AMGA
Single Pitch Instructor
Program Handbook | 4th Edition

AMERICAN MOUNTAIN GUIDES ASSOCIATION

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AMGA Single Pitch Instructor Program Handbook

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Introduction

The widely known American Mountain Guides Association (AMGA) Single Pitch Instructor (SPI) Program was first created in 2008 and gained UIAA endorsement in 2009. Since its inception, the core curriculum and program format have remained relatively consistent. In 2014, the curriculum was divided between this handbook and a supplemental single pitch climbing textbook, marking the first formal separation of program operations and technical instructional content. More recently, from 2018–2026, AMGA expanded access through Affinity Programs, serving over 300 students from underrepresented populations.

The first significant program update occurred in 2024, marked by a comprehensive revision of this handbook. The update refined assessment categories and scoring, clarified program proficiencies, and expanded the depth and clarity of program policies and candidate resources. Although elements of assessment language and documentation were modernized, the underlying instructional goals of the SPI Program remained unchanged.

As of 2026, this edition reflects updates to the SPI Exam structure, along with refinements to candidate resume requirements, including the introduction of a standardized expanded skills scenario and the integration of peer-to-peer teaching assessment. These changes strengthen the assessment framework while maintaining alignment with established SPI standards and outcomes. In support of these exam updates, minor refinements have also been made to select SPI Course sessions, including the course orientation and closing review sessions, to improve clarity, modernize language related to professionalism, and better align in-person instruction with existing eLearning content. The overall course flow, curriculum scope, and instructional intent remain unchanged.

The year 2026 also marks a milestone with the first revision of the SPI textbook since 2014. The updated text, *Rock Climbing: The Official AMGA Single Pitch Manual*, features modernized content and a new title, and will be available beginning May 2026.

Things that have changed:

- Updated program overview materials, policies, and candidate resources
- Updated evaluation templates and assessment framework (2024), including revised categories, proficiency definitions, and scoring
- Revised SPI Exam format (2026), incorporating peer-to-peer teaching assessment and a standardized top-skills scenario
- Refined framing of course orientation, professionalism, and end-of-course review sessions, to support clarity and consistency within current instructional contexts

Things that have not changed:
- Program format, duration, core curriculum, and certification length

This handbook contains information for SPI candidates and AMGA-licensed SPI Providers offering AMGA SPI Programs. It is intended to be used in conjunction with the SPI textbook *Rock Climbing: The Official AMGA Single Pitch Manual*, published by the American Mountain Guides Association, with contributions from Gaines, Martin, and Megas-Russell. This handbook defines the operational frameworks, program policies, and exam standards that promote consistency across SPI courses and exams, regardless of location or instructional staff. This consistency ensures that candidates are taught, coached, and examined to the same standard over time and supports a professional, credible program experience.

Program Overview

Rock climbing is more visible and accessible than ever, with many people first encountering the sport through climbing gyms, media, and organized programs, as well as on single pitch cliffs across the country. Whether their introduction occurs indoors or outdoors, a large percentage of participants engage in group climbing experiences sponsored by schools, churches, climbing gyms, scout groups, guide services, or summer camp programs. For many, a professionally led experience is their first opportunity to climb outdoors. Through the Single Pitch Instructor Program, the AMGA seeks to ensure that these early experiences are delivered with a high standard of instruction, risk management, and enjoyment. The SPI Program also promotes appreciation for and stewardship of the finite resources found at single pitch climbing areas. These standards are achieved through experience, personal qualities, training, and credentialing.

The AMGA Single Pitch Instructor Program is designed to enable instructors to "*proficiently facilitate and instruct the sport of rock climbing in a single pitch setting.*" The program is intended for active rock climbers who have a strong desire to teach in a single pitch environment. Candidates should be passionate climbers who own their own equipment, climb regularly, and have at least 12 months of outdoor rock climbing experience. Participants may include university faculty who teach climbing, climbing instructors, scout leaders, summer camp professionals, or climbers seeking additional training, experience, and certification for employment in the outdoor adventure and education industry.

The SPI Course is not a "climbing" course. It is an instructor training course for active, proficient rock climbers and aspiring climbing instructors seeking SPI certification. The course focuses on instructor-specific topics such as professionalism, teaching techniques, risk management, group site organization, climbing site conservation and Leave No Trace practices, and assistance and rescue skills. Single Pitch Instructor certification represents the second stage of the AMGA Climbing Instructor Certification Program and may serve as a foundation for candidates pursuing further professional development within the AMGA system.

The SPI Program consists of a three-day (27-hour) training course followed by a separate two-day (16-hour) exam. Certification is valid for three years, provided the instructor

maintains current AMGA membership and appropriate medical certification for the location in which they will be working. After three years, SPIs may renew certification by successfully completing the SPI Exam. Any SPI who attains certification in an AMGA Mountain Guide Program discipline is granted permanent SPI certification status, contingent upon maintaining AMGA membership and the appropriate level of medical certification.

Audience:

Candidates on Single Pitch Instructor Courses and Examinations. This manual was written to help candidates prepare for and complete the AMGA Single Pitch Instructor Course and Certification Exams. AMGA members may also find this a helpful resource for conducting programs in the field, supplementing their previous training and certification.

Participation Statement

The AMGA recognizes that climbing and mountaineering involve inherent risks, including the potential for serious injury or death. Participants accept responsibility for these risks. Professional climbing instructors play an important role in helping students or clients manage risk, develop skills, and maximize enjoyment; however, risk cannot be eliminated. The AMGA provides training, assessment, and educational resources to support instructors in delivering high-quality experiences in climbing and mountaineering environments.

AMGA Mission Statement

To be the leader in education, standards, and advocacy for professional guides and climbing instructors.

AMGA Membership

AMGA membership connects instructors to a national community committed to high standards of instruction, risk management, and professional conduct in climbing education.

Membership dues help sustain AMGA programs, including curriculum and assessment development and instructor education. Active AMGA membership is required to hold a valid SPI certification and to access member-only resources.

Candidates and certified instructors are responsible for maintaining current membership throughout their certification period. New members may join, and current members may renew or update their membership using the QR code or link provided.

Join or Renew Membership

AMGA Code of Ethics and Conduct

The AMGA Code of Ethics and Conduct demonstrates the commitment AMGA members make to uphold high standards of ethics and professionalism. The AMGA Code of Ethics and Conduct ensures exceptional service to the public, promotes respect and integrity among AMGA members, and advances the professionalism of the industry.

1. Managing risk and the welfare of our clients is our prime concern.

2. Where possible and practical, we should provide assistance to persons having difficulty by offering help which is appropriate under the circumstances. In providing assistance to others, we should avoid compromising the welfare of our clients.

3. Our clients have the right to expect us to be up-to-date on the latest methods and techniques and to use appropriate and well-functioning equipment.

4. We must be aware of our own physical, technical, and experiential limitations. We should use routes and terrain that are within our expertise and capabilities.

5. We are expected to teach and practice Leave No Trace principles and to be knowledgeable of local natural history.

6. We facilitate a welcoming and inclusive environment for all people, regardless of their intersecting identities whether based in gender, race, sexuality, religion or any other identity.

7. We will not engage in any form of discrimination, harassment, or other prohibited behavior as described in the Anti-Harassment and Prohibited Behavior Policy.

8. As representatives of the AMGA we must conduct ourselves in a manner that reflects well on the AMGA. This applies during AMGA programs as well as anytime we are interacting with clients, the public, our fellow guides, government agencies, and others.

9. We must understand our level of training and certification as defined by the AMGA Scope of Practice (SOP). After July 1, 2022, we will work only within our training and certification level(s) as defined by the SOP.

10. We will accurately and unambiguously represent the level of our training and certification to clients, the public, government agencies, and others as described in the AMGA Brand Use Policy.

11. We must work within the regulatory, permit, certification, and aspirant requirements of the country and/or land management agency in or under which we intend to work. We must obey all laws, rules, and regulations applicable to our guiding or other activities.

Course and Exam Conduct

A successful outcome for these programs depends on the conduct of students and the Program Provider (instructor). Appropriate conduct is expected throughout the program and can be summarized by:

- Conservative Risk Management
- Mutual Respect and Cultural Competence
- Openness to Learning and Collaboration

Risk Management -
A conservative approach to risk management should be followed by the students and instructors at all times. A primary duty of a professional climbing instructor is to manage risk. The instructors will role model this while demonstrating tools, techniques and concepts as well as managing risks at the crag. Students will need to emulate this.

