



Introduction

On behalf of Special Olympics International, THANK YOU for contributing your time and expertise. The knowledge you share with the course participants will make a significant impact on the lives of athletes with intellectual disabilities.

The Volunteer Coach Course offers a basic introduction to coaching Special Olympics cross country skiing. The course should be relevant to coaches involved with Special Olympics athletes of low to average ability. Higher-level skills and tactics are introduced in the Advanced Coach Course and in NGB and other accreditation coaching programs.

Coaches should leave the training school with a clear understanding of the following:

- Special Olympics cross country skiing events and rules
- How to use the Special Olympics Cross Country Skiing Coaching Guide
- How to organize a training session
- Techniques for warm-ups and stretching
- How to teach the fundamentals of introductory cross country skiing
- Ideas for appropriate drills and activities to teach cross country skiing event strategies
- How to teach Special Olympics athletes cross country skiing event strategies

Review the Quick Quiz at the end of this guide to identify major points and ensure that they are covered within the course.

Suggestions for Instructors

- **Review the Special Olympics Cross Country Skiing Coaching Guide.** It provides the necessary background to our coaching program.
- **Recognize the expertise of the participating coaches** and, whenever possible, draw upon their experience of coaching Special Olympics Athletes.
- **Stay on schedule.** There is a lot of material to be covered, and it is easy to fall behind. Remember, this course is an overview. Encourage coaches to take additional coaching courses.
- **Use team teaching.** Two instructors can bring different expertise to the course and also make this course more enjoyable for the participants. It is suggested that one instructor be a specialist in cross country skiing and the other in Special Olympics.

Your ideas on the course are welcomed. Please send any ideas for future improvement to:

SOI Cross Country Skiing Director
Special Olympics International
1133 19th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036





Cross Country Skiing Coach Training School Agenda

PART 1 Classroom Session (90 minutes)

- 1.0 Introduction and Using the Special Olympics Coaching Guide
- 1.1 Special Olympics Coaching Philosophy
- 1.2 Coaching Resources
- 1.3 Athlete Assessment
- 1.4 Special Olympics Cross Country Skiing Events and Rules
- 1.5 Preparing for Your Cross Country Skiing Program
- 1.6 Eight-Week Training and Competition Plan
- 1.7 Organizing a Training Program
- 1.8 Prevention of Injuries
- 1.9 Coaching Athletes with Intellectual Disabilities

PART 2 Activity Session (120 minutes)

- 2.1 Warm-us and Stretching
- 2.2 Basic Skills Instruction
- 2.3 Competition Instruction

PART 3 Special Olympics Athletes Training Session (90 minutes)

- 3.1 Model Training Session

PART 4 Classroom Wrap-Up (30 minutes)

- 4.1 Review (Questions)
- 4.2 Quick Quiz
- 4.3 Certification Process and Application

Materials

- Course Agendas (one per coach)
- Special Olympics Cross country Skiing Coaching Guide
- Other recommended coaching books/videos for display

Equipment

- Skis, boots, bindings, poles
- Waxing equipment
- Ski racing numbers for race start
- First-aid kit
- Race clothing
- Yellow/Orange pylons for marking
- Megaphone/Bullhorn
- Water





PART 1
Classroom Session
(120 minutes)

1.0 Introduction and Using the Special Olympics Cross Country Skiing Coaching Guide

- Welcome participants and introduce yourself and your coaching background.
- Ask participants to briefly introduce themselves.
- Review the course objectives and agenda.
- Introduce and review the Special Olympics Cross Country Skiing Coaching Guide. Refer to it as you go through the course.

1.1 Special Olympics Coaching Philosophy

- The use of the word “**Olympics**” means a commitment to high standards of coaching.
- **Training** is critical for athlete development.
- Coaches must continually **challenge** athletes to achieve new levels of achievement.
- Special Olympics means training to compete, not just recreation. Refer to oath: “Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me brave in the attempt.”

1.2 Coaches Resources

- Provide examples of coaching **books and videos**.
- Encourage coaches to affiliate with their sport’s associations/organizations.
- Provide information on other **NGB coaching courses**.
- Stress the importance of **assistant coaches and Partners Clubs**® with high schools and colleges. (Many Special Olympics athletes need individualized attention in order to progress.)

