

GUIDE FOR NEW INSTRUCTORS



GRANT NAKAMURA

Official publication of
PROFESSIONAL SKI INSTRUCTORS OF AMERICA
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SNOWBOARD INSTRUCTORS



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SHERRI HARKIN

Introduction

Welcome to the exciting world of teaching skiing and snowboarding!

This guide will help you learn more about snowsports instruction and offers insights on how to earn Level I certification from Professional Ski Instructors of America and American Association of Snowboard Instructors (PSIA-AASI). You'll be introduced to PSIA-AASI's teaching models and concepts, which apply to all the different disciplines of snowsports: adaptive, alpine, cross country, telemark, and snowboarding.

Each section of this guide covers areas you'll find relevant as a new instructor, such as learning about your students, maintaining professionalism, and promoting safety on the hill. This guide isn't the only resource PSIA-AASI offers for snowsports instructors, however, so look to the last page for a list of additional publications with more in-depth information on specific topic areas. Also check with your division for recommendations on other tools and resources available to you.



LINDA GUERRETTE

Who Are Your Students?

As a ski or snowboard instructor, you represent yourself and your snowsports school and/or resort. Each time you work with a student, you leave an impression, whether that be positive, neutral, or negative. To provide the best possible guest service and a safe, fun, learning environment, try to see every situation from the student's perspective. Consider how your interactions affect their impressions – of you, the school, the resort, and snowsports in general. After all, you'll do more than just help students with their technique. As summed up in PSIA-AASI's vision statement, you create lifelong adventures through education.

Guests of all types and ages come to snowsports areas to enjoy the winter environment and to learn how to slide on snow or improve the skills they already have. You'll be teaching students with a

wide range of abilities – from beginners who have never been on snow to advanced students looking to get even better.

Beginners are especially important to the ski and snowboard industry. If they have a great time and enjoy their experience, they're more likely to continue to advance their skills on snow, thus developing a passion for the sport and maybe even bringing others to join in the fun.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- What are some key ways to provide great guest service?
- How do you make a good first impression?



LINDA GUERRETTE

FEEDBACK

You may have noticed that the word “feedback” crops up frequently when talking about instruction. That’s no accident, since feedback is a crucial component in how students advance in their skills. In providing feedback – either during a given performance or directly after – you give students invaluable information about their movements, and help them use this information to guide future performance.

In most learning situations, feedback can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic feedback is the information your student receives when performing a movement, including sensory cues that, for instance, may indicate how the movement feels. Extrinsic feedback is information the student receives from external sources... primarily you in the role of instructor. It’s the extrinsic feedback that builds upon the intrinsic feedback.

You can break down extrinsic feedback even further, into knowledge of results (KOR) and knowledge of performance (KOP). Feedback related to knowledge of results has to do with outcomes, the extent to which a goal is achieved. Feedback related to knowledge of performance is defined as information about the actual performance or execution of the skill. In general, instructors conducting ski and snowboard lessons use a lot of KOP feedback, whereas coaches in competitive ski and snowboard events may rely more on KOR feedback.

Feedback is paramount to learning since, without it, your students won’t know how they’re performing. In all cases – whether intrinsic or extrinsic – feedback provides the information students need to guide their efforts. Through well-considered feedback, you can reinforce effective performance and/or motivate students to try new movements. Simply put, feedback is critically important in skill acquisition and in improving and/or maintaining performance levels.



SCOTT MARKEWITZ

To create an ideal learning environment, it’s vital that you not only provide feedback but also be aware of the type of feedback you give. For more in-depth information on types of feedback (categorized as individual or group; positive or negative; concurrent, terminal, immediate, or delayed; and descriptive or prescriptive), [download *The Teaching Dimension: A Compilation of Articles* by Joan E. Heaton](#).¹

STUDY QUESTIONS

- In what part(s) of the Teaching Cycle do you address safety with your students?
- How do you use the Teaching Model to build a relationship with your students?
- If you already have a few lessons under your belt, think about a student you recently taught. Provide a brief profile of this student and describe what you did to effectively communicate with them. How do you know your tactics or techniques were successful?
- In your own words, how do you develop trust and rapport with your students?
- Describe at least three different ways you can check for understanding.
- List three ways to show active listening.