Mutual Respect and Cultural Competence -
Acknowledge the uniqueness and vulnerabilities of every student. It is the responsibility of the instructors and students to create a safe learning environment. Appreciate that a degree of vulnerability is integral to learning. Certain behaviors compromise a safe learning environment. Vital ways to maintain respect and project an appropriate tone are as follows:

- Avoid inappropriate jokes, innuendo and cliques.
- Don't make assumptions. Every student and every instructor is unique. Make an effort to get to know each other as you would clients with openness and respect.
- Recognize and appreciate differences. Opinions, feelings and perspectives are unique to individuals and not necessarily shared by others. Be open to valuing other perspectives and acting respectfully to each individual on the course.

Be open to learning and collaboration -
The least effective use of time is to spend these courses validating what is already known. Instead, seek to learn new ways of doing things, accept constructive feedback and observe the Instructor's teaching styles. If students are not open to learning, the course will not be productive.

- Take the opportunity to try new skills and make non-critical mistakes
- Assist other students with skills that may be more familiar
- Ask for help and clarification - don't feel a need to "prove" skills that are unfamiliar

AMGA Scope of Practice

The AMGA believes that all professional members and accredited businesses should operate under clearly defined minimum standards as is outlined in the official AMGA Scope of Practice (SOP) document. 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.

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.

No training or certification structure, including SOP, can provide a guarantee of safety given the inherent and other risks associated with climbing and skiing.

AMGA Single Pitch Instructors, those who have passed the SPI Exam, and Single Pitch Instructor Course graduates, can operate in Single Pitch Rock Terrain as stated below within the Supervision guidelines.

Single Pitch 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

Supervision is a working relationship between Instructors or Guides certified by the AMGA in a given terrain type and Instructors or Guides in training for that terrain. Supervision implies working in close proximity in a single-pitch setting at close crags.

- Single Pitch Instructors, Multi-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 Unsupervised in this terrain.
- Graduates of the Single Pitch Instructor Course or Alpine Skills Course can work under the Supervision of a Single Pitch Instructor, Assistant Rock Guide, Rock Instructor, Multi-Pitch Instructor, Rock Guide, IFMGA Guide, or Tenured Guide.

Learn more about Scope of Practice on the AMGA website

The official Scope of Practice document is the standard for compliance. See document for complete details on supervision, terrain descriptions, and other scopes not included here.

Program Policies

SPI Program Hours and Ratios

An SPI Course is:
1. A minimum of 27 hours, normally run as three consecutive nine-hour days or day-field sessions with evening classes.
2. Not to exceed a ratio of six students to one current SPI Program Provider.
3. Not to exceed twelve total students directed by two current SPI Program Providers.

An SPI Exam is:
1. A minimum of 16 hours run over two consecutive days.
2. Not to exceed a ratio of six candidates to one current SPI Program Provider.
3. Not to exceed a total of twelve candidates under the direction of two current SPI Program Providers.

Gaining SPI Certification

To gain SPI Certification candidates must:
1. Successfully pass the SPI Exam.
2. Hold current AMGA Membership at Professional level.

SPI Certification First Aid Requirements

First aid training is not a pre-requisite for participation in an SPI course or exam. However, once an AMGA member is certified as an AMGA Single Pitch Instructor, they must hold a medical certification for the location in which they will be working. The level of medical certification needed will depend on the requirements set by the guide service and the land management agency where the programming is conducted. It is the responsibility of individual instructors to maintain appropriate medical certification.

SPI Certification Upkeep and Recertification

Instructors must maintain current AMGA membership. If an instructor allows their AMGA membership to lapse, their SPI Certification is invalid until membership is re-established. Single Pitch Instructors are professionally responsible for maintaining current AMGA membership and first aid certification.

SPI Certification is valid for three years from the date of certification.

To keep SPI Certification current, SPIs should pursue recertification prior to the expiration date. Candidates who let their certification lapse will enter a 12-month re-entry period

during which they may participate in an SPI Exam; however, they will not hold a valid SPI Certification between the expiration date and successfully passing an exam. From a professional standpoint, this is not advisable.

Certification Renewal Options:

SPI Certification may be renewed through one of the following options:

1. Successfully pass the two-day SPI Exam.
2. Successfully complete any higher-level AMGA program.
3. Become certified in any discipline within the AMGA Mountain Guide Program (MGP).

Completion of option 2 grants SPI Certification for three years from the course end date. Completion of option 3 grants permanent SPI Certification.

Important Recertification Notes:

- SPI Certification must be valid or within 12 months of expiration to be eligible for any of the renewal options listed above. Upon completing options 2 or 3, the SPI must contact the AMGA to ensure their records are updated.
- Instructors who pursue SPI renewal through completion of a higher-level AMGA course or exam but do not successfully complete that program must complete any required reassessment within their 12-month SPI certification re-entry period. If completed within this period, SPI Certification will renew from the date the makeup or re-examination is completed, not from the final day of the original AMGA Mountain Guide Program course or exam.

12-Month SPI Certification Re-Entry Period:

- Any SPI whose certification expires will have a 12-month re-entry period to regain certification.
- During this period, SPI Certification is not valid.
- To regain certification during the re-entry period, the instructor must successfully pass a two-day SPI Exam, or successfully complete any higher-level AMGA program.
- If certification is not regained within the 12-month re-entry period, the individual will be required to retake the full SPI Course prior to participating in an SPI Exam.

Two-Year SPI Course Sunset Policy:

- The SPI Course has a sunset time of two years. If a course graduate has not successfully passed an SPI Exam within two years of course completion, they must retake the SPI Course prior to pursuing an SPI Exam.
- There is no minimum time requirement between successful completion of the SPI Course and participation in the SPI Exam, provided all assessment prerequisites are met. Most successful candidates practice and consolidate skills for three to six months prior to assessment.

Program Make-Up Guidelines:

- Make-up options are available only to students or candidates who receive an Incomplete final mark in an SPI Program due to factors limiting attendance, including but not limited to weather or emergency circumstances.
- Eligible students or candidates may pursue a make-up day by hiring an AMGA Provider to complete the required components missed. Students and candidates are encouraged to contact the AMGA office for additional information regarding the make-up process, applicable guidelines, and support in coordinating a make-up day.
- Make-up options are not available to students or candidates who receive a No-Pass final mark due to deficient performance, failure to meet program prerequisites, failure to complete required eLearning modules, or a breach of the AMGA Code of Ethics and Conduct. Individuals receiving a No-Pass final mark under these circumstances must retake the entire course or assessment in which the No-Pass was earned. Final marks cannot be appealed.

For additional guidance, refer to the Make-Up Details document in the shared SPI Program Resources Folder

Required Skills

The SPI Course covers a large amount of material. Participants are responsible for reviewing this handbook in advance and arriving prepared for the program. The prerequisites outlined below represent minimum eligibility requirements, and most participants exceed them.

SPI Course Candidate Pre-Requisites

Candidates meet the pre-requisites for enrollment in an SPI Course if they:
1. Have a genuine interest in rock climbing and instructing on single pitch crags.
2. Are at least 18-years old at the time of the course.
3. Have at least 12 months prior outdoor climbing experience.
4. Are active climbers with traditional lead climbing experience (leader placing pro).
5. Have traditionally led a minimum of 15 rock climbing routes (any grade).
6. Are capable of comfortably climbing 5.8 while on a top rope.

The above prerequisites represent absolute minimums, and most candidates exceed them. Candidates who do not meet these minimums are unlikely to fully engage in the course or make effective use of the training. Individuals who are unsure whether they meet the prerequisites are encouraged to seek guidance from an AMGA Certified Multi-Pitch Instructor, Rock Guide, or Mountain Guide prior to enrolling in an SPI program.

SPI Exam Candidate Pre-Requisites

Candidates may enroll in an SPI Exam after successfully completing an SPI Course and meeting the Exam prerequisites, including required post-course resume experience, and within two years of course completion. Most successful candidates spend an additional 3–6 months practicing, teaching, and refining their skills prior to taking the SPI Exam.

Candidates meet the SPI Exam pre-requisites if they:
1. Have successfully completed an AMGA Single Pitch Instructor Course within the past 2 years. For those renewing, their SPI certification must be valid or within 1 year expiration.
2. Have traditionally led a minimum of 40 rock climbing routes, including at least 15 completed after the candidate's most recent SPI program. A large number of these should be at the 5.6 grade (or higher), in various locations and on a variety of rock types. Refer to the SPI Exam resume requirements on page 35 for full details.
3. Are capable of comfortably lead climbing (leader placing own protection) on any 5.6 traditional route. Candidates will demonstrate their leading ability on a variety of routes during the assessment.
4. Are capable of comfortably climbing 5.8 with a top rope belay. Candidates will demonstrate their top rope climbing ability during the assessment.

Required Resume Submission

All SPI Course and Exam candidates must submit a climbing resume documenting applicable experience using the current AMGA SPI resume template. Resume requirements vary by program. Candidates should refer to the SPI Exam section of this handbook for detailed, program-specific resume requirements. Program Providers will communicate their preferred method of resume submission upon applying to a program.

