

For MHM 6.25.2017

Q: My personal hiker rating is “A” but I go on B and C hikes all the time. A trip leader suggested I upgrade my hiker rating to “C.” Why should I bother?

A: The requirement for Denver members to have the same hiker rating as the hike rating was terminated a few years ago. So it is true that you may register for any hiking trip, regardless of your personal hiker classification, assuming you have the “requisite skills and ability necessary to safely and effectively participate” in the trip.

Nonetheless, trip leaders may set prerequisites for any trip. Prerequisites may include having a particular hiker rating for a trip, having completed a specific school, or having satisfactorily completed a specific trip within a specified time frame. e.g., Prerequisites for a hike to Capitol Peak may be stated as having summited a technical route on a 14er within the last 3 months or the prior climbing season, and/or having completed HAMS or BMS.

It is best for leaders, you, and other trip participants if your hiker classification matches your skills and capabilities. Assuming you have completed Wilderness Trekking School or obtained a waiver (the subject of a future article), here are some reasons why:

🏠 **Courtesy:** If you have an A-rating and register for a Difficult C trip with a leader who doesn’t know you, it will save the leader a phone call and a difficult decision about whether to allow you on the trip. A trip leader must think about everyone’s safety and enjoyment, not just yours.

🏠 **Certainty:** Believe it or not, members sometimes exaggerate their abilities! C and D-rated trip leaders, especially, will be skeptical of your qualifications if you have not bothered to obtain the proper rating.

🏠 **Credibility:** For the trip leader and other participants on the trip with hiker classifications matching the trip rating, having a hiker with a lower hiker classification sends a message that perhaps you are a weak link in the group. Could they trust you to know how tie a belay knot, could they rely upon your skills for evacuation of an injured party; could they feel comfortable that you have training for avalanche assessment, weather forecasting, etc. Having the same hiker classification as the hike sends a message to the leaders and other participants that you have a particular skill set and have shown the ability to exercise specific judgment in training situations. Leaders and participants are more likely to trust your skills if you have the same classification as the hike.

🏠 **Improve your skills:** You may want to take a Denver Group class, such as Alpine Scrambling, only to discover that enrollment requires a C hiker rating. Having obtained a C rating prior to enrollment will eliminate the urgent mission to obtain sign-offs from trip leaders with whom you have hiked in the past, hoping they remember you and your skill level.

🏠 **Aspire to give back:** Should you ever decide to become a trip leader yourself, you will

already have accomplished the major step of having a rating that matches the hikes you wish to lead. As a Schools instructor applicant, you will prove your understanding and commitment to Denver Group's safety and leadership practices and common vocabulary.

Want to ski? Although this article is specific to hiking, there is a similar classification system for skiing. **Matching individual classifications for ski trips remains required.**

To change your hike or ski rating, read this: [How to Change a Hiker or Skier Classification](#) and then download a [Classification Change Request](#) form.

The background to the [Trip Classification System](#), the [Member Classification System](#), and [School Prerequisites](#) are all available at the Denver Group website.

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