1.3 Athlete Assessment

- All athletes must be medically certified to play in Special Olympics (review **Special Olympics medical form**).
- All athletes with **Down syndrome** must have an **atlantoaxial X-ray**.
- Coaches will encounter athletes of all levels of abilities. Try to **individualize** training and competition placement to benefit each athlete.





PART 1 (Continued)

1.4 Special Olympics Cross Country Skiing Events and Rules

- List the **equipment** needed for a training session.
- Special Olympics cross country skiing **rules** include some modifications.
- **Divisioning** allows athletes to compete against those of similar abilities and ages.
- Provide a brief **historical perspective** of cross country skiing.
- Promote cross country skiing as a **lifetime sport**.

1.5 Prepare for Your Cross Country Skiing Program

- List the **equipment** needed for a training session.
- Emphasize the importance of good equipment and **quality ski clothing** for athletes.
- Provide names of **dealers** who will supply low-cost, quality equipment.
- Discuss the importance of proper equipment **maintenance**. Include a brief demonstration of ski waxing.
- Offer suggestions for **basic nutrition** requirements for endurance sports.

1.6 Eight-Week Training and Competition Plan

Briefly discuss each of the topics below. Identify their importance and what can be accomplished.

- Pre-Season Conditioning
- Peaking
- Racing Progression
- Competition Opportunities
- Team Registration





PART 1 (Continued)

1.7 Organizing a Training Program

Emphasize the importance of a **written training plan**.

- Establish a consistent **warm-up** routine.
- Provide flexibility exercises.
- Offer dryland training.
- Move to on-snow training.
- Provide competition experiences.
- Provide a cool-down routine to close.

1.8 Prevention of Injuries

- **Safety** is a coach's number one priority.
- **Check the competition area** for safety hazards before each workout.
- Establish **training rules** to minimize accidents.
- Have an **emergency action plan**, and practice it.
- **Never leave athletes alone** while attending an injured athlete.
- Make sure a **warming area** is always nearby.

1.9 Coaching Athletes with Intellectual Disabilities

- Establish clear **rules** to help athletes understand exactly what is expected of them and to reduce behavior problems.
- **Break down skills** and concepts into simple parts.
- Use **one-part instructions** and "**Key Words**" to explain and reinforce technical skill components.
- Instruct and demonstrate but also coach through asking appropriate *questions*.
Challenge athletes to think for themselves.
- Be aware of **physical impairments** that affect the way athletes hear, see, and/or pay attention.
- Establish a consistent **pre-event** and **post-event routine** at competitions.
- Ask coaches to suggest any of their own **coaching tips**.





PART 2
Activity Session
(120 minutes)

The **goals** of this session are twofold. One is to help coaches understand the importance of a consistent warm-up and stretching routine and the basic skill components of cross country skiing. The other is to provide simple technical information used to teach Special Olympics athletes these skills. The Coaching Guide should be used extensively in this section.

Teaching Suggestions

- Involve as many participants as possible. Make this an active session with an emphasis on participation.
- Know exactly what you are going to do and stick to the schedule. Time goes by very quickly.

2.1 Instructional Area Selection [20 minutes]

Activities

- **Leg Stretch** (with skis on)
Step forward on one ski, bending the leg in a 90 degree angle. Extend other leg backwards as far as possible. Lift back heel off ski. Repeat, switching leg positions.
- **Foot Swing** (with skis on)
While standing with skis parallel to one another, lift one foot and swing feely backward and forward. Repeat with other foot.
- **Toe Touches** (with skis on)
From standing position (Skis parallel, hip-width apart), bend from the waist and reach down as far as possible. Hold stretch for 5 seconds.
- **Running in Place** (with skis on)
Run in place continually for 30 seconds, gradually increasing speed.

Teaching Suggestions

- Instruct proper stretching technique, such as slow stretching, no bouncing.
- Show the effectiveness of having an athlete demonstrate a stretch while the other coaches focus on assisting athletes with lower ability.
- Use “**Key Words**” rather than technical explanations. Keep it simple!





