

TRILOGY EMERGENCY MEDICAL SOLUTIONS

Surface Water Rescue

Student Manual

16-Hour Hybrid Course • 8 Hours Online + 8-Hour Practical Day

Built on NFPA 1006 and NFPA 1670

FL EMS Provider #50-29993

A veteran-owned emergency medical training company

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Welcome & How This Course Works

Welcome to the Trilogy Emergency Medical Solutions Surface Water Rescue course. Surface water is the broadest of the water-rescue disciplines: it reaches from the backyard pool to the beach, from the retention pond behind a subdivision to a river running out of its banks. If your agency answers 911 calls, you will eventually stand on a bank looking at someone in the water. This course exists so that when that day comes, you act from training instead of improvisation.

The course is delivered in a hybrid format totaling sixteen hours. The first eight hours are online didactic instruction, completed at your own pace. The final eight hours are a single instructor-led practical day that begins in the controlled environment of a pool and, when a suitable waterfront is available, transitions to open water to apply your skills in live conditions. Where no waterfront is available, all eight practical hours are conducted in the pool. The course is built within the framework of NFPA 1006, Standard for Technical Rescue Personnel Professional Qualifications, and NFPA 1670, Standard on Operations and Training for Technical Search and Rescue Incidents.

Using This Manual

This manual is your primary reference for the online modules and your study guide for the written examination. Its four chapters track the four online modules. Read each chapter alongside its module, work the review questions at the end of each chapter, and bring the manual with you on the practical day — the appendices contain the swim qualification standard, the skills checklist you will be evaluated against, and the equipment list.

Throughout the manual you will find three kinds of callout boxes. Safety Points flag information that protects your life or your teammates' lives. Rescuer Reminders condense a section into the sentence you should carry onto the scene. Key Terms tables collect the vocabulary each chapter introduces; all key terms are also gathered in the glossary at the back.

Course Requirements at a Glance

Component	Requirement
Online modules	Complete all four modules before attending the practical session
Written examination	Score 80% or higher
Swim / watermanship qualification	Pass the swim test before performing any in-water rescue skills (pass/fail gate)
Practical skills evaluation	Competent performance of every assigned evolution
Attendance & safety conduct	Full attendance; PFD and SOP compliance at all times

A note on your AHJ. NFPA standards are consensus baselines, and the Authority Having Jurisdiction — your agency, under its lead instructor — may adjust details such as the swim standard and evolution parameters to match the waters you actually serve, provided the course objectives are met. Where this manual gives a specific figure or procedure, read it as the course's representative standard unless your AHJ directs otherwise.

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF THIS COURSE

Accepted, calculated risk is part of the job — but it is never acceptable for a rescuer to die for someone who is already deceased.

Safety is the most important factor of every mission. Every chapter of this manual, and every evolution of the practical day, flows from that principle.

Water Rescue Foundations & the Rescue Decision

Corresponds to Online Module 1 (2.5 hours). This chapter explains why water kills trained rescuers, how the NFPA standards organize water-rescue training, and how commanders and rescuers make the most important decision of any water incident: rescue or recovery.

1.1 The Problem: Water Kills Rescuers

Public-safety rescuers die at water incidents every year, and a sobering share of them die during the rescue attempt rather than in the original emergency. The water that takes them is rarely exotic. It is the same lake, canal, or flooded street they have driven past a hundred times. What changes on the day of the incident is the combination of urgency, adrenaline, and unpracticed skills.

Water deserves respect for three reasons. First, it may be cold: immersion in cold water strips body heat and fine motor control within minutes, and the initial gasp reflex alone can drown an unprotected swimmer. Second, it may be moving: water is heavy, and even a modest current exerts forces against a submerged body that no rescuer can out-muscle. Third, it causes indirect trauma: being driven into rocks, debris, pilings, or a submerged vehicle can be disabling or fatal by itself, independent of drowning.

Layered on top of the environment is a training problem. Water-rescue skills are low-frequency and high-risk. Months may pass between water calls, and skills decay in the gap. A rescuer who has not thrown a throw bag since last spring, standing on a bank watching a person go under, will feel enormous pressure to improvise — and improvised water rescue is how agencies lose people. The corrective is exactly what this course delivers: realistic training, honest preplanning, and the discipline to work the lowest-risk method that will do the job.

RESCUER REMINDER

The victim's emergency does not obligate you to create a second one. Trained, deliberate action outperforms brave improvisation every time.

1.2 The NFPA Framework

The National Fire Protection Association is an independent, voluntary-membership organization that produces scientifically based consensus codes and standards, along with research, training, and education. Two of its standards frame everything in this course. NFPA 1006 addresses the individual: the tasks a rescue technician must be able to perform and the knowledge required to perform them. NFPA 1670 addresses the organization: how a team assesses its hazards, organizes, trains, and operates at technical search and rescue incidents.

The standards are deliberately written as a floor, not a ceiling. The Authority Having Jurisdiction — the AHJ, meaning the organization responsible for approving equipment, training, and procedures, typically your department under its chief and lead instructors — decides how the standard is met in your response area. That flexibility is a feature. A department serving spring-fed Florida canals and one serving a rocky New England coastline should not train identically, and NFPA does not ask them to.

Training Levels

Water-rescue training is organized into three levels, and understanding them tells you where you fit on a scene.

- **Awareness.** The entry level, built on classroom knowledge. Awareness-trained personnel recognize the hazard, secure the scene, gather information, and summon the right resources. They operate outside the hazard zone.
- **Level I (Operations).** Level I rescuers work on and beside the water, but not in the hazard environment with the victim. They are trained to use, deploy, and support shore-based rescue — reach tools, throw bags, line tending, haul systems — and to support Level II rescuers on every evolution.
- **Level II (Technician).** Level II rescuers enter the hazard environment the victim is in. They perform swimming rescues, victim contact and releases, in-water medical care, and extrication, and they are expected to plan, lead, and supervise operations.

The levels are not a hierarchy of importance; they are a division of labor, and a single incident routinely uses all three at once. Police officers holding scene security and managing witnesses are functioning at the Awareness level. The rescuer on the bank tending a line is Level I. The swimmer making contact with the victim is Level II. Every layer protects the layer in front of it. This course trains you to operate at the surface-water Level I standard and to perform and support core Level II surface skills under supervision; your certification level is ultimately assigned by your AHJ based on completed training and evaluation.

1.3 The Five Subdisciplines

NFPA divides water rescue into five subdisciplines, each with its own Level I and Level II standards, its own equipment, and — as experienced rescuers put it — its own personality: surface water, swiftwater, ice, surf, and dive rescue. Certification in one subdiscipline is not certification in another. A superb surface rescuer with no swiftwater training has no business in a flooded creek at Level II.

Surface water is the broadest of the five. Any open, unfrozen water that is not surf or significant current belongs to it: pools, ponds, lakes, canals, borrow pits, marinas, industrial water, and the standing water of floods. It is also the foundation discipline — the watermanship, communications, victim-handling, and rope fundamentals you learn here underpin every other water specialty.

The Flood Reality

Flooding kills more people in the United States than any other severe-weather hazard, and more than half of flood deaths involve people in vehicles. Roughly two feet of moving water will float and carry

most vehicles, and drivers consistently underestimate both depth and current at flooded crossings. For Florida agencies none of this is theoretical: retention ponds line our roadways, canals run behind our neighborhoods, and vehicles go into the water here year-round, in every weather. Every suppression company is a potential first-arriving unit at a water incident, whether or not it carries a boat. That first-arriving crew is exactly who this course is built for.

1.4 Preplanning & Size-Up

You cannot preplan a waterway from the station. Go out and get onto — and into — the water itself. Walk the banks and boat the channels of your district. Document access points, egress points, and watercraft launch sites. Learn the bottom composition, the depths, the known obstructions. Identify the structures that trap or funnel water: low-head dams, culverts, spillways, bridge pilings.

