



MWS Essential Eligibility Criteria

Montana Wilderness School courses range from 6 days to 21 days in length. They are designed to provide empowering expeditionary wilderness experiences that foster personal growth, cultivate a conservation ethic, and offer connections to remote landscapes and wild places. MWS courses take place in remote areas that are often one day's travel or more from definitive medical care and involve travel through challenging, exposed, and rough terrain, often in inclement weather.

MWS strives to create high-quality educational experiences for all of our students, and we value the health and safety of our students and staff. We recognize that outdoor activities—especially those in the backcountry—contain inherent risks. To achieve the intended educational, technical, and personal growth outcomes, participants on each MWS course must be capable of and committed to engaging in activities by meeting the *Essential Eligibility Criteria* for a student's chosen course. MWS instructors are trained as experiential educators but are not therapists or trained in adaptive or specialized programming for people with disabilities or with significant mental, behavioral, or emotional health conditions or considerations.

The following *Essential Eligibility Criteria* pertain to requirements that participants must meet prior to arrival for their course. The *General Essential Eligibility Criteria* address baseline requirements for all MWS courses. Additionally, there are course- or element-specific requirements offered to assist participants in preparedness for the rigors and expectations of backcountry life. This list is not intended to be comprehensive of all situations, but rather a guideline to help students understand the expectations for travel and safe participation that demand a level of physical and emotional preparedness. Following sufficient instruction and supervised practice, students will be expected to be able to abide by criteria specific to their course elements.

General Essential Eligibility Criteria for All Courses

- Able to understand and follow verbal and visual instructions individually and in an expedition group; participants must be able to follow instructions whether supervised or not.
- Able to comprehend hazards and safety concerns after sufficient instruction. Be able to identify hazards posed by the environment (e.g., steep or uneven terrain, moving water, sun, wind, cold, etc.), and to adhere to risk management policies procedures and guidelines even when instructors are not present.
- Able to effectively communicate personal distress, illness, injury, need for assistance, and safety concerns to others. Participants must be able to communicate these in a variety of conditions where visibility and audibility are limited, such as in inclement weather and darkness.
- Able to adapt to the physical, mental, and emotional rigors of the course, given a supportive and inclusive environment.

- Able to live in primitive conditions for the duration of course, often more than a day from advanced medical care.
- Able to manage any known medical conditions, with or without assistance, for at least the duration of the expedition. Participants must be able to manage these in a primitive and remote environment.
- Able to stay alert and engaged for extended periods of expeditionary backcountry travel and living.
- Able to demonstrate adequate self-care, without supervision, after sufficient instruction. This includes staying adequately hydrated and nourished, maintaining hygiene and using clothing and equipment to maintain warmth and protection from the elements in temperatures ranging from below freezing to over 100 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Refrain from the use of alcohol and/or tobacco-*controlled* substances, and any misuse of prescription or over the counter drugs. If using prescription drugs, participants must be able to follow correct dosage and usage and keep them in good condition while in the backcountry. Depending on the prescription medication, possession and administration of medication may be with or without instructor assistance.
- Able to contribute to a safe, respectful and just social and emotional learning environment, respecting all stated or inferred identities, and maintaining appropriate, non-exclusive relationships with other group members and instructors.
- Able to refrain from sexual activity, exclusive relationships (cliques), harassment and bullying, and all other behavior that disrupts the learning of others or the cohesion of the group.
- Must be able to travel on uneven and variable terrain, including flat, uphill, and downhill.
- Must be able to carry the majority of personal equipment and an equitable share of group equipment using the means specific to their course (loading or unloading can be done individually or with assistance to lift/load onto or off of a horse, in or on a boat, or in a backpack). Participants must be able to communicate with staff when needing assistance.
- Must arrive at course start neither experiencing nor presenting any symptoms or signs of communicable disease.
- Able to wear an approved face covering or mask if instructed to do so. Masks must cover both the nose and mouth and fasten either at the back of the head or behind the ears.
- Able to follow instructions for mitigation strategies that reduce the risk of spreading communicable diseases, such as handwashing, coughing into an elbow, and covering nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.

Backpacking Courses

- *All General Essential Eligibility Criteria*
- Able to carry a backpack weighing a minimum of 40lbs, that will include personal clothing, group food and equipment.
- Able to wear an appropriately sized and adjusted backpack, per manufacturer's recommendations.
- Able to travel each day wearing a loaded backpack, while maintaining adequate balance, over steep and uneven terrain, on and off trail, at elevations of 8000' or more, including sections of scrambling, and crossing rivers and streams without bridges.

Flatwater Courses

- *All General Essential Eligibility Criteria*
- Able to wear a properly fitted PFD, per manufacturers' recommendations, and float in water without assistance.
- Control, submerge, and maneuver a paddle in order to steer and propel the boat forward.
- Able to perceive, understand and respond to audible commands given by a boating partner or communicate such commands to boating partners (such as in a tandem canoe) to maneuver a boat to maintain proper heading or avoid obstacles.
- After sufficient instruction, must be able to independently exit a capsized boat, fend for self while in the water away from the boat, attain and maintain correct body position if out of the boat, hang on onto another boat or rope for rescue purposes, and/or perform self-rescue or cooperate with assisted rescue.
- Possess physical strength and coordination sufficient to carry gear from boats over uneven and rugged terrain to camp locations.
- Able to work with a team to move, carry and lift boats on and off a trailer and in and out of the water.