How Students Learn

With quality snowsports instruction, students learn the appropriate movements and skills that support desired outcomes, while feeling comfortable and inspired with their efforts. While every student has their own way of learning, all go through a cycle of experiences to learn how to ski or snowboard. Good instructors have methods that are effective for a broad range of students, but they're also adept at making adjustments and modifications – based, in part, on learning preferences – that support the student-centered lesson approach PSIA-AASI helped pioneer.

Learning styles or preferences represent the ways your students collect, organize, and transform information into movement patterns. They can be broken down into two basic components: how a person perceives and communicates information and how he or she processes that information. Some students choose to perceive information, while others prefer to process information. Drawing upon the work of various learning theorists, PSIA-AASI's education tenets explore four approaches to how students learn:

- **VAK** – Information enters the brain through three primary senses: visual (through sight), auditory (through sound), and kinesthetic (through feeling).
- **Four Learning Styles** (Feeler, Watcher, Thinker, Doer) – Students have a preferred (though not necessarily exclusive) learning style, i.e., way of processing information.



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- **Motor Skill Acquisition** – Students move through three stages of learning when acquiring a new skill: initial, elementary, and mature.
- **The CAP Model** – Students have three distinct modes of development: cognitive (how they think), affective (how they feel in terms of attitude and social/emotional needs), and physical (how they move in terms of psychomotor skills).

Each of these educational theories are addressed at more length below.

VAK

Largely attributed to educator Walter Barbe, this approach to teaching relies primarily on how you, as the instructor, deliver information with regard to the student's visual, auditory, and kinesthetic senses. While students may have a preference for one or two of these areas, it's important to recognize that students should be given opportunities to collect or to perceive information through all three channels to effectively learn a new skill. Skiing and riding are movement-driven sports, so developing a kinesthetic awareness of the interaction of the ski or board with the snow and how the body moves in space is critical to student success, especially when they're first learning.

FOUR LEARNING STYLES: FEELER, WATCHER, THINKER, DOER

As outlined in work on experiential learning by David A. Kolb, these learning styles represent the cognitive mode of the learner, based on a combination of how the student perceives and processes information. Much like VAK, students may be predisposed to receiving information in one or more different ways, but for learning to be effective and lasting, students should pass through a series of experiences.

The Feeler:

These types of students value concrete experiences. People with this learning style are receptive learners and learn predominantly through “gut” intuition. They try many things and learn by doing and by evaluating along the way. The Feeler is very sensitive to the connection between what he or she does and its outcomes. This type of learner is aware of similarities and differences of experiences. They are particularly kinesthetic and will learn sports relatively



easily because of this strong sensory awareness. If instruction gets too analytical, this student may quickly lose interest.

The Watcher:

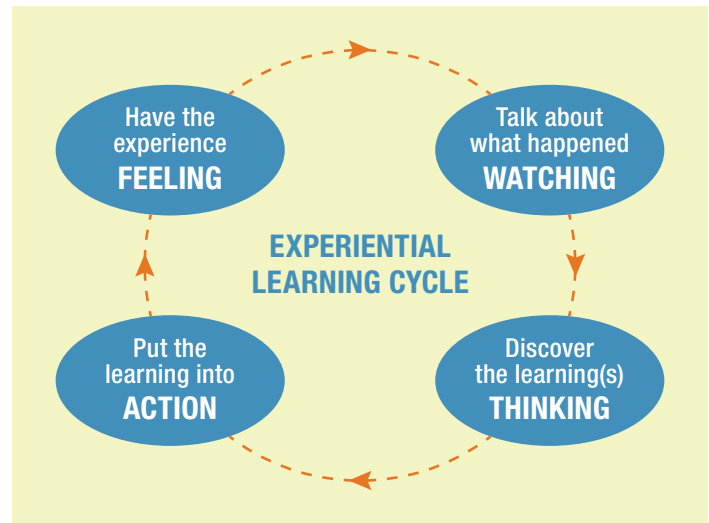
These types of students value reflective observation. People in this category like to “get the picture” and understand the purpose of practice. They need to watch others and study everyone’s performance, which provides the essential information they use to emulate what they see. To aid communication, create images for them to visualize.