Then imagine the same water misbehaving. A small rise in water level changes everything — the boat ramp you planned to launch from at normal pool may be underwater and unusable at flood stage, and the gentle swimming hole may develop real current. Topographic maps show you what happens to your district as water rises; flood-modeling and disaster-planning software can map inundation at specific river stages. Weather is a planning input, not background noise: rain that fell upstream hours ago may be your problem tonight, and wind changes surface conditions, search effectiveness, and boat handling. Preplan for the worst conditions you expect to operate in, not for the conditions on a pleasant training day.

Other Agencies & Readiness

Know every agency that shares your water before the incident does the introductions. Examine, speak to, and train with them: capabilities, response staffing, equipment, and procedures all differ, and different agencies operate under noticeably different standards of personal protection. Verify — do not assume. Joint readiness exercises expose interoperability problems while they are still fixable, and unannounced drop drills give the most realistic picture of what a real response will look like. Finally, remember that support extends beyond public safety: the American Red Cross shelters and feeds displaced victims, and critical-incident stress resources exist for your personnel after hard missions.

RESCUER REMINDER

Preplanning is what converts a chaotic response into a rehearsed one. The best water rescues are half-finished before the unit leaves the station.

1.5 Rescue vs. Recovery

The most important decision at any water incident is made before rescuers are committed: is this a rescue or a recovery? A rescue means conditions support a viable victim and a survivable attempt — and speed matters. A recovery means the victim is no longer viable, or the risk to rescuers cannot be justified — and the time pressure is off. The declaration is not made once; command re-evaluates it continuously as conditions and information change.

The engine of the decision is risk versus benefit: what can we actually accomplish, and at what price? Accepted, calculated risk to life and limb is part of the job. But a recovery run at rescue tempo — rescuers taking rescue-level risks for a victim who cannot benefit — is how people get hurt for no possible gain. Declaring a recovery is not giving up. It is command doing its job, and it protects the living.

The Timeline

The timeline is the parameter that answers: when did this happen, and can rescue actions still change the outcome? EMS treats most trauma inside the Golden Hour — roughly sixty minutes — and submersion compresses that window dramatically. A widely used operational benchmark holds that confirmed submersion beyond sixty minutes, or rescue operations already past sixty minutes, generally shifts the mission to recovery. Your AHJ sets the exact criteria, and cold-water incidents — particularly involving children — can justify extended rescue effort. Two disciplines make the timeline honest. First, get the true time of entry from witnesses early; it drives everything. Second, count setup time truthfully: the clock includes your response, size-up, and rigging, not just swim time.

Conditions Supporting — and Not Supporting — Committing Crews

Agencies benefit from writing their go/no-go criteria down before the incident. The following representative lists are adapted for this course; your AHJ's SOPs govern.

Conditions that may support entry	Conditions that may not support entry
A witnessed report of a person or vehicle entering the water	No credible witness can confirm anyone is in the water
Reasonable belief the victim has been submerged less than the AHJ's rescue window	Confirmed submersion, or rescue operations, beyond the rescue window
Fresh vehicle tracks into the water, or new damage to guardrails, fencing, or landscaping	Dangerous wildlife — snakes, alligators — close enough to pose an unjustifiable risk to rescuers
Active lights on a submerged vehicle	The incident commander judges the rescue cannot be performed safely
Air bubbles or a fresh fuel or oil sheen on the surface	

Water Conditions Shape the Mission

Temperature, current, and contamination may not change whether you go — but they change what you wear and how you go. Cold water makes thermal protection mandatory, shortens working times, and can lengthen victim survival windows. Current changes approach angles, tether decisions, and where you stage downstream safeties. And treat all water as contaminated until proven otherwise: obvious contamination such as sewage or fuel is easy to spot, but clean-looking water can hide the same hazards. Contamination drives PPE selection and mandatory decontamination after the mission, covered in Chapter 4.

1.6 Command, Support & Accountability

Surface rescue rarely succeeds on swimmers alone. Build the support package early — ideally at dispatch, and no later than size-up. Scene lighting is still a required part of night water work, and modern apparatus offers many options; operating on dark water without light is unacceptable. Ladders and platforms provide access down steep banks and over seawalls, and serve as high-point anchors for extrication. Watercraft extend your reach, flotation, and speed beyond the shore, and helicopters add search, lighting, and transport capability; both are treated in Chapter 3.

Over all of it sits command. Someone must take charge, visibly and early, because a water scene assembles a wide range of training, expertise, and experience — often from multiple agencies with different protection standards. Command verifies credentials before assigning anyone to the water. Accountability is continuous: who do we have, where are they, and what is their status? And backup rescuers function as the water-rescue equivalent of a Rapid Intervention Crew: dressed, equipped, briefed, and positioned before the primary rescuer commits, with no job except the rescuer.

SAFETY POINT

A backup rescuer who is still dressing when the primary gets into trouble is not a backup. The backup is ready before the primary enters the water — every evolution, every time.

Chapter 1 Key Terms

AHJ	Authority Having Jurisdiction — the organization responsible for approving equipment, training, and procedures, with latitude to adapt NFPA baselines to local waters.
NFPA 1006	Standard for Technical Rescue Personnel Professional Qualifications; defines individual rescuer knowledge and skills by level.
NFPA 1670	Standard on Operations and Training for Technical Search and Rescue Incidents; defines team organization, training, and operations.
Awareness level	Entry training level; recognizes the hazard, secures the scene, and summons resources from outside the hazard zone.
Level I (Operations)	Rescuer trained to deploy and support shore-based rescue and to support technician operations, without entering the hazard environment.
Level II (Technician)	Rescuer trained to enter the hazard environment, make victim contact, and plan, lead, and supervise operations.
Rescue vs. recovery	The command decision, made before committing rescuers and re-evaluated continuously, of whether conditions support a viable victim and a survivable attempt.
Risk vs. benefit	The analysis weighing what can be accomplished against the price of attempting it.

Golden Hour	The EMS principle that most trauma is best treated within roughly sixty minutes — a window submersion compresses dramatically.
Rapid Intervention Crew	Personnel dedicated to the rescue of rescuers; in water rescue, the dressed and ready backup rescuer serves this function.

Chapter Review Questions

Answer the following from memory before checking the key at the back of this manual. These questions mirror the style of the online examination.

1. Name the three environmental characteristics that make water dangerous to rescuers, and give one consequence of each.
2. State the guiding principle of this course in your own words, and explain how it changes behavior at a recovery incident.
3. Which NFPA standard addresses the individual rescuer's qualifications, and which addresses team operations and training?
4. Describe the operating position of Awareness, Level I, and Level II personnel relative to the hazard zone.
5. List the five water-rescue subdisciplines. Why is certification in one not certification in another?
6. Why do flood statistics matter to a Florida suppression company that carries no boat?
7. Give four items a crew should document when preplanning a waterway, and explain why preplanning must consider high-water conditions.
8. A witness reports a car entered a retention pond 'about twenty minutes ago.' List three physical clues that would support committing crews to the water.
9. What two time-counting disciplines keep an incident timeline honest?
10. What must be true of the backup rescuer before the primary rescuer enters the water?

CHAPTER 2

PPE, Communications & Search Operations

Corresponds to Online Module 2 (1.5 hours). This chapter equips the surface rescuer — literally and procedurally. It covers the personal protective equipment of surface rescue, led by the PFD; the four channels of team communication; and the interview, sighting, and search techniques that locate a victim you cannot see.

2.1 The PFD: First Among Equals

The personal flotation device is the single most important piece of protective equipment a surface rescuer can wear. Everything else in your kit assumes you are alive and on the surface; the PFD is what keeps you there. The rule that follows is absolute: PFDs are worn — properly fitted and fully fastened — by every person in or near the water, and by every person aboard a watercraft. No exceptions, no seniority waivers, no 'just for a second.'

