



## **SCOPE OF PRACTICE**

Approved April 7, 2017  
Draft Update July 12, 2021

*To highlight the updates to this draft all changes and additions have been added as bold and italicized text. These are draft changes and subject to approval by the Board of Directors at their September 2021 meeting.*

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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 (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.

Until *July* 1st, 2022, this document is educational for AMGA accredited businesses and AMGA professional members (except SPI providers, for whom this is a condition of their contract beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018). After *July* 1st, 2022, compliance is mandatory for AMGA accredited businesses and AMGA professional members. See section VIII, Implementation and Enforcement, for complete details on these topics. (This paragraph to be removed after 7/1/22.)

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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.

**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.

**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 working relationship between Guides certified by the AMGA in a given terrain type or Tenured Guides 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 or near each other on multi-pitch routes. Supervision includes periodic briefings and debriefings about route selection, strategy, and client care. Throughout a supervised activity, the supervised Guide and their supervisor may be out of sight of each other and may or may not (as feasible) be in radio or phone contact.

**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.

**Mentoring:** Mentoring is an informal, voluntary relationship between a more experienced Guide and one with less experience. It is a learning and development partnership between a Guide with significant experience and someone who wants to learn. Mentoring often includes informal communication, 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.

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## **II. Supervision and Mentoring**

Mentoring and Supervision 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, Mentors, and Supervisors to provide Apprenticeship. It is imperative that accredited businesses, Mentors, and Supervisors 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, or Ice Instructor Exam.

Example: An individual who has passed the Climbing Wall Instructor Certification Course is a Climbing Wall Instructor. An individual who has passed the Single Pitch Instructor assessment is a Single Pitch Instructor. An individual who has passed the Rock Instructor Exam is a Rock Instructor.

**Apprentice Guide:** An individual who has successfully completed any first level course (Alpine Skills Course, Rock Guide Course, Alpine Guide Course, 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 Apprentice Guide, but needs to work under Supervision.

**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 Aspirant Exam is an Assistant Rock Guide.

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

Example: An individual who has passed the Rock, Alpine, and Ski Aspirant Exams is an Aspirant 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 Aspirant 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.

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#### **IV. Definition of Remote Terrain**

**Remote Terrain**: Remote Terrain is defined as terrain with significant and/or complex approaches and descents, typically requiring two or more hours from the trailhead. Access to definitive medical care will be significantly delayed. Remote Terrain may be approached and descended in one day as on a significant rock, alpine, or ski objective, or it may involve less demanding routes where backcountry camping is involved.

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#### **V. Terrain, Supervision, and Mentoring**

##### **Terrain Types:**

Terrain for Guides is defined based on these categories.

- Climbing Wall Instructor
- Single Pitch Instructor

- Rock Instructor
- *Glacier Guide (to be added to this document in September 2021)*
- *Multi-Pitch Instructor (to be added to this document in September 2021)*
- Ice Instructor
- Rock Guide
- Alpine Guide
- Ski Guide

***Terrain Descriptions:***

*These descriptions are further clarified by the AMGA Route Catalog (coming summer 2021) which contains commonly guided climbs from around the United States including specifics on required training and certification levels for guiding each route.*

**Climbing Wall Instructor Terrain:**

Climbing Wall Instructor 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 have been certified to teach climbing on naturally occurring rock formations.

**Single Pitch Instructor Terrain:**

Single Pitch Instructor terrain is outdoor 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.

<p><b>Supervision and Mentoring</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single Pitch Instructors, Rock Instructors, Apprentice Rock Guides, Assistant Rock Guides, Rock Guides, Apprentice Alpine Guides (excepting Alpine Skills Course Graduates), 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 the <u>Supervision</u> of a Single Pitch Instructor, Rock Instructor, Rock Guide, IFMGA Guide, or Tenured Guide.</li> </ul>
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- Mentors for this terrain are Rock Instructors, Rock Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides.

### **Rock Instructor Terrain:**

Rock Instructor terrain is outdoor terrain that is not Remote Terrain, up to Grade III, with approaches and descents that require minimal short roping. The approach and/or descent should have only short sections of Class 3 and/or Class 4 terrain that does not require movement on snow which would create a falling hazard. The routes should not exceed Grade III in length.