Students with this learning preference are more successful if they can position themselves where they can watch what they’re being directed to do. If you have students follow behind you in a line, The Watcher is happiest when skiing directly behind you, so he or she can look at your movements. However, if you ask students to take turns when performing a particular movement pattern, this type of student will likely prefer to be last so he or she can garner as many visual references as possible.

The Thinker:

These types of students value abstract conceptualization, so they’re typically analytical, logical, thorough, and theoretical. They would rather read than listen to lectures, and they may be perceived as loners or dreamers. At times, they can be meticulous to a level of obsession.

Figure 3: The Experiential Learning Model.



Source: David A. Kolb and Ronald Fry. 1975. “Toward an Applied Theory of Experiential Learning,” in Cary Cooper (ed.) *Theories of Group Processes*. London/New York: John Wiley & Sons.

The Thinker may take an academic approach to skiing or riding by studying snowsports books. They may come to the lesson with pre-conceived notions of what they “should” do. These learners benefit from detailed explanations of what you want them to do. They generally welcome opportunities to ride the chairlift with you, so they can get more verbal information on the skills and movements they’re working on.

The Doer:

These types of students value active experimentation, so they tend to be pragmatic, practical, and functional. They are searchers who see a purpose in learning, making them good problem-solvers who work well with others. The Doer is constantly active, and being idle is not ideal. If skiing, they may poke their poles in the snow or tap their poles together until it’s time for their turn. If snowboarding, they’ll be eager to get going. Lengthy explanations or extensive conversations on the side of the trail tend to frustrate this learner, since they’d much rather be skiing or riding.

As you teach, you’ll see that students show learning preferences in one particular area/category over another. However, as represented by the Experiential Learning Cycle (figure 3), most learning theorists agree that when a teacher helps students experience learning in *all* of the areas/categories listed above, they will certainly get more bang for their buck!

MOTOR SKILL ACQUISITION

Prevailing theories hold that when learning a new movement pattern – regardless of the sport or outcome – people move through three levels of motor skill acquisition:

- **Initial:** At this stage, learners make crude movements lacking in rhythm. They focus more on sensation than quality.
- **Elementary:** At this stage, learners start to gain some control, and look at the body part to connect what is happening with movements. They generally enjoy exploring movements if they feel in control, and focus on active avoidance of fixed or moving objects.
- **Mature:** At this stage, the learners' movements are refined, coordinated, and mechanically correct. They are able to pay equal attention to the environment, other people, and tasks at hand.

New instructors, in particular, can better assess movements by understanding that students pass through each of these stages on the path to skill acquisition. Some students acquire new skills quickly



ASHLEY WOODARD SARNACKI

and adroitly; others may develop the skills more slowly. Regardless, each stage has its own unique characteristics and allows the person to adapt and process new learned movement patterns.

THE CAP MODEL

The CAP Model, which, again, offers a framework for observing students and defining their abilities in the areas of cognitive, affective, and physical development, helps you tailor lessons to each student by setting appropriate expectations. It has historically been used when teaching children, but research and years of experience has proven its value in all learning environments and age groups.

- **Cognitive (how the student thinks):** When working in the domain of knowledge and mental skills, it's important to know the student's stage of development. These developmental stages are ever-changing, especially in growing children.
- **Affective (how the student feels):** The affective domain relates to the emotions and motivations students display during the lessons. With fear and excitement taking center stage as the main influences on physical performance, emotions play a role in almost every aspect of learning.
- **Psychomotor (how the student moves):** Physical characteristics and stages of physical development greatly affect a student's movement capabilities. Recognize that students of the same age can be in different stages of development and, therefore, may perform differently. Remember that, regardless of physical ability, students are trying to do their best.