The U.S. Coast Guard groups PFDs into five types, and knowing them lets you match the device to the mission. Types I and II are the offshore and near-shore buoyant vests designed to turn most unconscious wearers face-up; they are bulky, and you will meet them in maritime and passenger-vessel service rather than rescue work. Type III is the vest-style working PFD of most fire and EMS agencies: it permits full swimming and working movement while keeping a conscious wearer upright and afloat, and it is the standard for shore crews and boat crews. Type IV devices are throwable aids — ring buoys and flotation cushions — that are deployed, not worn. Type V is the special-use category, and its most important member for our purposes is the swiftwater rescue vest, which adds a quick-release tether harness for tethered-swimmer work.

Rigging the Rescue PFD

A surface rescuer's vest carries the tools of self-rescue on the vest itself, where they can be reached in the water: a whistle for signaling when voice will not carry; a cutting device, reachable with either hand, because entanglement is a leading in-water killer; a strobe or marker light for night and low-visibility operations; and, where vehicle-in-water response is expected, a window punch and seat-belt cutter. Fit matters as much as inventory — a loose PFD rides up over the face of a swimming rescuer at exactly the wrong moment. Inspect PFDs as part of daily checkout: flotation condition, buckles and webbing, and every piece of attached hardware.

SAFETY POINT

Structural firefighting gear is not water PPE. Bunker gear absorbs water and sinks, taking its wearer with it. If your assignment is in or near the water, dress for the water.

2.2 Thermal & Body Protection

Thermal protection is chosen for the water you serve, not the air temperature over it. Wetsuits — neoprene garments that insulate with a trapped layer of water warmed by the body — are completed by neoprene booties and gloves, and serve most Florida surface work well. Drysuits provide full exposure isolation for cold or contaminated water at the price of donning time and training. Above the neck, a water-rescue helmet — lower profile than a structural helmet, free-draining, and secure when wet — protects against strainers, debris, and hull strikes. Add eye protection appropriate to the task, and wear footwear always: banks, ramps, and bottoms are carpeted with glass, metal, and fish hooks.

Equipment Care & Cleaning

Water-rescue equipment earns its keep in ugly water, and it lasts only as long as its care. Rinse everything with clean water after every use, training included. Use mild soap when needed — harsh chemicals attack neoprene, nylon, and flotation foam. Air-dry gear completely before packing it, never store it wet, and keep it out of direct sunlight, which degrades webbing and fabric strength. Document inspections, and remove damaged PFDs and hardware from service immediately. Remember that gear living packed in an apparatus compartment must be inspected on a schedule, not merely after use.

2.3 Team Communications

Establish how the team will talk before anyone is committed to the water. Surface rescue uses four channels, and a competent team is fluent in all of them: radio, including the interoperability channels a multi-agency scene requires; hand and arm signals for distance and noise; whistle signals for attention and command when voice fails; and line-pull signals for tethered swimmers. Wind, current, and engine noise defeat the human voice quickly — well-trained rescuers hold entire conversations in signals. One discipline governs all four channels: standardize. A signal that means two different things to two agencies on the same bank is worse than no signal at all.

Hand & Whistle Signals

- **OK** — one arm tapping the top of the head, or both arms forming an O overhead.
- **HELP** — one arm waving overhead.
- **STOP** — a closed fist held high, or both forearms crossed.
- **Directional** — point with the whole arm: left, right, swim out, swim in.
- **Whistle:** one blast means attention — look at me; three blasts mean emergency — a rescuer needs help. Agencies assign local meanings to two-blast and repeated patterns; train to your AHJ's SOP.

Every signal is confirmed with a return signal. An unacknowledged signal is an unsent one.

Line Signals: OATH

Tethered work runs on rope-pull signals, remembered by the acronym OATH. The tender and swimmer use parallel meanings, and the difference in the fourth pull matters.

Pulls	Tender → Swimmer	Swimmer → Tender
1	O — “Are you OK?”	O — “I’m OK”
2	A — Advance the line / change direction	A — Advance me more line
3	T — Talk: surface for instructions	T — Take up slack
4	H — Hold your position	H — HELP (emergency)

Pulls must be firm, deliberate, and distinct, because the taut line is the medium — slack swallows the message. Keeping the line tight is the swimmer's responsibility, not the tender's, a point developed in Section 2.6. Four pulls from the swimmer is always an emergency, and the backup deploys immediately. Rehearse OATH until it is reflexive; a swimmer in trouble will not remember a chart.

RESCUER REMINDER

You will use hand, whistle, and OATH line signals live on the practical day. Memorize them now — the pool is a poor place to learn vocabulary.

2.4 The Witness Interview

On many surface calls the witness is your only search instrument, and the quality of your interview determines the quality of your search. Four questions anchor it. WHO: how many victims, their ages, swimming ability, and clothing. WHERE: exactly where they entered the water and where they were last seen. HOW: fell, jumped, vehicle, boat capsize — and are injuries likely from the mechanism? HOW LONG AGO: the timeline input that drives the rescue-versus-recovery decision from Chapter 1.

Separate multiple witnesses and interview them individually, before they can harmonize their stories. Record the information and identify each witness by name and contact — the interview is part of the legal record of the incident and is treated as a legal document. And put each witness physically back where they stood: a sighting only works from the exact spot where it was originally taken.

Point of Entry & Point Last Seen

Two locations organize every water search. The point of entry is where the victim or vehicle went into the water. The point last seen — the PLS — is the last confirmed location of the victim on or in the water. They are often not the same place; current, wind, and the victim's own efforts move people. Physical clues confirm or replace witness statements: tire tracks into the water, fresh guardrail or fence damage, floating articles, a fuel sheen, air bubbles rising.

2.5 Sightings, Triangulation & the Area of Probability

A sighting converts a witness's memory into a line on the water: the witness, standing where they originally stood, lines the PLS up with a fixed object on or beyond the far side — a tree, a piling, a

channel marker. One sighting gives you a line. Two or more sightings from separated witnesses intersect, and that intersection — triangulation — defines the area of probability: the area in which the victim or vehicle is most likely to be, based on scene information and witness interviews. The area of probability is where the search effort concentrates first.

Whether that search runs at rescue tempo depends on the strength of the information. Active search measures apply when a victim is seen, or when clues put one in the water with high confidence: rescuers, watercraft, and equipment commit immediately to the area of probability. Passive search measures apply when there is no witness and the information is weak or conflicting: spotters are posted at strategic points, banks are investigated for clues first, and timelines are checked — when was this person last confirmed anywhere? The same stretch of bank can call for either approach on different days. Let the evidence choose.

2.6 Search Operations

When no victim is visible, surface rescuers can still search effectively from shore and shallow water. Human chains — linked rescuers sweeping wadeable water, every member in a PFD — cover shallow areas quickly. Probing works pike poles and hooks systematically along a line. Drag hooks are a recovery-mode tool, and crews should understand in training what contact with a body feels like. Where agencies are equipped, sonar narrows the area before anyone gets wet. Whatever the technique, search patterns must be systematic and documented; random searching finds victims by luck, and luck is not a plan.

Tethered Search Patterns

Tethered surface searches use a team of at least two — rescue swimmer and line tender — and two primary patterns.

- **Parallel search.** The swimmer sweeps lanes parallel to an open shoreline while tender and swimmer both move along the bank. Use it when the victim is believed close to shore with no known point of entry and the shoreline is unobstructed.
- **Sweep (arc) search.** The tender stays fixed while the swimmer sweeps expanding arcs on the line. Use it when a point of entry is known, or where docks, boats, or obstructions make a moving tender impractical.

