



HIKING LEADER REFERENCE MANUAL

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Introduction

The Outdoor Club of South Jersey offers over 700 hiking events a year. That's a lot of places to go and our members cannot get there without someone to guide the way. We encourage experienced hikers to step up from following a leader to becoming a leader. Leaders are the OCSJ's most valuable resource, yet there are never enough members willing to take on the task. As is frequently said, "There is no club if there are no leaders".

The intent of this manual is to provide an experienced hiker with the knowledge and confidence they need to begin leading hikes. It contains tips, tricks, and advice from experienced OCSJ hiking leaders; things they learned the hard way. There is a lot of information crammed into a few pages. Combined with on-the-trail experience with a co-leader, the new leader will know enough to get started. Our hikers will be able to explore unfamiliar trails and enjoy new experiences knowing they are in good hands. Of course, a manual will never teach you everything you need to know. Every leader continues to learn with each and every hike.

Thank you for stepping up, for your willingness to take on responsibilities, and for sharing your free time. Thank you for becoming a leader. Welcome to the group that makes our club go.

Diane Mason
Hiking Leader
Outdoor Club of South Jersey



Planning a Hike

WHERE SHOULD I GO?

- For your first hike, select a trail you know by heart. Maybe it's your favorite hike, a local park, or a walk around an interesting neighborhood. Keep it short and sweet. Knowing the trail leaves you free to concentrate on your hikers.

PRE-HIKE YOUR HIKE

- Walk a new-to-you hike or one you have not been on in a while.
- If possible, obtain a map (on-line resources, trail apps, park offices).
- Check trail conditions so you can advise your hikers (wet feet, steep climbs, no shade, etc.)
- Note good spots for rest breaks and lunch.

HOW DO I GET MY HIKE ON THE CALENDAR?

- Once you've selected where you want to go, send all the details to the Hiking Chair who will list your first one or two hikes for you.

WALKING PACE DESCRIPTIONS

- Every posted hike must include the pace the group can expect to walk. The OCSJ uses standard pace descriptions.
- These are averages only; actual results may vary due to factors such as surfaces (trails vs roads), terrain (bushwhacking vs clear), elevation changes (hilly vs flat), and weather.



EASY

Less than 2.5 mph (25+ minute mile)
Slower walking with more frequent rest breaks
For the slower walker.



MODERATE

2.5-3.0 mph (20-25 minute mile)
Comfortable walking with occasional rest breaks.
For the average walker.



BRISK

3.0 – 3.5 mph (17-20 minute mile)
Faster walking with occasional rest breaks.
For the average, better conditioned walker.



FAST

Over 3.5 mph (17 or less minute mile)
Fitness walking with few rest breaks.
For seasoned, fit conditioned walkers.

- Notes about pace and distance:
 - It is important to err on the side of too much when describing how far you will go and how long it will take. Add extra time and distance to your description.
 - If you go faster than the listed pace, you might get hikers that cannot keep up.
 - If you are inaccurate in how far you will go, you might get hikers than cannot go the distance.
 - Even a half mile off can be the difference between an enjoyable hike and a struggle to finish.



Before the Hike

WEATHER CANCELLATION POLICY

- Your posted hike should include your weather cancellation policy. The standard is “Rain Cancels” or “Bad Weather Cancels”, however, you can choose to hike in almost any weather condition as long as your hikers will be safe.
- As a leader, keep an eye on the weather in the days leading up to your hike.
 - If the weather forecast looks bad, cancel the day (or more) before.
 - If you prefer to wait until the morning of a hike, include that info in the hike description. For example, “Cancellations will be made by 7:00 a.m. on the day of the hike.” Your hikers will know to check before heading out that morning.
- Even when the weather forecast is only slightly less than ideal, expect your hikers to contact you or post comments asking if the event is still on. Don’t be surprised by how early those questions will start.

CLOTHING

- Wear something highly visible that will distinguish you as the leader, such as a bright hat or shirt.

ARRIVE EARLY

- Be at the meeting location 30 minutes ahead of time. People may arrive that early.

TURNING AWAY A HIKER

- As the leader, you have the right to turn away a hiker who did not sign up for the hike, remains on the waitlist, or is not prepared to hike safely (for example, wearing clothing inappropriate for the weather or shoes for the terrain).

STARTING AND ENDING

- The hike begins when people sign in.
- The hike ends when you return to the vehicles. Tailgates/social activities are not part of the event.
- It is completely up to you if you leave exactly on time or wait a few minutes for stragglers. Don’t let anyone rush you or bully you about whatever decision you make.
- While not a club requirement, at the end of the hike you should not drive away until all of your hikers have left the parking area. However, if they get on their cell phone for more than a few minutes, feel free to drive away.

