ADVENTURE ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

# SNow Activities

Schools must follow the Department’s Excursion Policy and Guidelines and the requirements outlined in this document when planning, conducting and approving adventure activities.

These guidelines are for developing risk management plans specific to the location, activity and group participating. They are not intended to be used as a training manual. Staff instructing the activity must have sufficient knowledge/expertise in the activity.

Snow sports are conducted within alpine resort and non-resort areas. These guidelines cover cross-country skiing, downhill skiing and snowboarding. Where snow activities are planned outside resort areas, staff must also follow the guidelines for Bushwalking.

If an overnight camping component is planned, please also refer to Camping guidelines.

These guidelines do not cover competitive snow sports.

## activity Definitions

**Cross-country skiing** –is sometimes referred to as Nordic skiing. Cross-country skiing may include skiing on groomed trails as well as on ungroomed snow. Cross-country skiing can include skate style skiing and cross-country ski touring.Cross-country skiing uses skis that traditionally have a binding system with no heel connection. Instead, they have an attachment at the toe allowing a more natural walking motion on skis. Cross-country skis may have a pattern known as a fish scale in the base of the skis to allow for grip whilst sliding on a flat or a hill. Cross-country skis without a patterned base maybe used for skate skiing technique. Cross-country skis designed for off-trail use, variable snow conditions, extended touring and carrying heavy loads are often wider under foot with cable binding and may have metal edges.

**Downhill or alpine skiing** – involves the use of skis with smooth bases that can slide both forwards and backwards. Ski boots are sturdy, providing solid ankle support, and attach to the ski with a toe and heel binding, which have adjustable release mechanisms designed to reduce the risk of injury in the event of a fall.

**Telemark** – equipment is similar to downhill skiing, but the heel of the boot is not attached directly to the ski.

**Snowboarding** – involves the use of a board that can slide in all directions. Boots are sturdy, provide ankle support, and are attached to the board with bindings not designed to disengage in a fall. Snowboarding stance and skills are similar in many respects to those of surfing or skateboarding.

The terms***ski*** and ***skiing*** are used in this document to describe downhill skiing, snowboarding, telemark and cross-country skiing in resort areas.

## VENUE Definitions

**Resort areas** – are permanent crown land reserves managed by an [Alpine Resort Management Board](https://www.arcc.vic.gov.au/the-alpine-resorts) with some or all of the following features:

* accommodation
* professional ski instruction schools
* marked and/or groomed ski trails
* medical service
* search and rescue facility
* ski patrol service
* some type of skier lift.

**Non-resort areas** – are beyond managed resort boundaries where few if any resources may be available. For example, there may be no ski patrol, road clearing or access to immediate medical services.

## Staffing definitions

**Staff** – any adult approved by the principal who provides supervisory, instructional or educational elements of the activity or excursion. See Excursions Guidelines: Staffing for further details.

**Teacher** – a staff member registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching who provides a supervisory role on a program.

The following roles can be filled by school staff, a teacher or an external provider, or a volunteer (See [Volunteers in Schools](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/volunteers/policy) policy).

**Designated Instructor** – the appointed staff member on a program who provides the lead technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Instructor** – a staff member who provides professional, technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Assistant Instructor** – a staff member who provides assistance to the instructor(s) in the provision of technical expertise and supervision for the activity. An assistant instructor role may be filled by a volunteer (See: Volunteers in Schools Policy).

## Environment

Alpine snow environments can be unfamiliar settings for students and present hazards which may not be immediately obvious. Environmental factors need to be considered when planning snow activities. Snow activities may be affected by, yet not limited to, environmental conditions such as air temperature, winds, surrounding landscape and vegetation, prevailing weather and micro climates.

Alpine environments are extremely variable by nature. Conditions need to be planned for and monitored regularly in the lead up to, and during the activity.

When preparing for snow activities, staff should consider ways to minimise the environmental impact of the activity.

## Transport

Schools must ensure that buses with a capacity greater than 12 seats entering prescribed hazardous areas must have an annual hazardous areas inspection and a current certificate. The driver must also hold a current Hazardous Areas Authority and carry the required equipment for hazardous areas.

Further information can be obtained from [VicRoads](http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/Home).

## Student preparAtion and skills

Planning for activities should begin with an assessment of students’ current knowledge, skills and experience in snow environments.

The assessment of students’ current knowledge, skills and experience in the activity should be documented using [Documentation of Participant Preparation, Pre-requisite Skills/Knowledge​ ​ (doc - 139kb)](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/participrep.doc).

