to avoid. The AMGA will consider issuing a variance to the member, so that, in defined situations, work outside of the SOP is permissible. More details on the variance request process can be found on the AMGA [website](#).

- Variances will be issued based on standard guidelines or by the AMGA Board of Directors appointed SOP Committee
- The AMGA Board of Directors may approve detailed guidelines to be used in granting variances

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## **VIII. Enforcement and Compliance**

It is the AMGA's expectation that guides, instructors, and accredited businesses will follow the Scope of Practice as per the AMGA Code of Ethics and Conduct. Guide Managers who are AMGA members may also be held accountable for scheduling guides outside of their SOP. An enforcement and compliance process exists in the event that an AMGA professional member or accredited business does not comply with SOP. The details of the compliance process can be found on the AMGA [website](#), as well as within the Professional Compliance Manual.

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## **IX. Clarifications and Edits to this Document**

### **Clarifications:**

Situations may arise where the terrain or other descriptions may not provide adequate detail to appropriately apply the SOP. If such a question arises, an AMGA professional member, accredited business, or other stakeholder may request a clarification.

- Clarifications will be issued by the Technical Director ("TD") or an individual designated by the TD or they may defer action until the next meeting of the AMGA Board

- The Scope of Practice Committee may revise or rescind the TD's clarification as it sees fit, the AMGA Board of Directors will be informed of and may modify the committee's actions
- Clarifications approved by the Board will be listed on the AMGA website

**Edits:**

It is the objective of the AMGA that the general intent of this document will remain unchanged. The goal is to provide consistent guidance to AMGA members and accredited businesses. It is recognized, however, that infrequent clarifications or adjustments on terrain descriptions, training levels, Supervision, Mentorship, or other topics may be necessary. The AMGA Board of Directors will consider these edits as needed.

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**Appendix: Avalanche Education****Avalanche Education Instructor Statement:**

The AMGA recognizes the fundamental differences of avalanche education instruction as compared to ski & splitboard guiding in snow-covered terrain. While the goals and objectives of avalanche education are different for students on avalanche courses than those of clients on a guided day or objective, backcountry risks and use of terrain exposed to avalanche hazard is not exclusive to ski & splitboard guiding.

The AMGA recommends that all members conducting avalanche education have the standard of training at the Apprentice Ski Guide level given the evolution and growth of avalanche education.

It is the responsibility of the individual AMGA member and Avalanche Education Provider, to ensure the individuals instructing avalanche education in the field are competent to perform the tasks required for their employment.

The AMGA will address a long-range plan for avalanche education Scope of Practice that will replace this short-term solution. This will entail collaboration with other stakeholders in the avalanche education industry and may result in terrain specific training standards.