Download Resume Templates

Required Reading

It is required that all SPI Course students have access to *Rock Climbing: The Official AMGA Single Pitch Manual* by AMGA (ISBN: 9781493092710). Published by Falcon Guides, the book is intended to be used in conjunction with this handbook. Most successful candidates review both resources in entirety and practice skills prior to joining the SPI Course.

Required Online E-learning Modules

All SPI Course students are required to complete the AMGA online e-learning lessons. The Program Provider instructing the course will send you more information and a discount code to complete the modules for free prior to your course. *Do not pay for these if you are enrolled on an SPI Course!* Failure to complete the modules will result in a no-pass final mark on the SPI Course. Link to AMGA SPI Online Programs

Recommended Viewing

The following videos are recommended to support preparation for the SPI Course and Exam. These resources supplement, but do not replace, instruction during the program.

The AMGA Rock Series of member-only Tech Videos, available by logging into your AMGA account, includes many skills that extend beyond the SPI curriculum. A small number of videos are particularly relevant to SPI candidates. Access to member-only videos is a benefit included with AMGA membership.

AMGA Tech Videos (Member Only) • *Become a member today*
- Munter Mule Overhand • Extended Anchors • Top Rope Tethers • Ground Anchors • Rappelling: Throwing Ropes

AMGA Tech Videos (Public)
- Coiling ropes • Clove Hitch: Handshake Method
- Munter Belay • Belaying a Leader • Backup Belaying • Belay Device Hands Free

Preparing for the Course

Be sure to complete all required reading and online e-learning modules prior to the course. Direct questions regarding application, enrollment, payment, travel/lodging, course content, equipment, or logistics to the Program Provider instructing the course. Review and bring all required equipment; ensure personal gear is in good working condition and clearly marked. Consider obtaining venue-specific guidebooks and area geology or natural history resources to supplement your understanding of the local terrain.

Review each day's itinerary and remain flexible, as schedules may change due to weather or other unforeseen circumstances. Practice the techniques outlined in this handbook to the best of your ability prior to the course. If any material is unclear, make note of it and ask instructors before or during the program.

There is a large amount of material to cover in the three-day course. Participants are expected to familiarize themselves with the topics in this handbook in advance and arrive prepared, focused, and ready to learn in order to maximize both individual and group outcomes.

Many recreational climbers entering the course with professional goals have limited experience using the munter hitch. Participants are strongly encouraged to practice the munter hitch and tying it off with a mule/overhand prior to the course. This fundamental skill is frequently unfamiliar and can limit effective participation if not practiced beforehand. Practicing in a low-risk setting is strongly recommended.

Equipment

The equipment brought on a day of single-pitch instruction has a tremendous effect on the quality of the experience, for both the instructor and clients. As a professional instructor all equipment should be in good working condition, marked and appropriate for the planned outing. Each trip, climbing venue and client population is slightly different and may have varying requirements; the instructor will need to adjust accordingly.

During this program, considerable time will be spent on exposed, but not necessarily technically difficult terrain. To maximize security for the client and the instructor, both need to travel as unencumbered as possible while still carrying needed gear. In general, instructors should choose just enough equipment for the task, and avoid carrying functionally redundant gear. Single-pitch terrain should not be remote in nature, therefore the instructor can bring an abundance of equipment and more than the typical rock or alpine guide. Being able to moderate this with regards to pack weight will be key to effective travel to the base and top of the crag.

Clothing
Clothing should be appropriate for the activity and environment. Depending on venue and season, temperatures may fluctuate from sub-freezing to wet to hot—sometimes all in the same day, so please arrive prepared. A system that allows for multiple layering options is recommended.
- *Examples: Mammut "_Selun FL Sun Hoody_" "_Runbold IV Pants_" "_Madris Light ML Jacket_"*

Footwear
Footwear is one of the most important pieces of equipment for the instructor and is directly related to instructor security. Approach shoes with sticky rubber are strongly recommended for increasing instructor security, especially at the top of the cliff. In areas of high rain, mud, grass, or leave, shoes with suitable tread may be substituted. Appropriate climbing shoes that allow the instructor to climb up to 5.8 while wearing for extended periods of time are necessary.
- *Examples: Mammut "Alnasca Knit III low"*

Backpack
A pack of sufficient size is important for the climbing instructor. One that can fit all personal and group gear comfortably inside of the pack, such that ideally nothing needs to be strapped to the outside. Depending on the day, a 35-55L pack will accomplish this. The climbing instructor relies on a larger pack as they may carry additional equipment such as static set-up ropes, duplicate gear for larger groups, and teaching equipment.
- *Examples: Mammut "_Neon 55_" or "_Trion 38_"*

Required Technical Equipment

All required equipment is a prerequisite for participation and will be inspected on the first morning of the course. Equipment must be in good working order. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must be used within the manufacturer's inspection, care, and retirement guidelines. Soft goods with excessive wear, unknown history, or that are clearly beyond their intended service life—including very old or hand-me-down equipment—will not be used during the program. Candidates are responsible for clearly marking all personal gear. For additional details, refer to the SPI Equipment Overview eLearning module.

- Climbing Helmet, UIAA approved, such as the *Mammut "Crag Sender"*
- Climbing Harness, UIAA approved with belay loop, such as the *Mammut "Ophir"*
- Climbing shoes or approach shoes in which the candidate can climb up to 5.8 top rope
- Standard "lead climbing rack" such as, cams, stoppers/nuts, etc. (hexes and tri-cams if desired) with which the candidate can lead up to 5.6, including stopper/nut removal tool
- 8 -12 quickdraws or 24" (60cm) sewn slings/runners with carabiners (emphasis on sling draws)
- 1-2 48" (120cm) sewn sling/runner (at least one should be nylon)
- 4 or more locking "HMS/Pearbiners", such as the *Mammut "Classic HMS" or "Crag HMS"*
- 4-5 additional locking carabiners, such as the *Mammut "Sender Screwgate"*
- Tube-type belay/rappel device, such as the *Mammut "Crag Light", or BD "ATC"*
- Mechanical assisted braking device, such as the *Petzl "GriGri" or Edelrid "Pinch"*
- 1-2 Prusik loops (1m of 6mm Nylon Accessory Cord), such as *Sterling "Hollowblock2"*
- 1-2 Cordelettes (5m of 7mm Nylon Accessory Cord)
- 1 optional 180cm "triple" or 240cm "quad" sling for anchoring. *Mammut "Contact Sling"*
- One 60m "single" dynamic rope (9.2-10mm) suitable for leading and top roping, such as the *Mammut "9.5 Crag We Care"*
- One 30-50m static or "semi static" rigging rope (9-10.5mm), for setting up anchors and fixed lines, such as the *Mammut "10.0 Performance Static"* or *Sterling "⅜ SuperStatic2"*

Pro Tips:

- **Keep it simple.** The SPI curriculum focuses on foundational skills such as friction hitches. As SPI Provider Trainer Elaina Arenz notes: *"Keep your kit simple—there's no need for mechanical progress capture devices like Tiblocs, Micro Traxions, or similar tools."*
- **PPE condition matters.** Ensure all soft goods are in good condition, have a known history, and are within manufacturer inspection and retirement guidelines.
- **Rope length considerations.** Static anchor rigging ropes in the 45–60 m range are common, while ropes 30 m or less are often too short to meet the needs of venues.
- **Mark hard goods.** Use nail polish to mark carabiners and other hard goods. Tape is short-lived and creates unnecessary micro-trash.
- **Split your racks.** Avoid loading all equipment onto one carrying sling. Separate gear to improve efficiency and adaptability.

Single Pitch Instructor Course Evaluation Overview

On all AMGA programs, students are assessed and evaluated relative to the stated prerequisites listed on the AMGA website and proficiencies found in this handbook. Students can expect feedback from their instructors throughout the course and a more thorough debrief on the final day of the program. The instructor will provide a written evaluation after the course is completed.

SPI Course Evaluation Focus Areas

BASIC SKILLS
- Belaying, knots, hitches, protection, anchors, rope management, and movement

BASE-MANAGED SKILLS
- Rappel with edge transition, weighted and unweighted take-over of belays, counter-ascend to a stuck climber, and counter-balanced lower with a climber

TOP-MANAGED SKILLS
- 3:1 raise, 3:1 assisted raise, releasable rappel set-up, fixing problems on rappel, and lowering clients

PROFESSIONALISM
- Preparedness, gear in working order, group participation, homework completed, instructor's notebook

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNIQUE
- Appropriate lesson planning, presentation, site selection, communication, & knowledge

SPI Course Competency Scale

During the SPI Course, students are evaluated on the focus areas using these four categories. Multiple deficient scores may result in a no-pass course result.