2.2 Teaching the Basic Skills [60 minutes]

For the purpose of this course, the focus should be on the five fundamental skills of cross country skiing: the Ready Position, Recovery, Star Turns, Side Stepping (Climbing), and Diagonal Strides. More activities and technical skill information should be taken from the Coaching Guide.

Teaching Suggestions

- Coaches should be encouraged to make liberal use of **assistants**. One assistant is suggested for every two skiers.
- A recommended method of organization when teaching skills is to **line up skiers** with a minimum of three feet between them. Larger groups may gather in a circle, with instructor/coach in the middle. Always try to keep skiers' backs to the sun.
- If a skier is encountering difficulties learning a skill, **revert back** to the previous skill until he/she is ready to move up.

Skill 1: **READY POSITION**

- Demonstrate the correct ready position, emphasizing looking ahead and keeping chin up.
- Key Words: “Balance”; “Stability”; “Flex”; “Chin Up”; “Look Straight Ahead”

Skill 2: **RECOVERY**

Falling Down

- Demonstrate and practice safely falling down while keeping the hands, arms, and poles out of the way.
- Key Words: “Lean to the Side”; “Relax”; “Reach for the Snow”

Standing Up

- Demonstrate and practice standing up after falling down.
- Key Words: “Bend the Knee”; “Set Your Foot”; “Plant the Poles”; “Push Up”

Skill 3: **STAR TURNS**

- Demonstrate and practice performing inward and outward star turn.
- Key Word: “Ready Position”; “Form a V”; “Make a Circle”

Skill 4: **SIDE STEPPING (Climbing)**

- Demonstrate and practice sidestepping on flat terrain.
- Key Words: “Pick it Up”

Skill 5: **DIAGONAL STRIDE**

- Demonstrate and practice performing a diagonal stride while skiing.
- Key Words: “Glide”; “Stride Forward”; “Flex at the Knees”; “Push Down on the Pole”





PART 2 (continued)

2.3 Competition Introduction [40 minutes]

The general rules and modifications of Special Olympics cross country skiing are described in detail in the Official Special Olympics Winter Sports Rules. Coaches, however, need to be instructed on the teaching of several competition related issues, including starts, passing, and sign recognition.

• **Starts**

– Interval Starts

Interval starts are used in 500-meter race through 10-kilometer race.
Briefly demonstrate; include the countdown.

– Relay Starts

Relay starts are used in the 50-meter race, 100-meter race, and relay races.
Briefly demonstrate.

• **Passing**

– Discuss and demonstrate common passing errors.

A competitor may not impede or push another skier.

A competitor may not unnecessarily slow down, thereby causing another to slow down or collide.

A competitor should practice stepping around a slower skier when passing.

– Demonstrate proper passing technique.

Call “Track!” when overtaking a slower skier.

Yield when being overtaken by a faster competitor.

• **Sign Recognition**

– Trail markers

– “Cross Country Skier” sign

– Degree of difficulty signs

– Caution or warning signs

– Regulatory signs, including direction signs on race course





PART 3
Special Olympics Athletes Training Session
(90 minutes)

Guidelines

This part of the training school provides an opportunity for coaches to work directly with Special Olympics athletes and to observe expert instructors demonstrating some of the ideas introduced earlier.

Coaches will benefit from seeing how a competition training session is run. Therefore, we recommend that the instructors run a **model training session**.

At least three Special Olympics cross country skiing athletes are needed.

The instructors should lead this session and involve as many coaches as possible as active training partners. Take five minutes before the session to review activities, identify responsibilities, and assign participants specific responsibilities.

Model Training Session

Note: Each training session is likely to focus on different areas. Early in the training season, coaches should concentrate on basic skills, especially on basic skills, especially when dealing with skiers of lower ability. Later in the season, when coaches are keying in on upcoming competitions, the focus may be on tactics and race simulation. The following model is a sample that might be appropriate for early season training session.