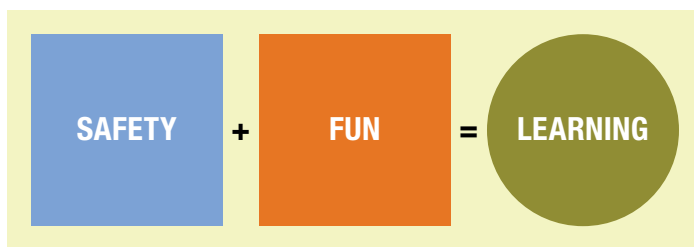
Traditionally, when teaching motor skills, the psychomotor domain has received the most attention, but greater emphasis in the cognitive and affective domains offers exciting new avenues for learning to take place. Including all three of these domains in your teaching/learning process makes learning more meaningful and enjoyable.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- Describe four learning styles.
- Describe the elements of VAK.
- What are ways you can determine your student's learning preference?
- Describe how the CAP Model applies when teaching a lesson.

Keeping It Safe

“Safety, fun, and learning” have long been core values in PSIA-AASI’s approach to snowsports instruction. Those three words should guide your everyday actions, behaviors, and decisions. To help ensure that students have a good time on the hill and feel comfortable trying new things, your number-one priority as an instructor is to provide a safe learning environment by, among other things, evaluating terrain, traffic, and snow conditions. Beyond that, it’s vitally important that instructors teach all students about safety, especially children and other beginners for whom safety awareness has far-reaching effects as they progress.



By knowing, heeding, and sharing NSAA’s Your Responsibility Code – along with other safety guidelines provided by your resort or snowsports school – you can help keep yourself and others safer on the slopes. Doing so will lead to a more positive learning experience for your student.

Figure 4: Your Responsibility Code.

KNOW THE CODE
CONOCE EL CÓDIGO

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY CODE **SU CÓDIGO DE RESPONSABILIDAD**

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stay in control.• People ahead of you have the right of way.• Stop in a safe place for you and others.• When starting downhill or merging, look uphill and yield.• Use devices to help prevent runaway equipment.• Observe signs and warnings, and keep off closed trails.• Know how to use the lifts safely.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mantenga el control.• Las Personas que van delante tienen el derecho de vía.• Deténgase en un lugar seguro para usted y para los demás.• Al empezar el descenso o al incorporarse, vea cuesta arriba y ceda el paso.• Utilice dispositivos para prevenir la pérdida de control del equipo.• Observe las señales y advertencias y no entre a las pistas cerradas.• Aprenda cómo usar los elevadores de manera segura.
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By continually identifying and addressing potential safety concerns, you show your students and resort guests that you care about their security and well-being. Safety awareness is a crucial element of every lesson. Here are examples of safety topics you can typically cover with your students during the course of a lesson:

- **Your Responsibility Code** (see figure 4)
- **Terrain, Weather, and Sun and Wind Exposure**
 - **Terrain** – Terrain selection can enhance or inhibit success. Use the proper terrain for the level and the ability of the students in your class and for the technique being taught. Instructors and students should realize that going to terrain that is too advanced too quickly can create defensive habits that will be hard to correct later.
 - **Cold Weather** – Cold weather can affect guests both psychologically and physically. On cold days, try to keep the class moving and keep stops brief. If you’re going to stop for prolonged periods of time, look for areas out of the wind and away from blowing snow. Whenever possible, keep your students’ backs to the sun for added warmth. Facing away from the sun also allows the students to see you better, especially if you’re talking to them.
 - **Sun and Wind Exposure** – Discuss the need for using sunscreen, as well eye protection such as sunglasses or goggles. Windproof outerwear is also recommended.
- **Pacing and Physical Preparedness**
 - Work with your students to understand their physical condition by asking questions, and set your instructional goals accordingly. Asking questions about other physical activities they enjoy and sports in which they participate will provide some of this information.
 - The altitude and amount of activity may be different from what they are used to, so check in with them frequently to see if they’re feeling tired or thirsty. Frequent breaks for water, rest, or even food might be needed. If you use warm-up exercises, check to see if the students have any physical limitations you should be aware of.

■ Equipment Needs

- Perform a visual check of your students' equipment before each lesson. Check if the equipment is the right size and type for your guests and the techniques they will be taught.