PROFICIENT: Performs skills unassisted and can apply systems as needed. Demonstrates capability to operate within SOP.

COMPETENT: Generally performs skills and can replicate systems with little assistance. May require occasional coaching with application of skills and/or execution of complex skills. Demonstrates capability to operate within SOP.

DEVELOPING: Inconsistent performance of skills and requires some assistance when replicating systems. Requires coaching with application of skills and/or execution of complex skills. Demonstrates capability to operate within SOP.

DEFICIENT: Cannot perform skills and/or replicate systems without hands-on oversight. Generally needs extensive coaching with application of skills and/or the execution of complex skills and systems. Does not demonstrate ability to operate within SOP.

Assessment Categories:

There are five scoring and assessment categories on AMGA Single Pitch Instructor Exams. On Single Pitch Instructor Courses, students are not evaluated on these categories but the categories are shared here to help prepare students for future training programs and to develop as professionals. Refer to pages 31-32 for more information related to the SPI Exam evaluation and defined proficiencies for each category.

Risk Management
Both hazard recognition and client/ instructor security are fundamental skills for managing risk in the climbing environment. These foundational skills require intentional development to mitigate hazards in single pitch terrain. In addition, social and emotional risk management is an important part of instructing. A shift in mindset from recreational climber to being the person responsible for students or clients is a critical part of becoming a professional.

Technical Systems
The candidate must understand, correctly use, and apply:
- Protection, anchor, and belay techniques
- Rappelling and lowering techniques
- Appropriate rope management techniques for both top and bottom-managed sites
- Assistance and 'rescue' systems

Movement
Climbing ability and movement skill are critical to instructor security and efficient operation in the single pitch environment. It is important to be able to climb fluidly, model good movement, and to inspire clients. Terrain assessment is needed to appropriately mitigate hazards. Route selection, route finding and navigation to and from the base or top site are needed.

Professionalism
Preparedness and planning are crucial to managing risk and providing the students or clients with a high quality experience. Incorporating LNT principles into every day is an important responsibility of the instructor. Demonstrating good stewardship and educating students or clients about the environment are all responsibilities of the instructor and increase the level of professionalism we strive to achieve. Being respectful and considerate of other users and modeling good communication with all parties encountered, is expected of a professional instructor.

Instructional Technique
- Lesson Planning - The candidate must use and implement appropriate lesson plans and teaching progressions
- Pedagogy - The candidate must understand and use a variety of teaching methods adaptable to various learning styles
- Communication - Does so clearly with a positive attitude
- Coaching and Tips - The candidate must provide appropriate coaching and tips to assist in creating a comfortable and rewarding experience for the student(s) or client(s)

SPI Course Overview

The following three-day outline is the standard progression for an SPI course. Program Providers may present a different daily schedule but the entire curriculum will be covered in the course. Program Providers may add to the curriculum on the course at their discretion, but they will not omit items from the established SPI curriculum. SPI Program providers must make it clear when they are teaching outside the established curriculum and should not evaluate beyond that curriculum. The course is normally run over three consecutive nine hour days but as long as the curriculum is covered over 27 hours the course may be run over separate weekends or even as a semester class.

Day 1:

Session 1: SPI Course Orientation and Program Overview
Session 2: Professionalism
Session 3: Equipment
Session 4: Knots and Hitches
Session 5: Belaying
Session 6: Protection and Anchoring
Session 7: Teaching
End-of-Day Debriefs

Day 2:

Session 8: The Climbing Site
Session 9: Site Organization and Group Management
Session 10: Base-Managed Sites
Session 11: Assistance Skills: Base-Managed Sites
Session 12: Programming and Risk Management
End-of-Day Debriefs

Day 3:

Session 13: Instructor Demo Lead Climb
Session 14: Top-Managed Sites
Session 15: Lowering
Session 16: Assistance Skills: Top-Managed Sites
Session 17: Rappelling
Session 18: Climbing Movement
Session 19: Course Review and Exam Scenario Overview
Final Individual and Group Debriefs

SPI Course Day 1:

Summary:

Session 1: SPI Course Orientation and Program Overview
Session 2: Professionalism
Session 3: Equipment
Session 4: Knots and Hitches
Session 5: Belaying
Session 6: Protection and Anchoring
Session 7: Teaching
End-of-Day Debriefs

Session 1: SPI Course Orientation & Program Overview

Goals: Introduce participants and instructors; establish a shared understanding of the SPI Course structure, expectations, and learning environment; and clarify how the SPI Program fits within the broader AMGA framework. Participants will understand the scope, intent, and professional context of the SPI certification.

Location: Classroom setting or single-pitch crag

Equipment: Discussion format. No equipment is required.

Overview: This session establishes a common baseline for the SPI Course and clarifies expectations for participation, professionalism, and learning. Topics include:

- Course itinerary, logistics, and daily flow.
- Course expectations, professional conduct, and engagement in a collaborative learning environment.
- Risk management and emergency response as they relate to SPI Course logistics and delivery, including program-specific considerations and participant roles.
- Clarification of required eLearning content, including time for participants to ask questions related to the AMGA organization, history, mission, and program structure covered online.
- Discussion of single-pitch terrain and how professional instruction in this environment differs from recreational climbing.
- **Textbook Reference: x-1**

Session 2: Professionalism

Goals:　Candidates will be able to describe and demonstrate the behaviors, decision-making, and responsibilities expected of a professional Single Pitch Instructor.

Location:　Classroom or crag.

Equipment:　Discussion format. No equipment is required.

Overview:　Facilitated discussion examining professionalism in single-pitch instruction, building on required eLearning modules. Focus on how preparation, communication, judgment, and conduct influence client experience, and learning.

- Preparedness and organization appropriate to the instructional setting, including well-maintained and functional equipment.
- Effective time management, organization, leadership, and application of technical and instructional skills.
- Professional demeanor, clear communication, and respectful interaction.
- Applying the AMGA Code of Ethics and Conduct as a framework for professional behavior, decision-making, and instructor responsibilities.
- Ability to work effectively with participants from a wide range of backgrounds, identities, and experience levels, supporting inclusive group dynamics.
- Commitment to continued professional development, including relevant first aid, rescue training, and Leave No Trace education.
- Use of an instructor notebook or planning tools to support preparation, documentation, and reflection.
- **Textbook Reference: Professionalism Pages 3-6**

Session 3: Equipment

Goals:　Participants will have comprehensive knowledge of equipment and materials used in single pitch climbing instruction, and will be familiar with its use, care, applications, and storage.

Location:　Classroom setting or crag

Equipment:　All types of climbing equipment that will be used in the SPI program

Overview:　A hands-on review of climbing equipment and materials, building on elearning

- Instructor personal equipment: required equipment list and instructor pack (first aid, communication, and other essential instructional tools).
- Application: Relevant types and characteristics of ropes, webbing, cordage, and carabiners used in single-pitch instruction.
- Manufacturer guidance: use, limitations, and retirement considerations as a reference for professional equipment application.
- Protection: gear appropriate for single-pitch anchor building and leading.
- Program equipment: client harnesses, helmets, belay/rappel devices—types and fitting; improvised chest harness.
- **Textbook Reference: Equipment pages 35-64, 113-143**

Session 4: Knots and Hitches

Goals: Candidates will demonstrate proficiency in tying and understanding of the application of the knots and hitches listed below.
Location: Classroom setting or crag
Equipment: Climbing ropes, cordelettes and slings.
Overview: A hands-on review of climbing knots and hitches which should include the following:
- Figure 8 family
- Overhand family
- Double overhand on a bight (Big Huge Knot - BHK)
- Ring bend
- Clove hitch
- Girth hitch
- Bowlines
- Münter hitch
- Münter mule
- Friction hitches (autoblock, Prusik, Klemhiest)
- Double fisherman's bend
- Flat Overhand
- **Textbook Reference: Knots and Hitches pages 65-102**

Session 5: Belaying

Goals: Candidates will demonstrate a thorough understanding of belay devices, techniques and communication. Candidates must also exhibit the ability to teach belaying clearly.
Location: Classroom setting or crag
Equipment: Various belay devices and climbing ropes
Overview: A hands-on review of belaying systems and techniques relevant to single-pitch instruction. Practice may occur during this session and/or be reinforced throughout the program in other appropriate contexts.
- At the top of the cliff (from the anchor):
  - Belaying with mechanical assisted-braking device, and belaying with Munter Hitch including blocking with a Munter Mule hitch.
- At the base of the cliff (from the harness belay loop):
  - Belaying with manual-braking and assisted-braking devices.
- Additional topics:
  - Belaying the leader
  - Communication
  - Ground anchors
- **Textbook Reference: Belaying pages 200-212**

Session 6: Protection and Anchoring

Goals: Candidates will demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of anchoring principles and risk management strategies for single pitch crags.