First time skiers and beginners must undertake ski lessons to receive competent instruction in basic skills, taking into account such factors as snow conditions, weather, terrain and the progress of students.

The instructor should ascertain the previous experience of each student.

Instructional staff must brief students on:

* equipment, clothing and footwear that is suitable for the activity and location
* safety measures appropriate to control risks associated with the activity and the environment
* minimal environmental impact techniques relevant to the activity and location
* historical and cultural considerations relevant to the activity and location
* activity scope and boundaries
* communication and communication signals
* relevant terminology.
* a summary of the emergency plan, including methods of emergency communication
* management of group on the snow
* expected weather conditions and what this means for the activity
* the Alpine Responsibility Code specifically
  + the importance of always skiing in control and within ability
  + lift use and riding procedures when appropriate.

Students must be instructed in the safe use of all ski equipment and taken through a recognised progression of skills on appropriate terrain. These skills include yet are not limited to, sidestepping, diagonal stride, basic snow plough and how to fall and get up safely. For novice groups, groomed trails of beginner standard are appropriate for introductory sessions. Competent instruction will include information about snow conditions, weather, and terrain, and implications of changing conditions.

Prior to undertaking overnight cross-country ski trips where carrying heavy packs is required, participants must have previously undertaken cross-country skiing lessons and demonstrated skiing skills sufficient to competently ski with packs the terrain to be encountered.

## Equipment

All equipment used must be in sound condition, suitable for the activity and must meet applicable industry safety standards.

##### Eye protection

All students must wear sunglasses or goggles to protect their eyes from glare off the snow, which even on cloudy days can lead to snow blindness. Sunglasses complying with Australian Standard (AS/NZS 1067) will provide the best UV protection. Where there is the prospect of strong winds, heavy snowfall or higher speed skiing, goggles will provide better eye protection and are recommended.

##### Hand protection

Gloves or mitts to prevent sunburn, frostnip and abrasions while skiing must be worn.

##### Helmets

For downhill resort skiing and snowboarding, helmets must be worn by students and staff.

Helmets designed and approved to BS EN 1077 (specification for helmets for alpine skiers) must be used. For more information on helmets for skiing see the [SNELL Memorial Foundation](http://www.smf.org/).

For cross-country skiing the use of helmets should be considered based on the activity, student ability, terrain and conditions.

To determine whether helmets should be worn, consider:

* the skills and experience of participants in relation to the terrain participants are likely to encounter
* artificial hazards in the activity environment
* natural hazards in the activity environment.

If staff members consider that helmets should be worn, they must wear them too. The decision for students not to wear helmets must be documented in the risk register.

##### Ski equipment

All ski equipment must be matched to the skills and experience of each student and the type of skiing to be undertaken. All equipment including protective equipment must be correctly sized, adjusted and matched to participant’s ability, experience and intended purpose.

To prevent dangerous runaway ski equipment, downhill skis must have working ski brakes, Telemark skis must have working brakes or ski leashes. Snowboards must have leashes.

Common protective equipment includes helmets, wrist guards, padding and back braces.

Equipment required for an overnight tour may differ from a day trip on groomed trails.

##### Ski touring equipment

Day touring and overnight parties must carry with them appropriate equipment for ski touring in alpine environments. This should include:

* four season tents which provide shelter for all members of the group
* stoves and fuel suitable for cold, windy alpine environments, for which students have had safety instruction
* emergency food that does not require lengthy preparation, for each participant
* four season sleeping bags packed to ensure they remain dry
* insulating sleeping mats
* comprehensive ski, boot and pole repair kit
* snow shovels.

If touring parties are travelling in possible avalanche terrain\*, participants must be briefed on the dangers and methods of travel in it. Participants should all carry avalanche beacons, probes and shovels and be trained in their use prior to entering possible avalanche terrain.

\*For information regarding Australian snow and avalanche conditions, refer to [Mountain Sports Collective](http://mountainsportscollective.org/).

## Clothing

For cold conditions encountered in snow activities, students and staff should have a change of clothing available. Clothing for snow activities should allow participants to remain warm even when wet and should be worn in layers with inner insulating layers and outer windproof and waterproof layers. Cotton fabrics should be avoided.

To protect against sunburn use broad-spectrum, water-resistant SPF 30+ or higher sunscreen on all exposed parts of the body, applied according to manufacturer’s recommendations. Hats must not interfere with helmet effectiveness if worn or pose a risk to the wearer.