FORMS: SIGN IN WAIVER and INCIDENT REPORT FORM

- Consider purchasing a clip board that has storage space to hold pens and forms.
- Print an Incident Report Form and keep it on your clipboard or in your vehicle. You'll need to complete this form if someone is injured during your hike.
- Print the sign in waiver the day before your hike, and complete the top section of the form. It will be done and out of the way. List your own name and emergency contact info.
 - The current version of the sign in waiver and incident report form can be found on the club website (ocsj.org) under Policies and Forms.
- Have hikers sign the waiver as soon as they arrive at the meeting location. Ask a time or two if everyone has signed in. Hikers will arrive, start talking to each other, and forget to sign in.
- Hikers do not have to fill in their email address on the form. They do have to give an emergency contact number (911 is not acceptable). This may cause some pushback, stand your ground.

INTRODUCTION AND SAFETY TALK

- After everyone has signed in, introduce yourself and your co-leader.
- Ask for a volunteer to be the Sweep. Make sure you have their phone number handy in case they get separated.
- If going out as a group after the hike, this is a good time to let everyone know where you're going, such as a local restaurant, and give directions to get there.
- Count the number of hikers (count again after breaks and at the end).
- Give the required "safety talk" to the group.
 - Remind hikers to bring their water and use their bug repellent.
 - Describe the hike (We're going to start on the pink trail then turn onto the white trail). If a hiker gets separated and comes to an intersection, they may remember the name of the trail to take.
 - Mention any terrain issues such as muddy or icy trails.
 - Suggest they not touch unfamiliar plants or animals.
 - Ask them to be mindful when carrying trekking poles (points down when not in use).
 - Tell the group to stay behind the leader and in front of the sweep.
 - Explain the pet policy. Dogs must be leashed and remain in the back.
- Remember to bring the sign in sheet with you on the hike so emergency contact numbers are always handy. Let your Sweep know where you are keeping the sign in sheet in case you are the one injured.



During the Hike

YOU ARE IN CHARGE

- Tell yourself this is your hike, you are in charge. Don't let fear of conflict or ruffled feathers keep you from doing it your way.
- You will have hikers who believe they have a better way to go. Stand your ground. Be polite but firm. You can say, "That's a great idea for next time."
- You will have hikers who do not know or ignore standard hiking etiquette. A new hiker will never learn the rules until someone takes the time to teach them. For example, if someone is leaving trash behind, explain Leave No Trace, or remind a faster hiker to remain behind the leader.

PACE

- Watch your walking pace. There is always someone who wants to go faster, and you'll find yourself keeping their pace instead of your own. Use a GPS or hiking app to monitor your speed.
- Assess the skill level of your hikers early on in your hike. Keep in eye on hikers that may need help or are slower; they may have physical limitations you are not aware of.
 - If someone cannot keep up, slow down, even if it means dropping from brisk to moderate or moderate to easy. Like the Marines, we leave no person behind. The other hikers will be annoyed, but an annoyed group is better than a lost hiker.
- A large group is like a Slinky...grouped together, then spread out, then grouped together again. Stop and regroup before making a turn on the trail so everyone knows which way to go.
- When going over a difficult area (streams, steep rocks, etc.) stay and assist your hikers. Recruit stronger bodies to help if necessary. Make sure to tell the hikers where to stop and wait once they have made it past the obstacle.
- Hikers sometime overestimate their abilities or do not read the hike description thoroughly. Be prepared to hear you are going too fast or too slow, or both!

THE SWEEP

- Always keep your sweep in sight. If you lose sight of your sweep, stop and wait for them to catch up.
- Your sweep should always stay behind with anyone who falls back. No hiker is ever to be left alone.
- Occasionally ask the sweep if you have everyone, especially after water crossings, climbs, or curves in the trail. Never let your hikers separate into individual groups.

BREAKS

- Stop fairly early for clothing adjustments.
- Listen to the breathing of those around you. If someone is getting breathless, take a break.
- Stop for restroom breaks (sometimes called “bio breaks” or “separation breaks”). The usual is to direct the women one way and the men in the opposite direction. If someone needs to drop back for personal reasons between breaks, ask the Sweep to stay back with them. Move the group ahead to give them privacy, but slow your pace a bit until the hiker and sweep catch up.
- When stopping for lunch, announce how long the break will be. Then give people a five minute warning so they can start to pack up.
- Don't let anyone rush you to end a water/snack/lunch break. It's your hike, simply say, “I'm not ready to leave yet.”

IN CASE OF INJURY

- Carry a small first aid kit.
- If someone gets injured, never hesitate to call for medical help. If the person says they are fine, but they don't seem fine, call 911. Better safe than sorry. Afterwards, fill out an incident report and call the Hiking Chair.