Roles are precise. It is the swimmer's job to keep the line tight — swimming at a slight angle against the line — not the tender's, because a slack line loses the signals, loses the pattern, and loses the swimmer's position. The tender ties a knot in the search line to mark where a victim was found, the ending distance of a completed search leg, or the distance to a rescuer in distress. And the tender is simultaneously the swimmer's safety: eyes on the swimmer at all times.

SAFETY POINT

A tender who looks away from the swimmer to manage spectators, radios, or equipment has left the swimmer unprotected. Tending is a dedicated assignment, not a collateral duty.

Chapter 2 Key Terms

Type III PFD	Vest-style working PFD permitting full movement; the standard flotation of fire and EMS shore and boat crews.
Type IV device	Throwable flotation aid — ring buoy or cushion — deployed to a victim, not worn.
Type V PFD	Special-use category including the swiftwater rescue vest with quick-release tether harness.
OATH	The rope-pull signal system for tethered swimmers: OK, Advance, Talk/Take up slack, Hold/Help.
Point of entry	The location where the victim or vehicle entered the water.
Point last seen (PLS)	The last confirmed location of the victim on or in the water.
Sighting	A line established by a witness, from their original position, through the PLS to a fixed object beyond it.
Triangulation	Intersecting two or more sightings to locate a search area.
Area of probability	The area in which the victim or vehicle is most likely to be, based on scene information and witness interviews.
Active search measures	Immediate rescue-tempo search justified by a seen victim or high-confidence clues.
Passive search measures	Investigation-first posture — spotters, bank checks, timelines — used when information is weak or absent.
Line tender	The shore member managing a tethered swimmer's line, signals, and safety.

Chapter Review Questions

Answer the following from memory before checking the key at the back of this manual. These questions mirror the style of the online examination.

1. State the PFD rule of this course as an absolute, and name the four self-rescue tools rigged on a rescuer's vest.
2. Match USCG PFD Types III, IV, and V to their surface-rescue roles.
3. Why is structural firefighting gear prohibited as water PPE?
4. List four equipment-care practices that extend the service life of water-rescue gear.
5. Name the four communication channels of a water-rescue team and one condition that defeats each.
6. Reproduce the OATH table from memory, both directions. Which signal always triggers the backup?

7. What four questions anchor a witness interview, and why is the interview treated as a legal document?
8. Distinguish the point of entry from the point last seen, and explain why they often differ.
9. Describe how two witnesses and two fixed objects produce an area of probability.
10. Contrast the parallel search and the sweep search: when is each used, and who moves?
11. Whose job is it to keep a tethered search line tight, and what three things does a slack line lose?

CHAPTER 3

Rescue Methods: Verbal, Reach, Throw, Row, Go

Corresponds to Online Module 3 (1.5 hours). This chapter teaches the decision sequence at the heart of surface rescue — Verbal, Reach, Throw, Row, Go — and the tools and techniques of each rung: reach tools, the throw bag, watercraft and helicopters, safe water entries, rope-system theory, and the tethered rescue.

3.1 The Priority Ladder

Surface rescue methods are organized as a ladder of increasing rescuer risk: Verbal, Reach, Throw, Row, Go. Talking a victim to safety exposes no rescuer at all. Extending a tool exposes a braced rescuer at the water's edge. Throwing a line commits equipment and a belayer. Launching a boat puts a crew on the water. And a swimming rescue — Go — places a rescuer in the same hazard as the victim. The rule is simple: take the lowest rung that will actually work.

Read the ladder as a decision sequence, not a mandatory progression. A victim slipping under right now may justify skipping straight to Row or Go — the ladder tells you what to prefer, not what to plod through. And on a real scene, methods run in parallel: a throw bag is being deployed while the inflatable launches while a swimmer dresses. Whatever the method, the first victim-side goal never changes: get positive flotation to the victim or on the victim.

RESCUER REMINDER

A rescue without rescuer contact is always the preferred rescue. Every rung you avoid descending is risk you never had to buy back.

3.2 Verbal Rescue

If the victim is stable on the water and can help themselves, direct them to safety with clear, loud, simple commands. Making verbal contact may resolve the situation entirely — panic responds to a calm, authoritative voice. Tell them who you are and that help is here, then give one instruction at a time: grab the ladder; kick toward my voice; roll onto your back. Two dividends follow. First, the voice contact never stops — you keep talking through every other method you deploy. Second, a victim who follows commands is also reporting their level of consciousness and viability, which feeds the rescue-versus-recovery evaluation from Chapter 1.

3.3 Reach Rescues

A reach rescue extends a tool to the victim from a stable, anchored position on shore, dock, or watercraft. The tools are anything rigid or extendable within grabbing distance of the water: pike poles,

rescue hooks, and shepherd's crooks; extension ladders slid out over the water; and improvised implements — branches, paddles, backboards, even a PFD clipped to a pole. In a pinch, the improvised tool that is present beats the perfect tool that is not.

What keeps a reach rescue safe is the rescuer's body, not the tool. Get low — crouch or lie down — to keep your center of gravity beneath the victim's pull, and brace against something solid or be physically held by a teammate. Wear your PFD; the bank is 'near the water' by any definition. When the victim takes the tool, pull them in hand-over-hand and keep the tool between you until they are calm and controlled at the edge. A panicked victim converts an unbraced rescuer into a second victim in one pull.

3.4 Throw Rescues

The throw bag is the surface rescuer's signature tool: a compact bag of stuffed floating line that pays out of the bag in flight. Technique wins here. Hold the working end; throw the bag underhand, aiming slightly beyond the victim — and slightly upstream in any current — so the line drifts down onto them. Command as it lands: grab the ROPE — roll on your back. Then belay dynamically: brace, sit, or wrap your hip with the line, and let the water pendulum the victim to the bank rather than trying to winch them in by arm strength.

The first throw is technique; the second throw is the skill. A missed throw cannot be restuffed in time, so do not try — coil the recovered line in butterfly loops in your non-throwing hand and throw either the coils or the now water-filled bag directly. On the practical day you will be evaluated on accurate throws to a victim at distance, first and second throw.

Coiled Rope, Ring Buoy & Improvised Throws

Coiled rope throws split the coil — half in each hand, or the standing end anchored underfoot — and deliver the working half underhand or sidearm past the victim before drifting the line onto them. The ring buoy, a Type IV device, brings real flotation and not just a line, which matters for a tiring victim; it is heavier and slower than a bag, so throw beyond and pull back into the victim's reach, and never aim a hard buoy at the victim's head. Finally, improvised throws count: any floating object with a line attached beats nothing. A spare PFD, a cooler, a fuel jug — flotation first, elegance later.

3.5 Row: Watercraft in Surface Rescue

When the victim is beyond throwing range, a watercraft is faster and safer than a swimmer. A boat brings its own flotation; it carries equipment and additional rescuers; it reduces rescuer fatigue and exposure time in the water; and it provides lighting and an elevated search platform. Even an agency with no formal boat program will find boats on its water scenes — mutual aid, law enforcement, civilian craft — so every surface rescuer must know the basics of operating around them.

- PFDs on every person aboard, always — the rule of Chapter 2 floats too.
- The propeller is a lethal hazard: engine in neutral or off whenever any person is in the water nearby.

- Approach a victim from downwind or downstream, and bring them aboard over the bow or side according to the craft's design.

Deploying Rescuers from Watercraft

Swimmers and boats mix safely only when the mixing is planned. Before anyone enters the water from a craft, every member knows the boat's travel direction and the drop and recovery plan; positive communication runs between operator and swimmers at all times; and the engine comes to neutral for entry and recovery, with approaches made prop-away. Entries from a craft are controlled slide-ins or strides that protect mask and equipment. Recovery is the hard part: practice bringing a tired swimmer and a victim aboard in daylight and calm water, because you will eventually do it at night in chop.

