

Making A Great Indoor Climbing Instructor

August 22, 2025

Posted By: **Heather Reynolds** in [CWA Blog](#)



The job of an instructor is to deliver the content. A competent instructor provides the necessary instruction of content and skills. A *good* instructor ensures the required content is delivered in a way that is engaging and that students seem to understand. A *great* instructor continually assesses how the content is being received and confirms that the content can be applied.

Article At A Glance

- **Writer:** Heather Reynolds, Education Consultant for the CWA. She is part of our new year-long series on issues and topics surrounding certification and education.
- **Who Should Read:** This article is for our coaches and program staff.
- **What Will You Learn:** A breakdown of how to upgrade or level-up your coaching staff, or yourself.
- **Tie-Ins, Resources, or Further Reading:** We have a breakdown on Bloom's Taxonomy for indoor climbing gyms. Take a look!

Assessment and feedback are key ingredients to learning.

What is Being Offered Matters

There are many principles to keep in mind when instructing; the most important one is that learners are receptive to the information and in a position to engage with the content. It would not be wise to teach a 5.9 climber how to set a 5.12 route when they cannot yet climb that grade

successfully. Teaching developmentally appropriate content is a key ingredient to success.

Where the Instruction is Being Offered

Elements within a learning environment can both enhance or distract from the experience. For example, a new climber in a space with a lot of climbers moving around them and routesetting happening off to the right can be overwhelmed, distracting them from the instructor.

How it's Offered Counts

'How' can be divided into two processes:

- How to organize and chunk information for the students
- How to deliver the information to the students

Mastery happens when students have little successes along the way to learning the larger skill. Learning to belay can be broken into smaller teaching elements, including setting up the belay, belay technique for managing the rope, and partner checks before climbing.

These steps are a progression from what happens first, second, and third.

How content is delivered refers to the teaching approach the instructor used to introduce the information. In the past, content was offered in person, and in many cases, the instructor was there to introduce and explain concepts, eventually inviting each participant to practice.

[Bloom's Taxonomy](#) offers a visual representation of the hierarchy of learning objectives. At the lowest level, the student can remember the information.

CREATE

A climber can design their own systems for conveying the same information. The climber knows the figure-eight well enough that they can tie it many different ways correctly.

EVALUATE

A climber can judge the efficacy of an action and draw conclusions based on it. They understand the mechanics of the figure-eight and can conclude for themselves why it is the preferred knot for tying into a harness.

ANALYZE

A climber can not only take the action, but explain why it's right. They can tie the knot, and also tie the knot deliberately incorrectly and explain why it's wrong.

APPLY

A climber can now take the action with accuracy. The climber can tie the figure-eight knot.

UNDERSTAND

A climber can explain instructions with accuracy. They now know how to recognize the figure-eight, and how to recognize what makes it correctly tied.

REMEMBER

A climber can visually and or mentally recall information. They can see a figure-eight and know it's the knot used to tie into their harness.

The student may be able to remember some parts of tying a figure eight after being shown how to tie it. However, they will not be successful tying the knot until they apply the information and tie the knot. This is the third level of Bloom's Taxonomy where the student can demonstrate skill.

An instructor can ask students to analyze and evaluate the execution of a skill by presenting

them with situations or case studies.

Imagine a new rope climber conducting a mock belay check with another course participant. This activity would force the students to reflect on all aspects of the belay system and interactions between the climber and the belay.

Feedback Matters

Feedback impacts the learning process in multiple ways; both by the content itself and the manner it's delivered. Feedback provided negatively, for example, "that's not right. Here's how to do it correctly," may not be received as well as feedback that starts with a question like, "What can we do to improve this?"

Beginning with a question inspires curiosity and delays any concept of judgment, which can make people respond defensively or make them embarrassed. Open-ended questions, in general, can be constructed to guide the student to the correction needed. Students remember the ideas they problem-solve better than the answers given.

*Pro Tip: When a situation presents an immediate danger, **an instructor just needs to intervene and manage the risk.***

Who the Learner is Matters

In 2012, the potential learners in their late teens and early twenties were born between 1990-1997, falling in the Millennial category. Millennial learners learn best through collaboration and interaction rather than lecture-style learning.

In the CWA CWI Certification Program, this teaching approach is called a social or interpersonal teaching approach. The instructor designs activities that allow students to work together.

Students today are part of Generation Z, born between 2003-2008. While Millennials and Gen Z both adapt well to online learning opportunities, Gen Z learners tend to value independence and flexibility in their personal learning approaches.

This translates to being more adaptable in the delivery of content and the content being delivered, particularly incorporating visual media in an online setting.

Some of the many teaching approaches that can be implemented:

- Use a visual demonstration, explain the content, put the equipment in the learner's hand, and guide the use of the equipment.
- Presenting learners with a problem to solve or having them work in groups to solve problems as they apply concepts.

Not all students respond as well to all approaches, and then to the second or third step of any particular strategy. Great instructors will look for the most effective approach for the learner and the content.

There is a saying, “those who can’t do, teach.” It makes teaching sound easy, but great teaching is about ensuring that students have a positive experience and can demonstrate their learning.

Getting a diverse group of students to the same outcome in a set time frame is no small feat. The instructor needs to know the content and bring interpersonal skills, communication skills, and patience while paying attention to the student experience. That is a lot.

About The Author



Heather Reynolds is a licensed kinesiologist, High Five Trainer (Sport, PCHD), CEC Climbing Coach, CWA Climbing Wall Instructor Certification Provider Trainer. She works as a Consultant to the CWA. She blends her knowledge of movement, physiology, and education to develop a multitude of successful climbing programs designed to support and engage youth. Having worked with youth for over 30 years as a recreation instructor, leader and educator, Heather supports the values and expertise available in the High Five Program, bringing quality assurance to youth-based sport and

recreation programming.



CALLING SMALL FACILITY OWNERS: SERVE ON THE CWA'S BOARD

August 25, 2025

DISASTERS: PLANS ALL CLIMBING GYMS CAN HAVE IN PLACE



August 8, 2025