PET POLICY

- Pets must remain on the leash and at the back of the group. Dogs and leashes are a tripping hazard to your hikers. Strictly enforce this policy during the hike.
- Expect owners to claim their dogs are friendly when they actually do not socialize acceptably with either people or other dogs.
- Prepare for a lot of barking or growling if you come across another dog on the trail, especially an unleashed dog. It can be pretty scary. Hide your fear, stop the group, and assess the situation.
- Do not hold up the group because a dog insists on stopping to sniff here, there, and everywhere. Ask the owner to keep the dog close and moving. Empower your Sweep to keep the pet owner on the move.



After the Hike

THE “OFFICIAL” DISTANCE

- With their different devices and apps your hikers will track the distance you have walked. They will all get different results. You will be told that the hike was longer or shorter than you described. Note the longest one, and put that distance in the event description when you run the hike again.

FORMS: SIGN IN WAIVER and INCIDENT REPORT FORM

- Review and complete the top section of the sign in waiver (weather, name of sweep, initial that the safety talk was given).
- Write the name of no-shows or late cancellations on the form. Enter no-shows in Meetup or ask the Hiking Chair to enter the info for you. Make the Hiking Chair aware of people who cancelled late.
- Send the original sign in waiver to the Hiking Chair. Making a copy for your own records is optional. If you lead hikes often, you can wait to mail a few forms at a time, but at least monthly. The club keeps these forms for several years for insurance purposes.
- If there was an incident during the hike, complete an incident report form, and call the Hiking Chair.

CRITIQUE YOUR OWN HIKE

- Did you give the safety talk? Were you familiar enough with the trail? How did the timing of the breaks work out? Did you keep the pace set in the hike description? How did the Sweep do, can you trust them to do it again? What did you learn for next time?
- Leaders learn something new every hike. If something could have been done better, do better next time. In the meantime, be proud. You stepped up. You're a leader!



Other Things

QUALIFIED LEADER

- If you lead six hikes in a calendar year (January through December), you are considered a “qualified leader”. This has nothing to do with your skill level. It means you qualify for...
 - One year added to your membership for free, and
 - An invitation to the annual Leaders’ Banquet.
- It is the OCSJ’s way of showing our appreciation for your dedication. At the luncheon you are able to meet and share experiences with your fellow leaders.

LIABILITY AND MEDICAL INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR LEADERS AND CLUB MEMBERS

- The club’s insurance covers members who are injured while participating in a club event. The member’s own medical insurance is their primary insurance. The club’s insurance is secondary.
- Car shuttles and tailgates are not covered by our insurance policy. A shuttle driver uses their own vehicle and carries passengers at their own risk.
- Leaders are covered by the club’s liability insurance, which includes cost of defense and general liability. However, if the leader knowingly places their group in an unsafe or an illegal situation, they could be held responsible and not covered by the club’s insurance.

WHAT ADDITIONAL ITEMS SHOULD A LEADER HAVE IN THEIR DAYPACK?

- An additional snack (enough for you and another person).
- Plenty of water (enough for you and another person)
- First Aid Kit
- Knife or multi-tool
- Headlamp (in case your hike unexpectedly goes past sunset)
- Matches, lighter, or fire starter (because you just never know)
- Emergency blanket (in case you are stuck out in the cold or someone is injured)
- Insect Repellant (enough for you and the person who forgot theirs).
- Sunscreen (enough to share in case one of your hikers starts turning red)
- Map and Compass or GPS (for when you accidently “take the scenic route”.)
- *The Sign in Sheet with Emergency Contact Numbers!!*

Listing an Event on Meetup

After you have led a few hikes with a co-leader and are ready to fly solo, the Hiking Chair will give you the authorization to enter your own events in Meetup.

Neil Kornhauser, our Biking Chair, put together instructions for posting your events. These instructions can be found on the club's home page under Policies and Forms. The document is called Creating a Meetup Event.

WHAT IS INCLUDED

- Title
- Date and Time (add at least a half hour more than anticipated)
- Duration
- Photo (optional)
- Description
- Location
- How to Find Us
- Covid 19 Safety measures (optional)
- Host (adding another host is the way to add a co-leader)
- Optional Settings: Attendee limit (leave everything else "off" for your first couple of hikes)

WHAT TO WRITE IN THE DESCRIPTION

Where you're going: Include the name of the park or area. Mention the terrain.

Pace and Distance: Very important. It should go near the top of the description.

What they'll see: Note interesting landmarks, formations, or historical sites.

Leader contact info: Your phone number and/or your email address. If you prefer obscurity, you **MUST** check your Meetup comments & messages several times a day, especially the morning of the hike.

What to bring: Water, snacks/lunch, bug spray, something to sit on, type of shoes, etc.

Pet Policy. For your first couple of hikes pets should not be allowed. If you allow pets, add "Pets must remain on the leash and at the back of the group" to the description.

Cancellation policy: What type of weather will cancel, when you will make the weather call.

Restrooms: Location and type (flush toilets, Port-A-Potty or what Mother Nature provides).

Any other pertinent information your hikers need to know