

# Considering NOWS? Consider this!

## Q: What are the NOWS?

- A: National On-Water Standards (NOWS) are the national quality standards for courses that take place on the water and provide instruction to beginner-level 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 instruction, and
    - b) The qualities of approach used to provide skills instruction on the water.
  - NOWS are American National Standards (ANSs) approved and published by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

## Q: Why were NOWS developed?

- A: NOWS were developed to help raise and standardize the level of quality, consistency and availability of on-water, skills-based, entry-level recreational boating education across the country, with the goal to enhance the safety and enjoyment of our nation's recreational boaters.
- Recreational boating experts voluntarily developed the NOWS from 2011 to 2018.
  - The NOWS Program was funded in part by the US Coast Guard's Office of Boating Safety non-profit grant program.
  - For all the details about the development of the NOWS, visit the NOWS Program archive website at: [www.onwaterstandards.org](http://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 and guided real time by an instructor(s).

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

- A: NOWS set the quality standards for design and delivery of on-water instruction that produces recreational boat operators with entry-level skills. They do not set national standards for intermediate or advanced instruction, or for instructor training. Using NOWS to design and deliver these types of courses goes beyond the scope of intended use for NOWS.

## Q: How many NOWS are there?

- A: There are currently four (4) NOWS. Three set the standard for what skills should be included in beginner-level courses (one standard each for power, human-propelled craft, and sailing

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instruction). The fourth sets the standard for what factors to consider when designing and delivering on-water, entry-level, skills-based instruction in any of the three domains.

## 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 teaching beginner students the skills to operate a recreational sailboat, powerboat or human-propelled craft can use NOWS. Although it is not required that an instructor teaching the NOWS be certified, it is highly recommended that they be certified or otherwise 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 improve a course or program.
- Standardize instruction across different instructors or venues by using a common well-defined set of skills and using 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 determine and declare that a course follows 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 fit with the standards (if needed), and declaring the course follows the NOWS. For more information, download the NOWS Self-Declaration Action Plan at:  
[https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/abe9a2\\_afbcd5c146634c0f84f3b723e3b2d076.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/abe9a2_afbcd5c146634c0f84f3b723e3b2d076.pdf).

## Q: Does a course need to follow NOWS if that course already follows another national standard?

A: NOWS set the foundation for best practices in entry-level, on-water, skills-based instruction. If a course already follows another standard, check the extent to which the standard aligns to 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,

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contact the relevant organization and inquire if the standard used for the course meets the corresponding NOWS.

**Q: Can NOWS be used to assess performance of students against the standards?**

A: Yes. NOWS can be used to assess the level of student proficiency during or after participating in a course. Assessment tools called Rubrics have been developed and field-tested and are available at [www.usnows.org](http://www.usnows.org).

**Q: Is there a fee to use NOWS?**

A: NOWS and the associated instructional support materials are currently freely available to anyone interested in designing and delivering on-water, entry-level, skills-based recreational boating instruction for beginners.

**Q: How are the NOWS accessed?**

A: Go to [www.usnows.org](http://www.usnows.org) to download the NOWS and supporting materials.

**Q: Where can more information about NOWS be found?**

A: For general information about NOWS, download *NOWS in a Nutshell* at:  
[https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/abe9a2\\_df932dad06854443be5c3b816b5c3ea1.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/abe9a2_df932dad06854443be5c3b816b5c3ea1.pdf)

For more detailed information about how to use NOWS in your course, download the NOWS Instructional Approach Standard “How to” Guide at:  
[https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/abe9a2\\_253036c5dec740af8e45464a41dc839a.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/abe9a2_253036c5dec740af8e45464a41dc839a.pdf).