Location: Single-pitch climbing site with plenty of anchoring possibilities, either at the base or at the top of the cliff

Equipment: Instructor's rack

Overview: A review of anchoring principles and practice at a single-pitch crag. Candidates demonstrate proficiency in building anchor systems that are efficient in both time and equipment use. As stated in the prerequisites, the SPI Course is not an anchor-building class; candidates are expected to arrive with a solid foundation in anchor construction and gear placement.

- **Protection evaluation and use:** assessment of natural features; placement and evaluation of removable protection (SLCDs, stoppers, hexes, tri-cams); and evaluation of existing fixed protection including bolts and pitons
- **Anchoring systems and rigging:** central point construction, anchor placement relative to anticipated load, anchors for top- and base-managed sites, and introduction to advanced rigging systems (V-system, N-system, Backside, 3-in-1) presented throughout the program
- **Textbook Reference: Protection and Anchoring pages 103-182**

Session 7: Teaching Skills

Goals: Candidates will demonstrate an understanding of different learning approaches and proficiency in instructing in a group setting and coaching on an individual basis.

Location: Classroom or at the crag.

Equipment: Teaching tools/aids.

Overview: This session will address lesson planning, basic learning styles and teaching methods for various climbing and movement topics.

- Lesson planning for climbing instruction.
- Introduction to common learning approaches, acknowledging that individuals may engage with material in different ways.
  - Visual learning through demonstration and observation
  - Auditory learning through explanation and discussion
  - Kinesthetic (experiential) learning through participation and hands-on practice
- Use of visual and instructional aids such as video, slides, text, photos or diagrams, whiteboards, and physical objects or examples.
- Effective communication skills, including clear instruction and appropriate body language.
- Program and lesson sequencing, emphasizing a logical order of instruction.
- **Textbook Reference: Teaching pages 24-33**

End-of-Day Debrief

Notes

SPI Course Day 2:

Summary:

Session 8: Selecting the Climbing Site
Session 9: Site Organization and Group Management
Session 10: Base-Managed Sites
Session 11: Assistance Skills: Base-Managed Sites
Session 12: Programming and Risk Management
End-of-Day Debriefs

Session 8: Selecting the Climbing Site

Goals: Candidates will be able to research climbing areas and interpret guidebooks, topos and climbing web sites in order to select appropriate sites for institutional climbing. Candidates will be familiar with the various land management structures in the US and their varying permitting requirements.

Location: Single-pitch site.

Equipment: Guide books, topos, web print-outs for the area used.

Overview: A discussion of the single-pitch crag environment as it relates to commercial use, including an overview of land management and permitting systems (USFS, NPS, BLM, state parks, private owners, etc.), and criteria for selecting the best climbing area and routes for specifically-skilled clients.
- Land managers and commercial use permit systems
- Local and national climbing and commercial use ethics and etiquette
- Site selection and considerations for commercial and group users
- Selecting appropriate climbs for clients (physical ability, clients' goals, etc.)
- Reading route topos and interpreting route descriptions
- Understanding climbing ratings, grades and terrain classifications
    - Yosemite Decimal System (5.0-5.15, including letter grades)
    - Terrain classification (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th class terrain)
    - Commitment grade (I-VI) (III-VI not required for single-pitch climbing, but good additional knowledge)
- **Textbook Reference: The Climbing Site.Pages 9-10, 195-198**

Session 9: Site Organization and Group Management

Goals: Candidates will demonstrate proficiency in site organization and group management in both top and bottom managed situations. Candidates will demonstrate an understanding of both the environmental and social issues involved in commercial guiding in single pitch settings.

...Session 9 continued

Location: Single-pitch crag.
Equipment: Discussion format. No equipment needed.
Overview: This session will look in detail at group management considerations and the organization of a single-pitch climbing site.

- Group orientations
  - Goals for the day
  - Client roles, behavior expectations and boundaries
  - Explanation of hazards and risks
  - Fitting and checking equipment (harnesses, helmets, shoes, etc.)
- Equipment organization – individual and group
- Leave No Trace practices and impact reduction strategies for groups
- Group staging area out of the way of other users
- Maximizing client participation; climber, belayer, backup belayer
- Crag etiquette – minimizing conflict with other users
  - Minimum number of set-ups to accomplish group goals
  - Avoid blocking initial pitches of a multi-pitch climbs
  - Avoid use of popular, high-traffic routes
  - Noise control
- **Textbook Reference: Site Organization and Group Management pages 4-5, 191-194**

Session 10: Base-Managed Sites

Goals: Candidates will demonstrate an understanding of the rationale for working at the bottom of single pitch crags and proficiency in the skills required to operate in this setting.
Location: Base of a single-pitch crag.
Equipment: Ropes, anchoring equipment.
Overview: Considerations in opting to manage from the base and techniques and strategies for executing these systems.

- Rationale for choosing base-managed sites:
  - Easy to see and coach climbers and supervise belayers
  - Easier to communicate with and manage large groups at the base
  - Higher client-to-instructor ratios (i.e. 6:1) are possible
  - Faster "change-overs" so more climbing is accomplished
- Concerns for Base-Managed Sites:
  - Possibility of any object falling from above, striking belayer or clients
  - More rope in the system compared to a top belay system (more rope elongation)
  - Climbs over half the rope length require tying two ropes together to belay from the bottom
  - Cannot monitor the anchor systems as well

...Session 10 continued

Overview Continued:
- Base-Site Management
  - Keeping things neat
  - Rope organization
  - Closing the system - Always
- Ground Anchors
  - When to use
  - ABC, (Anchor-Belayer-Climber), always inline
  - Using natural features for ground anchors
  - No features available – using other clients as ground anchors
- Back-up belayers
- Use of 'catastrophe knots'
- **Textbook Reference: Base-Managed Sites 190-192**

Session 11: Assistance Skills – Base-Managed Sites

Goals: Candidates will be able to perform a variety of assistance skills that may be required when working at the base of a single pitch crag.
Location: Single-pitch crag.
Equipment: Top rope set-up.
Overview: A detailed look at and practice of weighted and un-weighted belay take-overs, climber pick-offs and counter-balance assists.
- Belay take-overs:
  - Weighted
  - Un-weighted
- Counter ascension to assist stuck climber
- Counter-balance lower with stuck climber
- **Textbook References: Assistance Skills: Base-Managed Sites pages 228-233**

Session 12: Programming and Risk Management

Goals: Candidates will demonstrate an understanding of programming and risk management issues relevant to single-pitch climbing instruction.
Location: Classroom or single-pitch crag.
Equipment: Discussion format. No equipment needed.
Overview: This session introduces foundational concepts related to program planning, instructor responsibilities, and risk management in a commercial single-pitch climbing context. Emphasis is placed on aligning program objectives with venue selection, managing risk in both planning and field settings, and understanding professional and legal responsibilities.

Continued on next page

...Session 12 continued

Overview Continued:

- **Programming Considerations**
  - Defining program objectives and instructional boundaries
  - Clarifying instructor roles and responsibilities
  - Participant screening and pre-trip communication
  - Permitting and venue access
  - Equipment inspection, storage, and record keeping considerations
- **Risk Management and Liability**
  - Overview of legal considerations in commercial instruction
  - Liability insurance, waivers, and assumption of risk
  - Informed consent and medical screening of clients
  - Creating and maintaining an Emergency Response Plan (ERP)
- **Risk Management in the Field**
  Overview of common risk categories and mitigation strategies:
  - Psychological – fear of falling or heights
  - Sociological – peer pressure and social dynamics
  - Financial – poor course, waste of money, lost or damaged personal equipment
  - Physical – client injury or fatality
- **Communication and Emergency Preparedness**
  - Instructor meetings and team coordination
  - Primary and secondary communication methods, including cell phone service availability
  - Emergency communication and evacuation considerations
- **Textbook Reference: Programming and Risk Management pages 9-22**

End-of-Day Debriefs

Notes

SPI Course Day 3:

Summary:

Session 13: Instructor Demo Lead Climb
Session 14: Top-Managed Sites
Session 15: Lowering
Session 16: Assistance Skills: Top-Managed Sites
Session 17: Rappelling
Session 18: Climbing Movement
Session 19: Course Review and Exam Scenario Overview
Final Individual and Group Debriefs

Session 13: Instructor Demo Lead Climb

Goals: Course instructor completion of a single-pitch trad lead climb demonstrating sound leading practices and considerations for student belaying of lead climbs. (Note: while the SPI is not a lead climbing course and the demo should only focus on lead climbing considerations for an instructor, it is acceptable to have students lead climbs if time permits and risk management considerations are addressed).

Location: Single-pitch crag

Equipment: Ropes, lead rack, etc.