Whitewater Courses

- *All General Essential Eligibility Criteria*
- *All Flatwater Eligibility Criteria*
- Must be sufficiently comfortable and capable in water: able to turn from face down to face up in moving water while wearing a properly fitted PFD, and able to hold breath underwater for short periods of time.
- After sufficient instruction, must be able to attain and maintain correct body position out of the boat in rapidly moving water.
- Able to control a canoe or packraft and maintain a balanced, upright position without assistance.
- With guidance, must be able to pack equipment and load equipment onto/inside a packraft or canoe and understands the importance of balance points in watercraft and can pack equipment accordingly.
- Able to wear all necessary safety equipment, including a helmet, spray skirt, PFD, or gloves for multiple hours at a time.

Horsepacking Courses

- *All General Essential Eligibility Criteria*
- Able to mount and dismount a horse independently.
- Able to rapidly dismount when directed to on short notice in any terrain in situations where a horse might be in distress and rapid dismount is necessary for the safety of the rider and horse. Assistance to remount may not be possible in all situations.
- Able to balance independently in the saddle while traveling over rugged steep mountainous terrain and negotiating obstacles such as rocks, deadfall, and mud.
- Able to maintain balance on the horse during river crossings with swift, deep, cold water and during entry and exit of the river when steep banks may be present and need to be negotiated.
- After instruction and guided practice, must be able to control the horse by giving it signals to stop, move, turn left or right, and calm down. This is typically accomplished through leg, hand and/or voice signals.
- Able to lift a minimum of 35 lbs. in order to pack a horse.
- Able to walk three miles on a trail if a horse is injured, ill, or unable to carry a rider.

- Able to dress appropriately for the mode of transport: to include wearing stiff or rigid boots, long pants, and wear a helmet (per manufacturer's recommendations) during all times when participants are riding horses.
- Able to move over uneven mountain terrain at camp in order to attend to and care for the horses.
- Able to perform an emergency one-rein stop by reaching down to the horse's neck, grabbing rein tightly on one side, and pulling it hard to your toe while maintaining balance on the horse.
- Maximum weight for individuals interested in horsepacking activity is 250 pounds, which is a function of the horse's weight carrying ability.

Rock Climbing and Mountaineering Courses

- *All General Essential Eligibility Criteria*
- *All Backpacking Eligibility Criteria*
- Able to wear a climbing harness and helmet, according to manufacturer's recommendations.
- Able to participate in belaying, rappelling and climbing activities.
- Able to maintain comfort and composure during extended times at height and exposure.
- Able to effectively communicate independently over a distance of up to 50 meters when participating in multi-pitch rock climbing or alpine mountaineering, or during snow or glacier travel. The potential necessary communication of climbing signals may include: hand signals, spoken signals, or a rope tug communication system. Electronic aids are likely not reliable.
 - Communication frequently includes direction from the instructor as to what the student should do in dynamic contexts (e.g. if the student falls and is caught by the rope) and explanation of necessary procedures to be used (e.g. if the rope becomes jammed on a multi-pitch climb, the instructor and student must communicate and work together to figure out what the problem is and how best to solve it).
 - Communication also requires a response from the student to the instructor (e.g., if a student falls, or has difficulty with a section of the climb and the instructor must determine—by asking questions about the student's wellbeing and status—whether rescue procedures are necessary).
- After sufficient instruction, must be able to provide a reliable belay to another climber during roped climbing. To do so, a student must be able to reliably manipulate a climbing rope through a belay device such as an ATC, Grigri or equivalent device, and understand the necessary climbing signals & commands to operate it effectively. The instructors leading the course may deem a backup belay person is necessary in any situation.
- After instruction and guided practice, student must be able to independently tie the overhand and figure of eight series of knots.
- After instruction and guided practice, student must be able to reliably and independently perform simple technical tasks such as tying into a rope, clipping into an anchor and getting into a harness without the direct supervision of an instructor.
- After sufficient instruction and practice, student must be able to travel over variable terrain, on or off trail, without stopping for one hour.
- On courses where participants are traveling over snowy or glaciated terrain, students must be able to perform a self-arrest with an ice axe without assistance.

Courses with a Wilderness First Aid Component

- *All General Essential Eligibility Criteria*
- Able to stay alert and to focus for 4-6 hours in a classroom type setting for 2 consecutive days.
- Able to stay alert and to focus for up to two hours at a time while performing patient care in a learning scenario, while traveling over rough, uneven terrain, or during periods of inclement weather.

- Able to respond to a simulated crisis, or a medical emergency in severe weather, darkness, or remote wilderness settings.
- After instruction and guided practice, the student must be able to perform all tasks related to patient care, including the ability to log roll a patient, palpate a patient for injuries from head to toe, perceive and assess a patient's verbal and nonverbal responses to examination. Must possess the ability to treat and attend to a patient's needs while on rocky, wet, sloped, brush covered, forested, snow covered or otherwise rugged and uneven terrain, and with the patient on the ground in awkward, crowded or low spaces.
- Possess the ability to withstand varied environmental conditions such as extreme heat, cold, and precipitation. Be able to work in conditions of limited visibility including darkness and in the vicinity of loud noises such as created by wind or rushing water.

Yellowstone Expedition + Wilderness First Aid

- *All General Essential Eligibility Criteria*
- *All Backpacking Eligibility Criteria*
- *All Flatwater and Whitewater Eligibility Criteria*
- *All Courses with a Wilderness First Aid Component Criteria*