3.6 Helicopters

Helicopters bring capabilities nothing else on the scene can match: an eye in the sky for search coverage and victim spotting; aerial photography and video for documentation; infrared and night-vision sensors; night scene lighting; and rapid victim transport. They are also specific, expensive, and training-intensive assets. Hoist and direct-rescue work requires a trained aircrew working with trained rescuers — it is never improvised on scene. And rotor wash is its own hazard: it can capsize small craft, flatten swimmers, and scatter floating evidence, so the helicopter-to-water interface must be planned, not discovered. Know your regional asset, its actual capabilities, and its request procedure before the incident.

3.7 Go: The Swimming Rescue

A swimming rescue places a rescuer in the same hazard as the victim, and it is chosen only when nothing above it on the ladder will work. Before a Go rescue is committed, four conditions are met: the swimmer has passed the AHJ swim qualification and is dressed for the water; flotation for the victim — buoy, tube, or board — goes with the swimmer; a backup rescuer is dressed and ready; and a tether decision has been made deliberately. Getting to the water is part of the method: running the bank is faster than swimming, so close as much distance as possible on land before entering.

Water Entries

- **Slide-in entry.** The default: lowest impact, maintains contact with the bank, correct for unknown bottoms and shallow water.
- **Stride jump.** From low height: legs scissored, arms sweeping down on entry to keep the head above water and eyes on the victim.
- **Compact jump.** Feet-first with the body tight, from height when sliding in is impossible.
- **Run-and-swim.** Sprint through the shallows lifting the knees, transitioning to a swim as depth takes the legs.
-

SAFETY POINT

Feet-first, every time, in any water you have not personally verified. Headfirst entries into unknown water end careers — the bottom is always closer than it looks.

3.8 Rope Systems & the Simple 2:1

Level I surface rescuers must understand the rope systems used in surface rescue well enough to rig, operate, and safety them. The workhorse is the simple 2:1 mechanical advantage: one line, anchored at one end, run through a pulley that travels with the load, and doubled back to the haul team. The pulley at the load halves the force the team must generate — at the cost of doubling the rope that must move. Two feet of pull produce one foot of load travel, at half the effort.

Every haul system operates with a functioning safety: a tended prusik or belay on the standing line that catches and holds the load if the haul line fails or is dropped. The safety is minded at the anchor by a dedicated rescuer — a prusik nobody is tending is decoration. The rule is short enough to say out loud on every evolution: no safety, no haul. You will build and operate a 2:1 with a functioning safety on the practical day.

Tethered (“Live Bait”) Rescue

The tethered rescue combines Go and Throw: a swimming rescuer deploys wearing a quick-release tether harness on a Type V rescue vest, line tended from shore, makes victim contact, and is hauled back with the victim by the shore team. Its requirements are non-negotiable: a quick-release harness the swimmer can dump under load, tested before entry; a trained tender managing the line; a backup swimmer standing by; and the signal vocabulary of Chapter 2 agreed before anyone is wet. Never tie a rescuer to a line without a quick release — a fixed line in moving water is an anchor fastened to a human being.

Chapter 3 Key Terms

Priority ladder	Verbal, Reach, Throw, Row, Go — the sequence of surface-rescue methods in increasing order of rescuer risk.
Throw bag	A bag of stuffed floating line that pays out in flight; the signature Level I throw tool.
Dynamic belay	Bracing and managing a loaded throw line so the water pendulums the victim to shore.
Butterfly coils	Loose loops of recovered line gathered for an immediate second throw without restuffing.
Mechanical advantage	A rope-and-pulley arrangement multiplying the haul team's force; the simple 2:1 halves required force while doubling rope travel.

Safety prusik	A tended friction hitch on the standing line that catches the load if the haul line fails — the reason 'no safety, no haul' exists.
Tethered rescue	A swimming rescue on a tended line via quick-release harness; also called live-bait rescue.
Slide-in entry	The default low-impact, bank-contact water entry for unknown bottoms and shallow water.

Chapter Review Questions

Answer the following from memory before checking the key at the back of this manual. These questions mirror the style of the online examination.

1. List the five rungs of the priority ladder in order and state what each rung commits to the water.
2. Why is the ladder a decision sequence rather than a mandatory progression? Give a scenario justifying a jump to Row or Go.
3. What two dividends does continuous verbal contact pay beyond directing the victim?
4. Describe the body mechanics that keep a reach rescuer from becoming a second victim.
5. Walk through a first throw-bag deployment: aim point, command to the victim, and belay technique.
6. Why is a missed throw not restuffed, and what is done instead?
7. Give four advantages a watercraft brings to a surface rescue, and the single rule governing propellers around people in the water.
8. Name three helicopter capabilities and two hazards or limits that must be planned for.
9. State the four conditions that must be met before a Go rescue is committed.
10. Which water entry is the default for unknown water, and what is the absolute rule about headfirst entries?
11. In a simple 2:1, how far does the haul team pull to move the load one foot, and at what fraction of the load's force?
12. What makes a haul-system safety 'functioning,' and what is the rule when there is none?
13. Why must a tethered rescuer's harness have a quick release?

Self-Rescue, In-Water Medical & Supervision

Corresponds to Online Module 4 (2.5 hours). This chapter covers the rescuer in the water: the swim qualification that gates all in-water work, self-rescue and rescuer emergencies, the realities of drowning and the techniques of approach and release, in-water cervical-spine care and patient packaging, extrication and decontamination, and the supervisory duties of the Level II rescuer.

4.1 The “Audition”: Swim & Watermanship Qualification

Before any rescuer performs in-water skills, they pass a swim test. The test proves skill, endurance, and prequalification; just as importantly, it builds the water confidence that keeps a rescuer calm when a plan goes sideways. The representative standard for this course — adjustable by the AHJ to match locally served waters — is: a 500-yard nonstop forward crawl; an 800-yard snorkel course; five minutes of treading water, drown-proofing, bobbing, or floating; and a 100-yard tired-diver tow or push.

On the practical day, the qualification is a pass/fail gate administered first: no pass, no in-water evolutions. It should not end there. Agencies are strongly encouraged to retest trained rescuers annually, in conditions resembling the water they actually serve — a February retest in the water temperature your district actually offers teaches lessons a heated pool never will.

4.2 Self-Rescue

Every rescuer ends up in the water unplanned eventually. Self-rescue is the skill set that brings you home from that moment, and it rests on a piece of equipment and a truth. The equipment is your PFD, which converts an emergency into an inconvenience. The truth is that even strong swimmers cannot stay face-up when unconscious — flotation, not fitness, is what protects you.

When you go in unexpectedly: protect the airway and get positively buoyant; signal your status — OK or HELP — immediately, because an unwitnessed rescuer in trouble is an unrescued one; and pick a safe exit, which is often not the closest point of shore. Learn drown-proofing: the relaxed face-down float, lifting the face only to breathe, that conserves energy for hours if it must.

Emergency Strokes & Defensive Swimming

Match the stroke to the job. The forward crawl is fastest but tiring — use it to close distance. The sidestroke is sustainable and keeps one arm free for a victim or a tool. The elementary backstroke is restful and keeps the airway high. In moving water, assume the defensive swimming position: on your back, feet up and pointed downstream, arms steering — your feet fend off obstacles, not your head. Never attempt to stand in moving water; foot entrapment against the bottom is a killer. And remember that rip currents pull out, not under: swim across the current, parallel to shore, then in.

Rescuer Emergencies: Stop — Think — Act

- **Rescuer in distress.** You are now the victim — say so. Signal HELP (four pulls if tethered), establish positive buoyancy, abort the rescue, and return. The backup deploys to you.
- **Entanglement.** Stop. Do not turn or rotate — spinning wraps you tighter. Work slowly and deliberately to free yourself, signal your tender or buddy, and remember that your cutting device is the reason you carry it.
- **Cramps.** For a leg or foot cramp, extend the leg and pull the toes (or fin tip) toward you to stretch the muscle out. For abdominal cramps, get buoyant, signal, and come out of the water. Cramps end missions — hydrate and pace yourself.