Overview: The SPI course instructor (not candidate) will demonstrate a lead climb that focuses on considerations for students belaying leading instructors. This is a short lead that will be a catalyst for the following points of discussion:

- Selection of an appropriate climb to lead in order to set-up anchors
- Considerations for belayer position use of a ground anchor
- Teaching and verifying lead belay technique
- Appropriate belay device for lead belaying
- Use of back up belayer
- Modeling of sound leading practices (plenty of solid protection, no soloing, climbing shoes for instructor security and modeling)
- Closing the climbing system
- Descent options
- Belayer/climber communication
- Teaching leading (organization policies, leading as an earned privilege, mock-lead and ground school strategies, conservative approach, etc.)

Textbook Reference: Leading pages 240-244

Session 14: Top-Managed Sites

Goals: Candidates will comprehend the rationale for choosing to operate from the tops of crags and display proficiency in the skills needed to execute these systems

Location: Top of a single-pitch crag

Equipment: Ropes, anchoring equipment, etc.

Overview: A detailed look at working from the top in single-pitch settings and the reasons for choosing this system as opposed to working from the base.

- Reasons for Top-Managed Sites:
  - No chance of falling objects striking belayers from above
  - 50% less rope in the system, less elongation
  - Some climbers prefer climbing toward instructors rather than away
  - Climbs over half the rope length are most easily belayed from the top
  - Difficult or dangerous access to the base of the cliff (sea cliff, steep ground, edge exposure, etc.)
  - Ability to monitor the anchor system
- Concerns for Top-Managed Sites:
  - Difficult (or impossible) to see climber from above on many crags
  - The climber's rope runs over the edge when belaying from above
  - Possible impact on fragile cliff top ecosystem
  - Cliff edge dangerous to manage
- Instructor and client risk management at the top of the crag
  - Instructor tethers: overview of common tether options and applications, including semi-static rigging ropes, dynamic rope tie-ins, friction-based tethers on closed-loop systems, fixed-length slings or cord, and adjustable purpose-built systems
  - Possible use of fixed lines for movement of clients in exposed areas
- Anchor-building sequence considerations
  - Progression of advanced anchor systems (V, N, Backside, 3-in-1), and how anchor-first versus tether-first sequencing affects system capability and risk management.
- Belaying from the anchor central point
  - With an assisted breaking device (GriGri) when, why, considerations
  - With a Munter hitch: when, why, considerations
- Station Management
  - Keeping things neat, thinking ahead to avoid organizational and systemic issues
  - Maintenance of "work space" between cliff edge and central point
  - Rope organization, stacking
- Incorporating a student belayer: one approach includes attaching the student belayer to central point, belaying as the instructor from central point using an assisted braking device (GriGri) or Munter hitch.
- **Textbook Reference: Top-Managed Sites pages 195-198, 210-212**

Session 15: Lowering

Goals: Candidates will demonstrate proficiency at lowering clients and the use of appropriate back-ups.

Location: Single-pitch crag.

Equipment: Top belay set-up.

Overview: A detailed look at lowering considerations, techniques, back-ups and reasons for lowering clients.

- Reasons and considerations for lowering clients
- Lowering methods
    - Mechanical Assisted Breaking Device with re-direct
    - Munter hitch
- Friction hitch back-ups
- Closing the climbing system
- Visual contact with the client
- **Textbook Reference: Lowering pages 213-215**

Session 16: Assistance Skills: Top-Managed Sites

Goals: Candidates must possess the skills to assist climbers from the top of a crag in a single-pitch setting.

Location: Single-pitch crag.

Equipment: Top belay set-up.

Overview: This session will look at raising and assistance techniques from the top of the crag. In the single-pitch setting, there is no need for in-depth raising systems training since all problems have a "gravity feed" solution. In the rare instance when an instructor is working at a sea cliff environment or single-pitch crag where the access to the base is problematic, a prudent Instructor would belay with an assisted braking device to affect a simple raise if required.

- 3:1 raise with MechanicalAssisted Braking Device
- 3:1 assisted raise with Mechanical Assisted Braking Device

Textbook Reference: Assistance Skills: Top-Managed Sites pages 234-236

Session 17: Rappelling

Goals: Candidates will be able to set up and manage institutional rappels, employ appropriate back-ups and execute assistance/rescue techniques

Location: Single-pitch crag.

Equipment: Top rope set-up.

Overview: This session addresses rappelling methods, considerations and back-ups used in student rappels.

Continued on next page

...Session 17 continued

Overview Continued:
- Reasons and considerations for rappelling:
  - Student experience, skill instruction, crag access/egress
- Rappel set-ups:
  - High central points, set back from the edge
  - Releasable rappels
  - Single and double line rappels
  - Pre-rigged rappel setup
- Rappel back-ups:
  - From the base: Firefighter's belay (discussed, not taught at SPI level.)
  - From the top: Independent belay
  - Instructor rappel: extended rappel device with friction hitch backup
- Problem avoidance:
  - Tying back long hair, loose clothing/jewelry
  - Coaching
  - Starting novice rappellers on a micro cliff or low-angle terrain, then moving to steeper/vertical terrain later
  - Visual contact with the client
- Rappel assistance:
  - Practice releasable rappel load transfers for rappellers with something stuck in their rappel devices

Textbook Reference: Rappelling pages 216-225

Session 18: Climbing Movement

Goals: Candidates will understand the principles of climbing movement and be proficient in teaching climbing movement skills in a group setting and coaching individual clients.

Location: Base of crag, boulders or artificial wall.

Equipment: Top rope set-up.

Overview: This session addresses teaching climbing movement skills on single-pitch crags and facilitating well managed and effective bouldering sessions for novice climbers.
- Basics of vertical movement and balance
- Common climbing skills
  - Hand holds and how to utilize them: edges, slopers, buckets, pockets
  - Foot positioning: smears, edging
  - Techniques: laybacks, stemming, chimneying, crack climbing, mantling
- Movement exercises: balance, body position, etc.
- Movement and Climbing games; Coaching skills
- Facilitating Bouldering
  - Risk Management (programmatic/insurance issues of "un-roped" climbing)
  - Correct use of bouldering pads, spotters

Textbook Reference: Climbing Movement pages 33-34

Session 19: Course Review & Exam Scenario Overview

Goals: Provide an opportunity for candidates to review course material and gain clarity on the SPI Exam, including the SPI Exam Scenario.

Location: Single-pitch crag with top and base access.

Equipment: Top rope set-up.

Overview: This session provides dedicated time for course review, skills integration, and clarification prior to the SPI Exam. **At a minimum,** the Program Provider demonstrates and reviews the SPI Exam Scenario (Single Pitch Skills Scenario: Top Managed Technical Drill) and its role within the SPI Exam. Time may be allotted for questions and discussion; however, time constraints may not allow for hands-on practice by all candidates. Additional review topics may be addressed based on relevance, candidate needs, and available time.

Course review topics may include:
- Clarifying questions that arose earlier in the course but fell outside the focus of scheduled sessions
- Review or demonstration of supplemental systems beyond the core curriculum (e.g., belaying from above with an auto-blocking device)
- Additional advanced anchor-building practice using a rigging rope
- Repetition and refinement of technical systems covered in the course curriculum

SPI Exam Skills Scenario Reference

For complete instructions—including setup, materials, approved equipment, and the sequence of the drill—refer to the *Single Pitch Skills Scenario: Top Managed Technical Drill* scenario sheet

End of Course Group and Individual Debriefs

Goals: Provide closure to the SPI Course, reinforce professional expectations, and deliver clear, constructive feedback to support continued development as a single-pitch instructor and preparation for the SPI Exam.

Location: Single-pitch crag or classroom, as appropriate to conditions and logistics.

Equipment: Instructor notebook and writing materials; AMGA reference materials.

Overview: The Program Provider facilitates a final session addressing the following:
- Group reflection and recap of relevant course themes and experiences
- AMGA Scope of Practice guidelines relevant to SPI course graduates
- Next steps for continued instructor development
- Policies related to pursuing the SPI Exam
- AMGA resources and policies supporting continued learning and growth

Individual debriefs are provided as time allows, typically 5 minutes per candidate.

Notes

SPI Exam Overview

The SPI Exam is two days in length (minimum of 16 hours of assessment time) and takes place at a single-pitch climbing area with a range of traditional lead routes of at least 5.6 difficulty and top rope routes of at least 5.8 difficulty. Because outdoor climbing grades vary by region, routes may feel harder than the stated grade. The exam evaluates all aspects of institutional single-pitch instruction.

Day one emphasizes technical proficiency, including climbing movement, anchor building, base assistance skills, and the top managed skills scenario. Candidates demonstrate their ability to apply efficient and effective systems appropriate to single-pitch instruction while managing realistic challenges in a scenario-based context.

