

Considering NOWS? Consider this!

Q: What are the NOWS?

- A: National On-Water Standards (NOWS) are the American National Standards (ANSs) for recreational boating instruction. They set the national quality standards for courses that take place on the water and provide instruction to beginner students in skills to operate recreational powerboats, sailboats, and human-propelled craft.
- They represent a national consensus of recreational boating experts from across the country for:
 - a) WHAT skills boat operators should be able to demonstrate after completing entry-level recreational boating skills instruction, and
 - b) HOW best to provide skills instruction that takes place on the water.
 - NOWS American National Standards (ANSs) were approved and published by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). The approach for gaining ANSI approval and publication was led by the American Boat & Yacht Council (ABYC) using its ANSI-approved standards development process.

Q: Why were NOWS developed?

- A: NOWS were developed to help raise and standardize the overall quality, consistency, and availability of on-water, skills-based, entry-level recreational boating education across the country, with the goal to enhance the level of safety and enjoyment recreational boaters experience on our nation's waterways.
- Recreational boating experts voluntarily developed the original version of the NOWS from 2011 to 2018. They were further updated from December 2021 to July 2023, as part of the ABYC American Nationals Standards maintenance process.
 - The NOWS Program was funded in part by the US Coast Guard's Office of Boating Safety non-profit grant program.
 - For details about the development of the NOWS, visit the NOWS Program archive at www.onwaterstandards.org.

Q: What type of courses are the NOWS designed for?

- A: NOWS are designed for courses that teach *beginner students boating skills on the water*. The following definitions apply:
- *Beginner students* are novices or people relatively new at operating a recreational boat and focused on learning the fundamentals.
 - *Boating skills* are behaviors associated with the capacity, aptitude or ability to safely operate a recreational boat at the entry level. Entry-level is the level of proficiency a person has achieved to be ready to pursue (or 'enter' safely into) recreational boating.
 - *On the water* means the primary method of instruction takes place on the water with students learning mostly through experience on a boat, while being trained real-time by an instructor(s).

Q: Can I use NOWS for my advanced courses or instructor training courses?

- A: NOWS set national standards for designing and delivering on-water instruction that produces entry-level skills for recreational boat operation. They do not set national standards for intermediate or

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advanced skills instruction, or for instructor training. Using NOWS standards to design and deliver these types of courses goes beyond the scope of their intended use.

Q: How many NOWS are there?

A: There are four (4) NOWS American National Standards. Three identify what skills to include in beginner-level courses (one standard each for powerboat, human-propelled craft, and sailing instruction). They are:

- ABYC EDU-1 On-Water Recreational Boating Skills–Power (current version: December 2021)
- ABYC EDU-2 On-Water Recreational Boating Skills–Human-propelled (current version: July 2022)
- ABYC EDU-3 On-Water Recreational Boating Skills–Sail (current version: July 2022)

The fourth identifies factors to consider for HOW to design and deliver on-water, entry-level, skills-based instruction in any of the domains. The title of this American National Standard is:

- ABYC EDU-4 On-Water Recreational Boating Skills–Instruction (current version: July 2022)

Q: Do I have to use NOWS? Are they mandatory?

A: NOWS were created voluntarily and by consensus of recreational boating experts across the nation. They represent the foundation of best practices in skills-based instruction for entry-level recreational boat operation that takes place on the water. Although there is no mandate for their use, all organizations and individuals are encouraged to follow NOWS when designing and providing these types of courses.

Q: Do instructors need to be certified to use NOWS?

A: Any instructor can use NOWS to teach beginner students the skills to operate a recreational sailboat, powerboat, or human-propelled craft. Although it is not required it is highly recommended that the instructor be certified, or otherwise formally approved by the governing organization that they represent.

Q: Why should courses follow NOWS?

A: Following NOWS will help:

- Differentiate courses or programs in the marketplace by promoting the use of best practices.
- Increase the quality of an instructional approach by using the expertise of the nation's top subject matter experts to develop or improve a course or program.
- Standardize quality of instruction across different instructors or venues by using a common well-defined set of skills, and common methods to assess performance of those skills on the water.
- Manage risks associated with providing on-water, skills-based instruction to beginner students.

Q: How do I ensure a course follows the NOWS?

A: The NOWS Self-Assessment and Declaration Process is used to determine whether a course follows the NOWS. It involves using a NOWS Self-Assessment Checklist to assess the course, modifying the course to ensure it follows the relevant standards (if needed), and formally declaring the course follows the NOWS. For more information, visit www.usnows.org/assess-and-update.

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Q: Does a course need to follow NOWS if it already follows another standard?

A: NOWS set the standards for all on-water, entry-level, skills-based recreational boating safety instruction. If a course already follows another standard, check the extent to which the standard complies with the NOWS. If the standard meets or exceeds NOWS, there is no need to modify the course. If the other standard is set lower than NOWS, make alterations (where appropriate) to ensure the course meets or exceeds the standards set by NOWS.

If someone else, such as a parent organization or national association (e.g., US Sailing, REA, American Sailing Association (ASA), Power Squadrons, US Powerboating, etc.) developed the course, contact the relevant organization, and inquire if the standard used for the course meets the relevant NOWS.

Q: Can NOWS be used to assess performance of students?

A: Yes. NOWS can be used to assess the level of student proficiency during or after participating in a course. Student assessment tools called rubrics have been developed and field-tested for each of the skills identified in the NOWS standards. These rubrics have been included within the NOWS Technical Support Documents (TSDs) for the three skills standards. For more information visit www.usnows.org/assess-and-update.

Q: Is there a fee to use NOWS?

A: The four American National Standards (ABYC EDU-1, ABYC EDU-2, ABYC EDU-3, ABYC EDU-4) are freely available for download. Visit www.usnows.org/review-standards to download the standards.

Q: Are there any support materials available for using the standards?

A: The NOWS Program has developed and makes available for purchase materials that support understanding and use of the four standards to assess and update courses. Visit www.usnows.org/assess-and-update for more information.

Q: Where can I get more information about the NOWS Program?

A: For more general information about the NOWS Program, download *NOWS in a Nutshell* at www.usnows.org/files/ugd/abe9a2_69a71b81a8004f9d8ee63563fab75e11.pdf