3.1 Warm-up and Stretching

- Running in Place
- Stretching Exercises (leg, toe touch, foot swing)

3.2 Skills Instruction

- Star Turns
- Side Stepping

3.3 Competition Stimulation

- Interval Starts

3.4 Cool-Down and Team-Talk





PART 4
Classroom Wrap-up Session
(30 minutes)

4.1 Review (Questions and Answers) [5 minutes]

4.2 Quick Quiz (see following page) [15 minutes]

- Ask coaches to complete the Quick Quiz.
- Provide the answers to each question.
- Coaches grade their own quiz.

4.3 Certification Process and Form [5 minutes]

- Ask coaches to fill out the first part of the certification form.
- In addition to taking this course on teaching and coaching a specific sport, a Special Olympics coach must do the following in order to achieve certification:
 - Attend a General Orientation as a basic introduction to Special Olympics
 - Complete a course on the basics of teaching and coaching Special Olympics athletes.
 - Complete 10 hours of working with Special Olympics athletes under an experienced coach
 - Complete the training programs for Protective Behaviors and Concussion Training and submit confirmation of completion to the Local Special Olympics Program (U.S. only).
 - Receive endorsement from his/her Program as having fulfilled the above criteria, as well as general screening approval as a suitable individual to work with Special Olympics athletes.

4.4 Training School Evaluation [5 minutes]

- Coaches complete the course evaluation and return it before leaving the training school.





Quick Quiz

1. For overall safety and effectiveness, there should be at least ___ coach(es) for every ___ athletes at each practice session.
2. The three main aspects of a well-organized training session in winter training are _____, _____, and _____.
3. The three factors in coaching philosophy are _____, _____, and _____.
4. Skiers learn the most about technique when they first _____ rather than by standing around.
5. Coaches should look to see that the skiers not only have the right ski equipment, but the right _____.
6. Finish this quote: “It is better to train often and easy than _____.”
7. A skier loses more body heat through the _____ than any other part of the body. Let’s keep our skiers warm for athletic activities.
8. A resource for more information on coaches education form cross country skiing is _____.
9. The three key points to either a classical stride or a freestyle skate that coaches look for are _____, _____, and _____.
10. Klister is used on snow that has been _____ and is used primarily in _____ conditions.
11. _____ poles are used to enhance skating, and poles for classical skiing normally measure to the _____.
12. The SOI/FIS Technical Delegate is on hand to oversee that the _____ are followed and will convene the _____ in the event of a protest.
13. The term “Nordic skiing” derived its name from _____
_____.
14. Higher elevations affect endurance athletes by _____
_____.



Quick Quiz Answers

1. For overall safety and effectiveness, there should be at least **one** coach(es) for every **four** athletes at each practice session.
2. The three main aspects of a well-organized training session in winter training are **properly fitted and serviced equipment**, **a well-maintained and set up training area**, and **proper medical and safety support**.
3. The three factors in coaching philosophy are **inclusion**, **training**, and **instilling confidence**.
4. Skiers learn the most about technique when they first **observe and then imitate** rather than by standing around.
5. Coaches should look to see that the skiers not only have the right ski equipment, but the right **clothing**.
6. Finish this quote: "It is better to train often and easy than **to train intensely only a few times.**"
7. A skier loses more body heat through the **head** than any other part of the body. Let's keep our skiers warm for athletic activities.
8. A resource for more information on coaches education form cross country skiing is **the U.S. Ski Coaches Association (USSCA)**.
9. The three key points to either a classical stride or a freestyle skate that coaches look for are **weight shift**, **forward body position**, and **pole plants**.
10. Klister is used on snow that has been **warmed** and is used primarily in **wet** conditions.
11. **Long** poles are used to enhance skating, and poles for classical skiing normally measure to the **armpit**.
12. The SOI/FIS Technical Delegate is on hand to oversee that the **rules** are followed and will convene the **Jury** in the event of a protest.
13. The term "Nordic skiing" derived its name from **Scandinavia** and refers to a discipline that **involves cross country and downhill maneuvers on skis that affixes the toe to the ski leaves the heel free**.
14. Higher elevations affect endurance athletes by **influencing the amount of oxygen that gets to the bloodstream because there is less oxygen in the air**.