Having a name tag in an obvious place (with school name and a contact phone number) can help the Ski Patrol locate staff should a student be lost or injured.

Staff and students should ensure that they are able to be seen by wearing high visibility clothing such as bright colours and/or reflective materials.

## Experience and qualifications

Staff instructing the activity should have sufficient knowledge and experience of the activity and the activity environment to operate in all reasonably foreseeable conditions.

In Victorian Alpine Resorts, official ski lessons may only be provided by resort staff. All Schools must confirm their plans and intentions with resort management prior to commencement.

For general skiing lessons outside the defined resort, the designated skiing staff must have one of the following:

* an [Australian Professional Snowsport Instructors](http://www.apsi.net.au/) Level 1 Nordic Ski qualification
* a ski guide certification, for overnight touring trips and/or more complex mountain terrain
* equivalent documented ski instructor or ski guide training and experience from a training provider or education institution
* equivalent documented experience in lieu of certification/accreditation.

Equivalent training and/or experience should include staff having:

* sound cross-country ski skills and techniques
* relevant knowledge of ski instruction for teaching beginner and intermediate skiers
* knowledge of ski touring and travelling techniques in various snow conditions and terrain
* knowledge of snow camping techniques for touring
* safety, rescue, risk and emergency management practices suitable for alpine environments.

The designated assistant to the instructor must:

* have experience in the activity at the level being offered to students
* be able to assume a supervisory role during the activity
* have the ability to participate competently in emergency response procedures
* have conferred with the instructor to establish the emergency response and supervision responsibilities.

[Documentation of staff qualifications and experience (doc - 151kb)](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/staffqual.doc) must be used to document staff experience and training in lieu of the listed qualifications.

Where an external contractor is chosen to run all or part of this activity, see: Excursions Guidelines – External Providers.

## Supervision

Supervision is the critical factor in managing risk in the outdoors.

A minimum of two staff members must be present for each activity, one with main responsibility for activity instruction and the other to assist the instructor.

During official ski school lessons the ski school instructor may be included as part of the supervision staff allocation. A school teacher must be present for ski school lessons.

It may be necessary to increase the staff allocation based on ability to observe or monitor students on activity with consideration to:

* students (medical conditions, age, maturity, ability and experience)
* group (dynamics and size)
* staff (medical conditions, age, ability and experience, qualifications and skills)
* location (remoteness, communications and environmental conditions).

Reasons for increasing staff allocations must be documented.

The following table shows the minimum staff-to-student allocation that must be used for snow sports.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Cross-country skiing (day) | |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers |
| 2 | Up to 16 |
| 3 | 17–24 |
| 4 | 25–32 |
| Cross-country skiing (overnight) | |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers |
| 2 | Up to 12 |
| 3 | 13–18 |
| 4 | 19–24 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Downhill skiing (day activities only)** | |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers |
| 2 | Up to 16 |
| 3 | 17–24 |
| 4 | 25–32 |
| Snowboarding (day activities only) | |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers |
| 2 | Up to 16 |
| 3 | 17–24 |
| 4 | 25–32 |

The teacher in charge is responsible for the supervision strategy, which must be endorsed by the school principal as part of the excursion approval process. Staff members must supervise students according to that strategy and in accordance with their duty of care. It is the role of the teacher in charge to clearly and adequately explain the supervision strategy to all participating staff members.

Students not directly participating in the activity must be separately supervised in line with Excursions Guidelines – Supervision.

## Peak bodies and expert advice

Alpine Responsibility Code <http://snowsafe.org.au/alpine-responsibility-code/>

[Snow Safe](http://www.snowsafe.org.au/)  <http://snowsafe.org.au/>

Australian Professional Snowsports Instructors  <https://www.apsi.net.au/>

Australian Ski Areas Association  <http://asaa.org.au/>

[Australian Ski Patrollers Association](http://www.skipatrol.org.au/)  <http://www.skipatrol.org.au/>

Mountain Sport Collective - Ski touring and Avalanche information

<http://mountainsportscollective.org/new-page-2>

Outdoors Victoria <https://outdoorsvictoria.org.au>

SNELL Memorial Foundation <http://www.smf.org/home.html>

Victorian Snow Report​ <https://www.ski.com.au/reports/australia/vic/index.html>

For further enquiries, please contact [community.stakeholders@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:community.stakeholders@edumail.vic.gov.au)

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