4.3 Understanding Drowning

Drowning is a process, not an instant — and it rarely looks like the movies. In distress, the victim can still support themselves and call for help; this is the window in which Verbal, Reach, and Throw succeed. In active drowning, the victim goes vertical in the water, arms slapping or pressing down instinctively, unable to speak or wave; many adults submerge within twenty to sixty seconds of entering this stage. A passive victim is motionless — face-down or submerged, unconscious or nearly so.

Two implications drive rescuer technique. First, an active victim will do anything to stay above water, including climbing the only solid object in reach — you. Every approach and release technique in this chapter exists because of that fact. Second, cold-water immersion adds a dangerous gasp reflex and rapid incapacitation, but also — especially in children — survival windows that justify aggressive rescue effort. Report water temperature to command; it belongs in the rescue-versus-recovery calculus.

4.4 Approach, Contact & Release

Bring flotation and push it ahead of you — let the victim grab the buoy, not the rescuer. Stop outside grab range, talk, and assess before committing to contact. On a front approach, never reach straight in; reach across the victim, so your arm can block, turn them, and take control from behind. The rear approach is preferred whenever you can get it: come in behind, secure across the chest or under the armpits, and lean the victim back to open the airway. Control means three things are true at once — the victim's back is to you, flotation is under them, and their airway is high. If the victim submerges before contact, mark the spot and do not chase blind; a marked PLS feeds the search patterns of Chapter 2.

Releases & Escapes

A panicked victim who gets hold of you is not attacking you; they are climbing. The universal escape uses the one fact in your favor: the one place a drowning victim will not follow you is underwater. Tuck your chin and submerge. Descending loosens their grip; push up and away, surface out of reach, and regroup. Break stubborn grips by peeling at the thumbs and driving through the weak point of the hold. Retreat is a tactic, not a failure — back off, re-present the flotation, and try again. You will practice front-approach blocks, rear approaches, and releases live on the practical day.

Flotation Aids & Swimmer Tools

The rescue buoy or tube is the swimming rescuer's primary tool. Push it ahead to a conscious victim, keeping it between you and them. For an unconscious victim, position the flotation under the victim so the victim lies between you and the buoy. Towed correctly on its leash, the buoy trails behind and leaves both arms free for a full forward crawl. Fins add power in current and on long swims and are donned at the water's edge; mask and snorkel keep your eyes in the water while you breathe at the surface; and a bodyboard or similar float adds capacity for multiple victims or a long tow.

4.5 In-Water Medical Care

Very few medical interventions can be done effectively in the water, and attempting shore medicine while swimming costs time the patient does not have. In-water priorities, in order: establish positive flotation on the victim — the first victim-side priority of every mission; keep the head, airway, and face above water; protect the cervical spine when the mechanism suggests it; and move the patient to shore or boat, where real treatment begins under EMS protocols. Suspect cervical-spine injury with diving mishaps, falls from height, watercraft strikes, and any unwitnessed unconscious victim in shallow water.

Cervical-Spine Control: the Vise Grip & Facedown Roll

The goal of in-water C-spine care is a neutral head — chin in line with the body, no twisting — established before any movement toward shore. The vise-grip technique clamps the patient's chest and back between the rescuer's forearms (or splints the head between both arms), locking head and torso into a single unit. A facedown patient must be turned first: apply the vise grip, then rotate the patient as one unit while you submerge alongside, so the patient finishes face-up with the airway clear and the spine aligned. It is one smooth motion, and the head never leads or lags the body. You will perform the vise grip and facedown roll to standard on the practical day.

Packaging & the Stokes Litter

Flotation comes first in packaging: slide a rescue tube, PFD, or ring buoy under the patient's back while control is maintained. Backboards in the water are aids, not answers — they do not provide reliable flotation, they are tip-prone, and they are slippery; use them to move a controlled patient with rescuers stabilizing both sides. The packaging tool of choice is the Stokes-type litter: it supports and floats the patient, protects them during extrication, and gives the team honest handholds. Load it in the water: submerge the litter, float the patient over it, raise and secure. Litter loading is a practical-day evolution.

4.6 Extrication & Decontamination

The rescue is not complete until the victim is in a safe place — and neither are you. Going up the bank, match the method to the slope and the load. With enough personnel, a simple straight pull up the slope works. Steeper banks and heavier loads call for the 2:1 mechanical advantage of Chapter 3, with its tended safety. Vertical litter lifts belong to rope-technician-trained personnel; aerial ladders and platforms make excellent high-point anchors under their direction. Do not forget the rescuers: staff a

dry-suited or wader-equipped shore member in the shallows to assist tired swimmers out, and rig a chest-height grab line from water to bank to turn a scramble into a walk.

Contamination, Decon & Exposure Reporting

All water is contaminated until proven otherwise. Exposure effects range from flu-like illness, rash, and gastrointestinal symptoms in the short term to serious disease with repeated exposure. Gross decontamination therefore happens on scene, as rescuers exit the water — and it starts before any gear comes off: a clean-water washdown of rescuer and equipment, with a mild cleaning solution per AHJ SOP. Exposure documentation is completed for every person who entered the water, and command arranges water testing and health-agency liaison whenever contamination is suspected.

4.7 Supervision & Leadership

Level II rescuers are expected to supervise, coordinate, and lead teams during operations — not merely perform skills. Scene safety is a product of training and enforced standards, and two behaviors matter above all others: PFD use and SOP compliance. Supervisors enforce both without exception, on themselves first. Accountability is continuous — who you have, where they are, and their status — with positive communication running to every operating element: water, shore, boat, and command. The backup rescuer functions as the RIC of the water scene: dressed, briefed, and dedicated to rescuers only.

Coordination is a discipline of attention. Resist tunnel vision; the victim in front of you is not the whole scene. Allocate resources deliberately across search, rescue, medical, backup, and support. Know who you are coordinating: verify training and credentials before assigning anyone to the water, because a multi-agency scene mixes very different standards. Adapt the Incident Command System to the incident — water rescue fits ICS; use it. And the supervisor owns the continuous rescue-versus-recovery re-evaluation of Chapter 1: the mission you started may not be the mission you should still be running.

RESCUER REMINDER

Leadership on a water scene is mostly the unglamorous enforcement of basics: PFDs on, SOPs followed, everyone accounted for, backup ready. Do those four things relentlessly and most tragedies never get the chance to start.

Chapter 4 Key Terms

Watermanship qualification	The swim test gating all in-water work; the course's representative standard is a 500-yd crawl, 800-yd snorkel course, 5 minutes treading/floating, and a 100-yd tired-diver tow.
Drown-proofing	A relaxed face-down survival float, lifting the face only to breathe, that conserves energy for extended periods.
Defensive swimming position	On the back, feet up and pointed downstream, arms steering — the self-protective posture in moving water.
Active drowning	The stage in which a victim is vertical, instinctively pressing down on the water, unable to call out — often 20–60 seconds from submersion.
Passive victim	A motionless, unconscious or near-unconscious victim, face-down or submerged.
Vise grip	Forearm clamp splinting a patient's head and torso as one unit for in-water C-spine control.
Facedown roll	The single-unit rotation of a facedown patient to face-up while maintaining the vise grip.
Stokes litter	The basket-type litter that floats, supports, and protects a packaged patient through extrication.
Gross decontamination	On-scene clean-water washdown of rescuer and equipment, begun before any gear is removed.
Accountability	Continuous knowledge of who is operating, where they are, and their status.

Chapter Review Questions

Answer the following from memory before checking the key at the back of this manual. These questions mirror the style of the online examination.