#### **Supervision and Mentoring**

- Rock Instructors, Assistant Rock Guides, Rock Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides can work Unsupervised in this terrain.
- Apprentice Rock Guides can work Unsupervised on routes up to Grade II and under Supervision of a Rock Guide, IFMGA Guide, or Tenured Guide on routes up to Grade III.
- Mentors for this terrain are Assistant Rock Guides, Rock Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides.

### **Ice Instructor Terrain:**

- Single Pitch Ice Instructor terrain is outdoor terrain that is not Remote Terrain and has approaches with no short roping. Objective hazards such as avalanche and icefall should be minimized by practicing terrain avoidance.
- Multi-Pitch Ice Instructor terrain is not Remote 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. The routes should be no longer than 3-4 pitches.

#### **Supervision and Mentoring – In single pitch ice terrain**

- Ice Instructors, Assistant Alpine Guides, Alpine Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides can work Unsupervised in this terrain.
- Graduates of the Ice Instructor Course can work Unsupervised in this terrain.
- Single Pitch Instructors, Rock Instructors, Rock Guides, Apprentice and Assistant Rock Guides, Apprentice Alpine Guides, can work under Supervision of an Ice Instructor, Assistant Alpine Guide, Alpine Guide, IFMGA Guide, or Tenured Guide on single pitch terrain where they do not lead.
- Mentors for this terrain are Ice Instructors, Alpine Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides.

### **Supervision and Mentoring – In multi-pitch ice terrain**

- 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 Unsupervised in this terrain.
- Rock Instructors who are graduates of the Ice Instructor Course can work Unsupervised on routes up to Grade II.
- Apprentice Alpine Guides who are also graduates of the Ice Instructor Course can work Unsupervised on routes up to Grade II.
- Mentors for this terrain are Alpine Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides.
- Guides/Instructors on multi-pitch ice routes that have significant avalanche terrain should have *Professional Avalanche Training 1 (Pro 1)*.

### **Rock Guide Terrain:**

Rock Guide terrain includes Rock Instructor terrain and Remote Terrain, at any commitment grade, with approaches and descents that require substantial short-roping. The approach and/or descent should not require movement on snow or ice that creates a falling hazard. Rock Guides, excepting those who are 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 Guide terrain.

### **Supervision and Mentoring**

- Rock Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides can work Unsupervised in this terrain.
- Assistant Rock Guides can work Unsupervised on routes up to Grade IV.
- Apprentice Rock Guides can work under Supervision of a Rock Guide, IFMGA Guide, or Tenured Guide on routes up to Grade II. This allows for Mentoring in complex short roping and route finding terrain.
- Rock Instructors can work under Supervision of a Rock Guide, IFMGA Guide, or Tenured Guide for routes up to Grade III. This allows for Mentorship in complex short roping and route finding terrain.
- Mentors for this terrain are Rock Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides.

### **Alpine Guide Terrain:**

Alpine Guide terrain includes Rock Instructor terrain and Remote Terrain, up to alpine Grade V, with approaches and descents that may include snow, ice, and glaciated terrain. The routes can be long and complex 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. Alpine Guides, excepting those who are 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 Guide terrain.

### **Supervision and Mentoring**

- Alpine Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides can work Unsupervised in this terrain.
- Assistant Alpine Guides can work Unsupervised for routes up to Alpine Grade IV.
- Apprentice Alpine Guides with *Professional Avalanche Training 1 (Pro 1)* can work Unsupervised for routes up to Alpine Grade III without significant ice climbing.
- Apprentice Alpine Guides with *Professional Avalanche Training 1 (Pro 1)* who have also completed the Ice Instructor Course can work Unsupervised for routes up to Alpine Grade III with significant alpine ice climbing.
- Apprentice Alpine Guides can work under Supervision of an Alpine Guide, IFMGA Guide, or Tenured Guide for routes up to Alpine Grade IV.
- Graduates of the Alpine Skills Course can work under Supervision of an Assistant Alpine Guide, Alpine Guide, IFMGA Guide, or Tenured Guide for routes up to Alpine Grade II.
- Mentors for this terrain are Alpine Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides.