Day two focuses on instructional application through group planning and facilitation of a day of climbing and instruction in a peer-to-peer setting. This includes lesson delivery, integration of technical and movement skills, and demonstration of effective risk management, communication, teaching technique, and decision-making within a collaborative instructional context.

Beginning in 2026, the SPI Exam format has been refined to include a standardized expanded skills scenario and peer-to-peer teaching components, with corresponding updates to resume documentation expectations. These updates strengthen the assessment framework, uphold a high instructional standard, and enhance opportunities for professional growth, and continuation of learning. SPI Examiners are responsible for fostering a professional and supportive environment that allows candidates to perform at their best. Candidates must demonstrate that their technical, instructional, and professional competencies meet the AMGA Single Pitch Instructor certification standard.

The SPI Exam assesses candidates across five core categories—Risk Management, Technical Systems, Movement, Professionalism, and Instructional Technique—aligned with the broader AMGA instructor and guide certification framework. Elements of previous assessment categories (pre-2024) have been consolidated into these five to create a more focused and relevant evaluation model. While not an exact replica of higher-level AMGA Mountain Guide Programs, the categories are similar in structure and intent, with distinctions specific to single-pitch instruction. The same scoring scale is used to ensure consistency across AMGA programs. A detailed proficiencies list further defines the standards and expectations within each category and serves as the primary reference for candidate evaluation.

SPI Assessment Framework

View the SPI Proficiencies and Assessment Standards

SPI Exam Evaluation Scoring Scale

Candidates' skills are evaluated throughout both days of the exam. Examiners record scores at the end of each day and review them again at the conclusion of the exam to account for trends, consistency, and any contributing factors that may have affected candidate performance. Any above-average or below-standard scores must be supported with specific examples and comments for clarity and documentation.

When assigning scores, examiners evaluate candidate performance using four key scoring considerations: whether risk management was compromised and to what degree; whether the client or student experience was acceptable or negatively impacted; whether errors were made and, if so, how effectively and how quickly they were recognized and corrected; and whether the candidate was able to complete tasks independently without coaching or examiner intervention. These factors are weighed together to determine where performance falls within the 1–10 scoring scale, with particular emphasis on risk management, consistency, and independent application of skills.

Candidates are assessed across five designated assessment categories. Performance within each category is evaluated using defined subcategories that clarify expectations and scoring criteria. Daily assessment results are compiled into a summary scorecard, which provides an overall evaluation of the candidate's performance and final certification outcome.

At the conclusion of the exam, each candidate will participate in an individual debrief with the examiner(s), during which a verbal assessment and feedback will be provided. The goal of the debrief is to clarify strengths and areas for improvement, ensuring clear understanding of overall performance and next steps for development.

Candidates will be notified of their final exam result (pass or no-pass) within 36 hours of completing the exam. In some cases, examiners may need to consult with the AMGA Climbing Instructor Program Manager before confirming a result. When this additional review is required, notification may be delayed, and candidates will be informed once the review is complete—typically within five business days. Communication may occur by phone or email, as appropriate. The candidate's formal evaluation and certification status will be finalized and published within two weeks of the exam. Daily debriefs, the end-of-exam debrief, and the final result should remain consistent.

Candidates must achieve a minimum average score of **70% in Risk Management** across both exam days and a minimum score of **60% in each of the remaining assessment categories** to pass the SPI Exam.

View the SPI Exam Scoring Scale

Scores are reported on a 1–10 scale:
- **9–10** reflect performance above the standard, indicating strong to exceptional mastery and skill. Scores of 10 are rare and represent an outstanding performance typical of an experienced and highly capable instructor.
- **8** represents performance at the standard—a solid, consistent demonstration of competency.
- **7** indicates performance that meets the standard but may show minor areas for refinement.
- **5–6** reflect substandard performance that may be compensated for through improvement in other areas of the exam.
- **1–4** represent performance significantly below the standard and are generally difficult to recover from without exceptional improvement throughout the remainder of the exam.

SPI Exam Resume Requirements

Effective January 1, 2026, candidates must use the updated AMGA SPI resume template and meet the revised experience requirements outlined below.

Candidates must submit a climbing resume documenting the following minimum experience using the current AMGA SPI resume template:

- **Total Routes:** Traditionally led a minimum of 40 rock climbing routes.
  - A large number of these routes should be 5.6 or higher, completed in varied locations and on a variety of rock types.
- **Post-Program Climbing:** Of the 40 routes, at least 15 routes must be completed after the candidate's most recent SPI program (course or exam).
  - These routes are recommended to be in the single-pitch environment.
- **Mock / Instructional Climbing:**
  - SPI Course Graduates: Of the 15 post-course routes, at least 5 must be mock instruction.
  - SPI Recertification Candidates: Of the 15 post-course routes, at least 5 must be mock or paid instruction.
- **Terrain Specificity:** Of the 40 routes, at least 5 must be top-managed routes.

Resume Notes
- Multi-pitch routes may be included; however, each multi-pitch climb counts as one route, regardless of the number of pitches. The requirement is 40 routes, not 40 pitches.
- All routes must be led clean by the candidate.
- Routes must have been completed within four years of the SPI Exam date.

Required: SPI Exam Resume Template

All SPI Exam resumes must be submitted using the current AMGA SPI resume template. The linked template is view-only; candidates must download a copy to complete and submit their resume.

SPI Exam Structure & Flow

The SPI Exam follows a consistent national standard while allowing for logistical flexibility in delivery. The following two-day outline represents the standard format for the SPI Exam. Program Providers may adjust the daily schedule or logistics based on venue, conditions, or group size; however, the full scope of the SPI Exam curriculum and assessment criteria must be maintained.

The outline below is intended to provide candidates with a general sense of how the SPI Exam is structured. Candidates should focus on understanding the purpose of each session rather than expecting a fixed timeline or identical delivery across programs.

Day 1:

Session 1: SPI Exam Orientation
Session 2: Base Managed Skill Assessment
Session 3: Single Pitch Skills Scenario: Top Managed Technical Drill
Session 4: Instructor Notebook Entry - Program Planning (Homework)
End-of-Day Debriefs

Day 2:

Session 5: Instructor Meeting - Program Planning Homework Review
Session 6: Continued Assessment of Technical Systems, Movement, and Group Management
Session 7: Teaching Components and Instructional Technique
End-of-Exam Group and Individual Debriefs

SPI Exam Day 1:

Summary:

Session 1: SPI Exam Orientation
Session 2: Base Managed Skill Assessment
Session 3: Single Pitch Skills Scenario: Top Managed Technical Drill
Session 4: Instructor Notebook Entry - Program Planning (Homework)
End-of-Day Debriefs

Session 1: SPI Exam Orientation

Goals: Introduce candidates and examiners; provide an opportunity for candidates to summarize relevant climbing and instructional experience since completing the SPI Course or previous SPI Exam; and clearly outline exam expectations, logistics, and the assessment process.

Location: Single-pitch crag or classroom.
Equipment: Classroom setting-none required.

Overview: This session establishes a shared understanding of how the exam will be conducted and what is expected of all participants. Topics include:
- Program itinerary and logistical overview
- Exam expectations and professional conduct
- Risk management and emergency response, including program-specific considerations and participant roles in supporting effective risk management throughout the exam
- Personal responsibility, self-care, and sustainability over the exam
- Communication, feedback, and coaching processes
- Evaluation structure, scoring scale, and passing standards

Session 2: Base Managed Skill Assessment

Goals: Evaluate candidates' ability to demonstrate competent climbing movement and effectively manage base-managed systems, including anchors, belays, and assistance techniques, in a single-pitch environment.

Location: Single-pitch crag

Equipment: Top roping and traditional leading equipment

Overview: This 2–4 hour session focuses on practical skill demonstrations and applied problem solving related to base-managed climbing systems. Candidates are evaluated on their ability to construct and manage systems, respond to common assistance situations, and demonstrate appropriate movement skills. Anchors are ideally constructed using a static rigging rope; however, routes may be established either from the top or by lead climbing.

The following skills are assessed during this session:
- Anchor building
- Ground anchors and backup belay systems
- Top-rope climbing movement demonstration (5.8)
- Weighted and unweighted belay takeovers
- Counter-ascending to a stuck climber
- Counterbalanced lowers with a climber
- Lead climbing movement demonstration (5.6)

Session 3: Single Pitch Skills Scenario: Top Managed Technical Drill

Goals: Assess a candidate's ability to apply core technical skills, problem-solving strategies, and risk management principles within a structured, top-managed single-pitch climbing and rappelling scenario.

Location: Top of a cliff. Terrain should meet the guidelines outlined in the *Single Pitch Skills Scenario: Top Managed Technical Drill* scenario sheet.

Equipment: Equipment use is limited to the items specified in the *Single Pitch Skills Scenario: Top Managed Technical Drill* scenario sheet.