1. List the four elements of this course's representative swim standard, and state when and how it is administered on the practical day.
2. Why does flotation, not fitness, protect an unconscious rescuer?
3. Match the forward crawl, sidestroke, and elementary backstroke to their jobs.
4. Describe the defensive swimming position and explain why you never stand in moving water.
5. Apply Stop–Think–Act to an entanglement: what do you do, and what do you never do?
6. Distinguish distress, active drowning, and the passive victim. Which rescue methods fit the distress window?
7. Why is the rear approach preferred, and what three conditions define 'control' of a victim?
8. Describe the universal escape from a panicked victim's grip and the fact that makes it work.

9. State the in-water medical priorities in order. Which mechanisms make you suspect C-spine injury?
10. Walk through the facedown roll: what is gripped, what rotates, and what never happens to the head?
11. Why are backboards 'aids, not answers' in the water, and what does the Stokes litter provide instead?
12. When does gross decontamination begin, and who completes exposure documentation?
13. Name the two safety behaviors a supervisor enforces above all others, and the four leadership basics of the chapter's final reminder.

CHAPTER 5

The Practical Day

The practical session is a single instructor-led eight-hour day. It begins in the controlled environment of a pool, and when a suitable waterfront — lake, ocean, or similar — is available, it transitions there for the final evolutions so your skills are applied in live conditions. Where no waterfront is available, the waterfront evolutions are repeated and extended in the pool so the full eight hours are met. All in-water work is conducted with PPE, safety swimmers, and a functioning safety system in place.

5.1 Schedule of Evolutions

Hours	Evolution	Venue
1.0	Swim / watermanship qualification (pass/fail gate to in-water skills)	Pool
0.5	PFD donning; hand, whistle & line signals; reach/throw tool familiarization	Pool
1.0	Reach & throw rescue — pike pole/hook, throw bag, coiled rope to target	Pool
1.5	Self-rescue & defensive swimming; victim approach, rear approach & grab releases	Pool
1.0	In-water medical — facedown roll, C-spine control, Stokes-litter loading	Pool
1.5	Open-water application — throw at distance, swimming approach, tethered “live-bait” rescue	Waterfront*
1.5	Current & defensive swimming in live conditions; extrication up bank; 2:1 haul with safety	Waterfront*

** When available; otherwise these evolutions are repeated and extended in the pool.*

5.2 What to Bring

- Swimwear and a towel; a change of clothes for after the session
- Personal thermal protection if you own it (wetsuit appropriate to the venue); loaner equipment availability varies by session — confirm with your instructor in advance
- Water bottle, sun protection, and any personal medications you may need poolside
- Mask, snorkel, and fins if you own them (required for the snorkel course; loaners as available)
- This manual, with the skills checklist in Appendix B
- A government-issued photo ID and proof of completion of the online modules and written examination

5.3 How You Will Be Evaluated

Every evolution in the schedule is evaluated pass/fail against the skills checklist in Appendix B. Competent performance means you complete the skill safely, in the correct sequence, without instructor intervention. A failed skill may be re-attempted at the lead instructor's discretion within the session's time; safety violations — a missing PFD, an SOP breach — are addressed immediately and may end participation in an evolution. The swim qualification is administered first and is an absolute gate: students who do not pass it observe the in-water evolutions from the deck and may complete them at a future session after requalifying.

SAFETY POINT

The standards you are evaluated against on the practical day are the standards that keep you alive on a real scene. Instructors enforce them as if lives depend on it, because they do.

Appendix A: Swim / Watermanship Qualification

Administered as the first evolution of the practical day. The standard below is the course's representative standard; the AHJ / lead instructor may adjust it to match locally served waters, provided course objectives are met. All elements are completed in swimwear (no PFD unless the AHJ directs otherwise), under direct instructor observation, with a safety swimmer on deck.

#	Element	Standard
1	Forward crawl	500 yards, nonstop
2	Snorkel course	800 yards with mask, fins & snorkel
3	Water comfort	5 minutes of treading water, drown-proofing, bobbing, or floating
4	Tired-diver tow or push	100 yards

Scoring is pass/fail on each element; all four elements must be passed in a single session for qualification. Students are encouraged to train to this standard before arriving — the practical day is a demonstration, not a first attempt.

Appendix B: Individual Skills Checklist

The practical-day evaluation record. Your instructor initials each line as Pass or Fail; every line must be passed for course completion.

#	Demonstrated Skill
1	AHJ swim / watermanship qualification completed
2a	Reach rescue — extremity reach (from land or watercraft)
2b	Reach rescue — improvised equipment
3a	Throw rescue — ring buoy
3b	Throw rescue — improvised equipment
3c	Throw rescue — rope bag (first and second throw)
4a	Water entry — slide-in
4b	Water entry — stride jump
4c	Water entry — compact jump
4d	Water entry — run-and-swim
5a	In-water assist — simple assist
5b	In-water assist — active victim, front approach (block)
5c	In-water assist — active victim, rear approach
5d	In-water assist — passive victim, rear approach
5e	Releases — escape from a panicked victim's grasp
6a	Self-rescue — defensive swimming position
6b	Line signals — OATH demonstrated both directions
7a	In-water medical — vise grip & facedown roll
7b	In-water medical — C-spine control & flotation under patient
7c	In-water medical — Stokes-litter loading in the water
8a	Victim evacuation — two-person with long spine board
8b	Victim evacuation — team evacuation using Stokes/SMR
9	Rope systems — 2:1 mechanical advantage haul with functioning safety
10	Tethered (“live-bait”) rescue with quick-release harness (waterfront or pool)

Appendix C: Required Equipment & PPE

Students must have access to the following for the practical session. The PFD is the single most important piece of PPE a surface rescuer can wear.

- Personal flotation device — Type III vest-style, and a Type IV swiftwater PFD where applicable
- Thermal protection appropriate to the water (wetsuit or drysuit), water-rescue helmet, and eye protection
- Whistle and established hand / line signals
- Reach tools (pike poles, hooks), throw bags, and coiled rope
- Rope-rescue hardware for a simple 2:1 system, with prusik / safety lines
- In-water aids: rescue buoy or tube, ring buoy, fins, mask and snorkel
- Patient packaging: Stokes-type litter and long spine board

Glossary

Active drowning	The drowning stage in which the victim is vertical, instinctively pressing down on the water, and unable to call out; submersion often follows in 20–60 seconds.
Active search measures	Immediate rescue-tempo search justified by a seen victim or high-confidence clues.
AHJ	Authority Having Jurisdiction — the organization responsible for approving equipment, training, and procedures.
Area of probability	The area in which the victim or vehicle is most likely to be, based on scene information and witness interviews.
Awareness level	Entry training level operating outside the hazard zone: recognize, secure, summon.
Butterfly coils	Loose loops of recovered throw line gathered for an immediate second throw.
Defensive swimming position	On the back, feet up and downstream, arms steering; the self-protective posture in moving water.
Drown-proofing	A relaxed face-down survival float, lifting the face only to breathe.
Dynamic belay	Managing a loaded throw line so the water pendulums the victim to shore.
Facedown roll	Single-unit rotation of a facedown patient to face-up under the vise grip.
Golden Hour	The EMS principle that most trauma is best treated within roughly sixty minutes.
Gross decontamination	On-scene clean-water washdown of rescuer and equipment, begun before gear removal.
Level I (Operations)	Rescuer deploying and supporting shore-based rescue without entering the hazard environment.
Level II (Technician)	Rescuer entering the hazard environment; plans, leads, and supervises operations.
Line tender	Shore member managing a tethered swimmer's line, signals, and safety.
Mechanical advantage	Rope-and-pulley force multiplication; a simple 2:1 halves required force and doubles rope travel.
NFPA 1006	Standard for Technical Rescue Personnel Professional Qualifications.
NFPA 1670	Standard on Operations and Training for Technical Search and Rescue Incidents.
OATH	Rope-pull signal vocabulary: OK, Advance, Talk/Take up slack, Hold/Help.