**Ski Guide Terrain:** Ski Guide terrain includes Remote Terrain, glaciated, and non-glaciated terrain, ascents and descents that may involve short roping on moderate rock and ice terrain. Ski Guides, excepting those who are qualified through the Alpine Guide track, should refrain from short roping on difficult rock and ice terrain—terrain that is more akin to Alpine Guide terrain.

### **Supervision and Mentoring**

- Ski Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides can work Unsupervised in this terrain.
- Apprentice Ski Guides with *Professional Avalanche Training 1 (Pro 1)* can work under Mentorship or Supervision of a Ski Guide, IFMGA Guide, or Tenured Guide on non-glaciated terrain that does not involve rope work. Apprentice Ski Guides with *Professional Avalanche Training 2 (Pro 2)* can work Unsupervised on non-glaciated terrain that does not involve rope work.
- Assistant Ski Guides can work Unsupervised on non-glaciated terrain.
- Assistant Ski Guides can work under Supervision of a Ski Guide, IFMGA Guide, or Tenured Guide on glaciated terrain.
- Mentors for this terrain are Ski Guides, IFMGA Guides, and Tenured Guides.

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

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



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## **VII. Clarifications, Variances, 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
- Clarifications issued by the Technical Director will be reviewed by a committee appointed by the AMGA Board
- The Board appointed 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

### **Variances:**

As mentioned in the introduction to this document, Guides in the field may find themselves in situations where deviation from the SOP is unavoidable. Professional members, accredited businesses, or outdoor education organizations may also anticipate situations in advance where working outside the SOP is difficult to avoid. The AMGA will consider issuing a variance to the member, accredited business, or outdoor education organization so that, in defined situations, work outside of the SOP is permissible.

- Variances will be issued by the Technical Director ("TD") or an individual designated by the TD
- The applicant must demonstrate a need that is not able to be fulfilled without a variance
- Variances issued or denied by the TD will be reviewed by a committee appointed by the AMGA Board of Directors
- The Board appointed 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
- Variances for non-accredited organizations will only be issued to organizations (or individual AMGA members working at an organization) whose primary focus/mission is education and not a guiding business
- Non-accredited organizations granted a variance must have an internal staff training process for the relevant terrain and a risk management plan
- The AMGA Board of Directors may approve detailed guidelines to be used in granting variances

**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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**VIII. Implementation & Enforcement** (this section to be removed after *July 1, 2022*)

Initially the SOP will be a fundamental component of all AMGA educational programs with the intent of clearly educating students with respect to the specific terrain and skills for which the students will be trained. This information will also be available to the guided/instructed public. The SOP will be an educational document with no formal enforcement mechanism until its adoption becomes mandatory.

As of *July 1, 2022* the SOP will be mandatory for AMGA professional members and accredited businesses. SOP compliance will be recommended for Single Pitch Instructor Course Providers beginning in 2017 and be required as a condition of their contract in 2018. The SOP will establish the scope of work for members at all training/certification levels, and it will also be accompanied by an enforcement mechanism developed by the Professional Compliance Committee ("PCC") and approved by the AMGA Board of Directors. This enforcement mechanism will include procedures for evaluating deviations from the SOP, recommendations for compliance, and where appropriate, sanctions.

**Accredited Businesses:**

For accredited businesses, the following is a suggested timetable that may assist with implementation of SOP by steadily increasing the percentage of Guides operating within SOP:

January 1, 2018 – 60%  
January 1, 2019 – 70%  
January 1, 2020 – 80%  
January 1, 2021 – 90%  
*July 1, 2022* – 100% (mandatory)

This suggested timetable will be distributed to all AMGA accredited businesses and any businesses interested in seeking accreditation. This suggested timetable is for accredited businesses only and does not apply to individual guides.

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**Appendix: Avalanche Education**

*In the 2017/18 winter season the American Avalanche Association (AAA) implemented changes to the Avalanche Education system in the United States. For details on the updated avalanche education framework and additional information please [click here](#).*

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