

At The Trailhead

(adapted by Jon Shields from "The Mountaineers Hiking Leaders Guide")

BEFORE THE HIKE

1. **Leader should arrive at the meeting place / trailhead at least 15 minutes early.** Useful: have the trip roster, map, weather report, recent trip reports for this trail handy for reference. Have cell phone turned on (if signal is available) to allow for last-minute calls from late arrivals, late cancellations, etc.
2. **Identify yourself as the leader, and check off the names of hikers on the trip roster as they arrive.** Hikers who do not have a Waiver on file at the clubhouse (as indicated on the trip roster) are NOT allowed to participate on the hike.
3. **Wait at the meeting place at least 15 minutes for late arrivals.** Identify late cancellations and no-shows; report them on the Trip Report along with appropriate follow-up instructions (e.g., "send letter").
4. **Introduce yourself and have all participants introduce themselves to the group.** Identify any guests and new members. Ideas for "icebreakers": Why did you pick this particular hike? Tell us something unusual about yourself that will help us remember you (e.g., hobbies, accomplishments, nickname).
5. **Do a quick equipment check.** It is the leader's responsibility to ensure that all hikers are prepared for the hike. If a person has forgotten important gear or looks unprepared, this is the time to turn them away, before it becomes a safety issue for the entire group. This may require a 10 Essentials, lunch and/or water check of a hiker (in private, if possible) before the hike begins. Option: other hikers may have extra items they may be willing to share.
6. Ask if each driver has their **car keys** with them and (where necessary) has posted the **appropriate trail park pass** on the windshield of their car. Valuables should be removed or hidden from view to avoid car prowls.
7. **Describe the hike and trail conditions**, potential problems/challenges, pace, side trails, special scenery or features of interest, etc.
8. **Establish the trip rules:** be explicit about how you intend to keep the group together (e.g., front guard; rear guard; keeping track of other hikers; rules for "party separations" such as informing others, stay 200 ft from water sources, pack it out if possible). Remind everyone to wait at trail intersections, stream crossings, etc. When the trip has ended, nobody leaves until all hikers have arrived at the trailhead; no cars leave until all cars have been started (e.g., in case of dead battery).
9. **Appoint a Front Guard:** role is to ensure that no other hiker gets out ahead of them.
10. **Appoint a Rear Guard:** role is to ensure that no other hiker falls behind them.
11. **Appoint a First Aid Leader:** role is to take charge of any first aid situations, and to delegate specific first aid tasks to others. Ask hikers to inform First Aid Leader and Trip Leader in private of any special health issues or concerns.
12. **Optional items:**
 - Record time of departure (e.g., to track pace, time until turn-around target).
 - Start GPS unit tracking functions, if one will be used or demonstrated on this trip.
 - Bring / demonstrate use of walkie-talkies, if these will be used or demonstrated on this trip.

AFTER THE HIKE

1. Make sure every hiker has returned to the trailhead. (No one leaves until every hiker has returned to the trailhead.)
2. Explain the official carpool policy (including current reimbursement rate for drivers).
3. If a dinner / food stop is being planned, identify the restaurant; make sure everyone knows the directions, etc.
4. Make sure all cars start before leaving.
5. Complete the Trip Report and submit it to the appropriate Committee(s).

Questions for Hikers

The following is a list of questions I typically ask hikers by phone a few days in advance of my trips. It takes a little extra effort, but has helped to avoid more serious problems on the hike.

1. Are you new to the Pacific Northwest?
 - If no, continue to the next question.
 - If yes, describe typical NW weather considerations (e.g., possible winter conditions any time of year, dress in layers for flexibility).
2. Are you new to hiking under typical Pacific NW backcountry conditions?
 - If no, continue to the next question.
 - If yes, describe typical NW weather (if haven't already), trail conditions, destinations, equipment needs (e.g., sturdy hiking boots, raingear, non-cotton clothing).
3. Are you new to The Mountaineers?
 - If no, continue to the next question.
 - If yes, describe typical procedures for carpool, meeting place, snack/dinner after hike, etc.
4. CURRENT WAIVER MUST BE ON FILE AT THE CLUBHOUSE (should be noted on the roster), OR THEY CANNOT PARTICIPATE ON THE HIKE. Waivers must be renewed yearly.
5. Are you familiar with the Ten Essential Systems?
 - If no, describe them, and explain that they must have all items to participate on the trip.
 - Ask if they have all of the Ten Essentials items necessary for this trip (including the map), or if they will need to go shopping for some prior to this trip.
 - Specifically, if they don't have a compass, recommend that they either wait until taking a navigation class for details on features and best choices, or, otherwise, recommend that they borrow or buy a Silva Ranger (~\$45) as best choice.
6. Do you have adequate raingear and non-cotton clothing? (Seattle Hiking Committee policy is that cotton clothing is NOT allowed on hikes.)
7. Do you have any physical or medical conditions of which the trip leader and/or first aid leader should be aware in advance of the hike? (Examples: recent injury, diabetes, serious allergies, special medication that must be taken on schedule during the hike.)
8. Do you have any questions regarding the hike, equipment, procedures, etc. that I can answer for you? (Typically, hike highlights, level of difficulty, pace, potential need for optional equipment such as trekking poles or gaiters.)
9. Would you like some advice on shopping for some specific items that you still need to buy for this trip? (Typically, advice on map, compass and/or appropriate clothing items.)
10. If they will be driving to the trailhead, and a trail pass (NW Forest Pass, MRNP Pass, or other) will be required, do they have one already? If not, do they know where to get one?

Other notes:

- Call trip leader if you need to cancel late, out of courtesy to those on the trip's waiting list, and to ensure that the group does not end up waiting for you at the trailhead.
- Do you have obligations to be back at a specific time? (If so, perhaps it would be best to switch to a different trip without such scheduling issues. We do not guarantee that we will be back at any specific time, nor do we rush the trip because someone is in a hurry.)