Passive search measures	Investigation-first posture used when information is weak: spotters, bank checks, timelines.
Passive victim	A motionless, unconscious or near-unconscious victim.
PFD	Personal flotation device; the surface rescuer's most important PPE.
Point last seen (PLS)	The last confirmed location of the victim on or in the water.
Point of entry	Where the victim or vehicle entered the water.
Priority ladder	Verbal, Reach, Throw, Row, Go — methods in increasing order of rescuer risk.
Rapid Intervention Crew	Personnel dedicated to rescuing rescuers; the water-scene backup fills this role.
Rescue vs. recovery	The command decision whether conditions support a viable victim and survivable attempt.
Risk vs. benefit	Weighing what can be accomplished against the price of attempting it.
Safety prusik	Tended friction hitch that catches a hauled load on failure; 'no safety, no haul.'
Sighting	A witness's line from their original position through the PLS to a fixed object.
Stokes litter	Basket-type litter that floats, supports, and protects a packaged patient.
Tethered rescue	Swimming rescue on a tended line via quick-release harness; 'live bait.'
Triangulation	Intersecting two or more sightings to define a search area.
Type III PFD	Vest-style working PFD; the fire/EMS standard.
Type IV device	Throwable flotation aid — ring buoy or cushion.
Type V PFD	Special-use PFD category, including the swiftwater rescue vest with quick-release harness.
Vise grip	Forearm clamp splinting head and torso as one unit for in-water C-spine control.
Watermanship qualification	The swim test gating all in-water work.

Review Question Answer Key

Model answers, keyed to the chapter review questions. Your wording may differ; the substance should not.

Chapter 1

1. Cold (strips heat and motor control; gasp reflex), moving (forces no rescuer can out-muscle), and trauma-producing (impact with rocks, debris, structures can be fatal independent of drowning).
2. It is never acceptable for a rescuer to die for someone already deceased. At a recovery, time pressure is removed and rescue-level risks are no longer justified.
3. NFPA 1006 (individual qualifications); NFPA 1670 (team operations and training).
4. Awareness operates outside the hazard zone; Level I on/beside the water but not in the hazard with the victim; Level II inside the hazard environment.
5. Surface, swiftwater, ice, surf, dive. Each has distinct hazards, equipment, and standards — competence does not transfer automatically.
6. Flooding is the deadliest severe-weather hazard, over half of deaths involve vehicles, and suppression companies are routinely first on scene at vehicle-in-water calls regardless of boat capability.
7. Access/egress points, launch sites, bottom composition and depths, obstructions and water-control structures. High water changes access, current, and hazards — plan for the worst expected conditions.
8. Fresh tracks into the water; new guardrail/fence/landscape damage; active lights on a submerged vehicle; bubbles or fresh fuel/oil sheen (any three).
9. Take the true time of entry from witnesses early, and count setup/response/rigging time honestly toward the operational clock.
10. Dressed, equipped, briefed, positioned, and dedicated solely to the rescuer — before the primary enters the water.

Chapter 2

1. PFDs are worn, fitted, and fastened by everyone in or near the water and everyone aboard watercraft — no exceptions. Vest tools: whistle, cutting device, strobe/marker light, window punch/seat-belt cutter.
2. Type III — working vest of shore and boat crews; Type IV — throwable aid (ring buoy/cushion); Type V — special use, including the quick-release swiftwater rescue vest.
3. Bunker gear absorbs water and sinks its wearer.
4. Rinse after every use; mild soap only; complete air-drying before packing; store out of sunlight; documented inspections with damaged gear removed from service (any four).

5. Radio (interoperability gaps), hand signals (distance/visibility), whistle (ambient noise limits), line pulls (slack line).
6. See the OATH table in §2.3. Four pulls from the swimmer (HELP) always deploys the backup.
7. Who, where, how, how long ago. It is recorded and witness-identified because it becomes part of the legal record of the incident.
8. Entry is where they went in; PLS is where they were last confirmed. Current, wind, and victim effort separate the two.
9. Each witness, from their original spot, lines the PLS with a fixed object (a sighting); the intersection of two or more sightings is the area of probability.
10. Parallel: victim near an open shoreline, no known entry point; tender and swimmer both move. Sweep: known entry point or obstructed shoreline; tender fixed, swimmer arcs.
11. The swimmer's. A slack line loses signals, the pattern, and the swimmer's position.

Chapter 3

1. Verbal (voice only), Reach (a braced rescuer and tool), Throw (line/flotation and a belayer), Row (a crew on the water), Go (a rescuer in the hazard).
2. Urgency can justify skipping rungs — e.g., a victim submerging now, beyond throw range, justifies immediate Row or Go while lower rungs are prepared in parallel.
3. It can resolve the incident outright, and the victim's response reports consciousness and viability.
4. Low center of gravity (crouch or lie down), braced or held by a teammate, PFD on, tool kept between rescuer and victim until controlled.
5. Aim slightly beyond (and upstream of) the victim; command 'Grab the rope — roll on your back'; belay dynamically and pendulum them to the bank.
6. There is no time to restuff; gather butterfly coils and throw the coils or the water-filled bag directly.
7. Flotation, equipment/personnel capacity, reduced rescuer fatigue and exposure, lighting/elevated platform, speed (any four). Engine in neutral or off with anyone in the water nearby.
8. Capabilities: search/spotting, IR/night vision, lighting, video, transport (any three). Limits: hoist work requires trained aircrew/rescuers; rotor wash endangers craft, swimmers, and evidence.
9. Qualified and dressed swimmer; victim flotation carried; backup dressed and ready; deliberate tether decision.
10. Slide-in. Never enter headfirst into water you have not personally verified.
11. Two feet of pull per foot of travel, at half the force.
12. A tended prusik or belay on the standing line, minded at the anchor, that catches the load on failure. No safety, no haul.
13. A fixed line in moving water anchors the swimmer against the current; the quick release lets the swimmer dump the tether under load.

Chapter 4

1. 500-yd nonstop crawl; 800-yd snorkel course; 5 min treading/drown-proofing/bobbing/floating; 100-yd tired-diver tow or push. Administered first on the practical day as a pass/fail gate.
2. An unconscious swimmer cannot hold a face-up position regardless of skill; only flotation keeps the airway above water.
3. Crawl — speed/closing distance; sidestroke — sustainable with one arm free; elementary backstroke — rest with a high airway.
4. On the back, feet up and pointed downstream, arms steering. Standing risks foot entrapment against the bottom while current forces the body under.
5. Stop; do not turn or rotate; work slowly to free yourself; signal tender or buddy; cut if needed. Never spin.
6. Distress — can support self and call out (Verbal/Reach/Throw window); active — vertical, pressing down, silent, 20–60 s; passive — motionless/unconscious.
7. It denies the victim a grab and sets up immediate control. Control = victim's back to you, flotation under them, airway high.
8. Tuck the chin and submerge, push up and away, surface out of reach, regroup. A drowning victim will not follow underwater.
9. Flotation on the victim; airway/face above water; C-spine when indicated; move to shore/boat for protocol care. Mechanisms: diving, falls from height, watercraft strikes, unwitnessed unconscious in shallow water.
10. Forearms clamp chest and back (or arms splint the head); patient rotates as one unit while the rescuer submerges alongside; the head never leads or lags.
11. Backboards lack reliable flotation, tip, and are slippery. The Stokes floats, supports, protects, and provides handholds.
12. As rescuers exit the water, before any gear is removed. Every person who entered the water completes exposure documentation.
13. PFD use and SOP compliance. Basics: PFDs on, SOPs followed, everyone accounted for, backup ready.

References & Course Information

- NFPA 1006, Standard for Technical Rescue Personnel Professional Qualifications
- NFPA 1670, Standard on Operations and Training for Technical Search and Rescue Incidents
- Trilogy Emergency Medical Solutions, Surface Water Rescue Online Modules 1–4 and Course Syllabus

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