Overview: The SPI Exam Scenario is a standardized skills assessment designed to evaluate a candidate's ability to integrate technical systems, problem-solving, and risk management while managing top-managed single-pitch climbing and rappelling activities. The scenario is structured to ensure consistent evaluation across SPI Exams and to reflect the range and complexity of managing single-pitch climbing experiences. *(next page)*

...Session 3 continued

Overview Continued: Anchors should be constructed within the time management guidelines described in the SPI Program Proficiencies. This time is not included in the overall scenario duration. The drill is assessed using the SPI Exam scoring scale and averaged into the candidate's overall score for the day. Time management is considered as one component of overall performance and is evaluated in context rather than as a strict pass/fail threshold. In larger groups, Program Providers may manage timing by rotating candidate pairs through the scenario while others wait.

Skills Scenario Reference

For complete instructions—including setup, materials, approved equipment, and the sequence of the drill—refer to the *Single Pitch Skills Scenario: Top Managed Technical Drill* scenario sheet

Session 4: Instructor Notebook Entry - Program Planning (Homework)

Goals: Evaluate a candidate's ability to plan and organize a full day of single-pitch instruction, demonstrating appropriate preparation, instructional intent, logistical awareness, and risk management.

Location: Single-pitch crag or classroom.

Equipment: Note-taking materials.

Overview: At the conclusion of Day 1, candidates are assigned a program planning homework task. This assignment reflects the level of preparation expected of a professional instructor prior to leading a day of climbing. Each candidate develops an instructor notebook entry outlining a detailed plan for the following day's venue and instructional objectives.

Plans should demonstrate thoughtful organization, sound decision-making, and attention to client experience, logistics, and risk management. Depending on the exam format and provider approach, specific details such as venue, start time, and overall plan structure may be assigned by the Program Provider or collaboratively determined by the group to support completion of the plan for the following day. Completed plans are reviewed the following morning during the morning meeting.

Framework for an Instructor Notebook Entry

Category	Topics to Include
Client & Program Overview	• Client or student goals and profile • Instructional or program objectives for the day
Venue, Conditions, & Route Planning	• Route selection based on objectives & current conditions • Weather observations and forecast, including temperature range, precipitation probability, and wind (screenshot or written summary) • Sun/shade considerations • Permit requirements or access restrictions
Hazards & Risk Management	• Anticipated hazards and mitigation strategies • Emergency response plan • Call-down list and nearest hospital • Primary and secondary communication methods
Equipment & Logistics	• Equipment list, including additional gear required for lessons or objectives • Parking, approach, and access considerations • Venue-specific logistics or restrictions • Venue-specific Leave No Trace considerations
Time Plan	• Meeting and approach times • Setup and instructional blocks • Transitions between lessons or routes • Lunch or rest breaks • Climbing and rope management cutoff time • Anticipated return time
Contingency Planning	• Alternate venue or route options in response to weather, crowding, or other constraints

End-of-Day Debriefs

Goals: Provide candidates with structured feedback on Day 1 performance, clarify expectations moving into Day 2, and identify individual or collective focus areas as appropriate. This debrief supports reflection, learning, and continued professional development within the exam environment.

SPI Exam Day 2:

Summary:

Session 5: Instructor Meeting - Program Planning Homework Review
Session 6: Continued Assessment of Technical Systems, Movement, and Group Management
Session 7: Teaching Components and Instructional Technique
End-of-Exam Group and Individual Debriefs

Session 5: Instructor Meeting and Review of Instructor Notebook Entries

Goals: Evaluate each candidate's ability to develop and clearly communicate an instructional plan using their instructor notebook, including instructional objectives, route selection, environmental considerations, and risk management.

Location: Parking lot or single-pitch crag

Equipment: Instructor notebooks and personal note-taking materials, paper or digital

Overview: Facilitated by the Provider, this morning meeting draws on input from the candidate group to present, review, and discuss the instructional plans developed the previous evening. Candidates briefly summarize key components of their instructor notebooks to demonstrate professional communication, planning, and decision-making. This session typically lasts about 15 minutes, depending on venue and program complexity.

Session 6: Continued Assessment of Technical Systems, Movement, and Group Management

Goals: Evaluate candidates' ability to efficiently and effectively set up and manage climbs or rappels in a peer instructional setting, demonstrating sound risk management, technical competence, and movement skills while supporting a positive and productive group experience.

Location: Single pitch climbing venue.

Equipment: Standard single-pitch climbing equipment appropriate to the venue and assessment focus

...Session 6 continued

Overview: This session continues candidate evaluation through peer-managed operation of technical systems and climbing movement. Observations from this session contribute to the candidate's overall program score. This is not a make-up or reattempt session, and not all technical systems will necessarily be revisited; it is intended to provide additional opportunities for observation of consistency, judgment, and movement in a live group setting.

During this session, candidates may be observed while:

- Setting up and managing climbs or rappels within a peer group
- Establishing routes via lead climbing
- Managing technical systems from the top of the cliff
- Building base-managed top-rope anchors and managing the climbing site from the base
- Demonstrating efficient movement on top rope, lead, or both (as determined by the Provider)
- Executing base assistance skills as appropriate to the system, terrain, and group context
- Completing skill assessments not concluded on Day 1 due to time or group size constraints

This session typically lasts approximately 2.5–3.5 hours, depending on group size, venue complexity, and program flow.

Session 7: Teaching Components and Instructional Technique

Goals: Evaluate each candidate's ability to plan and deliver a clear, well-organized peer-to-peer lesson that demonstrates effective instructional technique, appropriate risk management, and the ability to facilitate skill development within a peer learning environment.
Location: Single-pitch climbing venue
Equipment: Standard single-pitch climbing equipment appropriate to the lesson topic, lesson planning materials (paper or digital)

Overview: In this session, candidates prepare and deliver a peer-to-peer lesson focused on a specific technical or instructional skill assigned by the Examiner prior to the exam. Lessons are presented to peers within the candidate group, who may have varying levels of experience. Each lesson is limited to a maximum of 20 minutes, including demonstration and participant practice.

...Session 7 continued

Overview Continued: Lesson delivery may occur throughout the day or within a dedicated teaching block, as determined by the Provider. Candidates are expected to use the lesson planning framework and teaching strategies outlined in *Rock Climbing: The Official AMGA Single Pitch Manual* as a reference for lesson structure and evaluation expectations.

This session also serves as a continuing professional development opportunity, allowing candidates to practice teaching higher-level skills in a peer setting and to engage with topics that may extend beyond those covered in the SPI Course while remaining appropriate to the SPI Scope of Practice. Teaching and participating in peer-led lessons supports professional growth, reinforces instructional judgment, and provides exposure to a broader range of techniques and teaching approaches relevant to single-pitch instruction.

Evaluation emphasizes:
- Lesson organization that reflects clear instructional intent and priorities
- Clear explanations that stay focused on the task at hand
- Instructional delivery that integrates appropriate risk management
- Adjusting instruction based on peer questions, performance, or conditions
- Opportunities for engagement and hands-on learning

Potential Lesson Topics
(Assigned by the Examiner prior to the exam; not all topics will be used)

- Lead belaying and lowering with an assisted braking device (mechanical or geometric)
- Traditional protection placement techniques (active and passive protection)
- Anchor building: two-piece bolt anchors and three-piece traditional anchors
- Cleaning a sport anchor and lowering or rappelling
- Rappelling with an extension and third-hand backup
- Equipment application: advantages, limitations, and selection criteria
- Releasing a loaded auto-blocking belay device and initiating a lower
- Lowering with a redirected tube-style belay device
- Tethering systems: types and instructional applications
- Escaping a loaded top belay on the anchor and transferring to a munter/mule/overhand
- Teaching climbing movement through games or exercises relevant to the venue, rock type, and climbing style
- Lead climbing skills including: clipping techniques, back-clipping, z-clipping, correcting a z-clip, rope management, and mock lead climbing.

End-of-Exam Group and Individual Debriefs

Goals: Provide closure to the exam, reinforce professional expectations, and deliver clear feedback to support continued development.

Location: At the climbing venue or another appropriate nearby location, as conditions allow.

Equipment: Instructor notebook and writing materials; AMGA reference materials as needed.

Overview: The Program Provider facilitates a final session that addresses the following topics, as appropriate:

- Review of SPI certification lifespan and recertification pathways
- Overview of resources and benefits available to SPI-certified instructors
- Review of the AMGA Code of Conduct and Ethics, including AMGA brand use policy
- Review of AMGA Scope of Practice guidelines relevant to certified SPIs
- Group debrief addressing common themes from the exam

Individual debriefs are provided as time allows, typically 5–10 minutes per candidate.

Notes

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As an AMGA member, you are joining a nationwide network of instructors and guides committed to high standards, continued learning, and professional development.

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