■ Psychological Preparedness

- Students may experience many emotions over the course of a lesson. Obviously, you want the primary emotion to be joy, but fear can also come into play as students explore new terrain or even a new skill on old terrain. Talking about fear and anxiety with your students can help them understand that fear and/or apprehension is natural as they learn new things.
- Other emotions you'll encounter are excitement, nervousness, exhilaration, and frustration. It's helpful to learn how to accurately interpret body language as a sign of how students may be feeling. Understanding why they're taking a lesson and learning a snowsport can also help you adapt your teaching and communication to best address these emotions.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- Describe how you integrate safety, fun, and learning into your lesson.
- As an instructor, how do you manage safety and incorporate safety awareness into your lesson?
- How do you recognize fear and manage how it affects student learning?
- What factors should you consider when choosing terrain for your student or class?
- What are signs that your student may be developing sunburn?
- List one safety-related item you carry with you as an instructor.
- What are some of the possible threats present in the winter environment that skiers and riders need to be aware of?



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About PSIA-AASI

The Professional Ski Instructors of America® and American Association of Snowboard Instructors® (PSIA-AASI) is a nonprofit education association – and close-knit community – of 32,811 snowsports professionals dedicated to promoting skiing and snowboarding through student-centered instruction.

With a national office in Lakewood, Colorado, the association is represented throughout the United States by eight geographic divisions that conduct training and certification examinations – based on PSIA-AASI’s national standards – for a variety of snowsports disciplines: adaptive, alpine, snowboard, cross country, and telemark.

Guided by a commitment to safety, fun, and learning, members of PSIA-AASI are creating the future of skiing and snowboarding, and the association is devoted to making that job easier by providing the support that ensures their success. Education is at the core of PSIA-AASI, and this *Guide for New Instructors* represents the association’s ongoing commitment to producing useful resources that help members teach engaging lessons and create lifelong adventures through education.

Other resources produced by PSIA-AASI include *Core Concepts for Snowsports Instructors*, the *Children’s Instruction Manual*, discipline-specific technical manuals and handbooks, teaching aids, and online tools – such as the [E-Learning Course for New Instructors](#) and the comprehensive video library known as [The Matrix](#). These resources, in addition to your snowsports school trainers and division clinic leaders, help you learn and grow as a snowsports instructor.

If you’re new to PSIA-AASI, welcome to the world’s largest organization dedicated to ski and snowboard teaching and education. We’re here to help you be amazing! Of course, if you’re new to instruction or aren’t a member... yet... we hope this guide provides meaningful takeaways that inspire your teaching and entice you to join. For more information, see the [PSIA-AASI Trail Map: Your Guide to Getting Started as a Ski or Snowboard Instructor](#) and the [PSIA-AASI Membership Guide](#).



KEVIN CASS

Next Steps

The fact that you're reading this *Guide for New Instructors* shows you have a passion for snowsports and want to enrich the lives of others by teaching them to ski or ride. That's awesome!

If you're not yet a member of PSIA-AASI, you're invited to join this professional community of committed ski and snowboard instructors. Together, we're dedicated to helping you love teaching and the rewards that come from instilling in your students a lifelong passion for skiing and snowboarding.

If you're a new member, thanks for your commitment to students and to your own success on snow. PSIA-AASI will make it worth your while! For many instructors, training is just the beginning of a journey toward personal and professional development. As a snowsports instructor, you have the potential to grow your communication and interpersonal skills as you learn to work with guests of all ages and from diverse backgrounds.

CERTIFICATION

One professional development opportunity that many instructors pursue is PSIA-AASI certification, which validates your skills and knowledge at specific levels of competency. These certifications and certificate programs are considered the gold standard in the snowsports industry and serve as testimony to PSIA-AASI's reputation for producing high-quality instructor education

2016-20 PSIA-AASI Team.



LINDA GUERRETTE

resources. The credentials PSIA-AASI provides are recognized nationally and internationally and are transferable across the country from division to division. In addition to the core PSIA-AASI certifications in adaptive skiing, adaptive snowboarding, alpine skiing, cross country skiing, snowboarding, and telemark skiing, PSIA-AASI also offers certificate programs for Children's Specialist and Freestyle Specialist.

PSIA-AASI develops national certification standards that each division implements into their certification exam processes to validate your skills as an instructor. As a new instructor, you would first become a registered member as you work to continue your professional development, then likely study for and take your Level I exam. As you progress in your depth of knowledge and technical skill – and demonstrate a greater range of sliding skills – you might choose to pursue Level II certification. Level III is the highest level of certification within PSIA-AASI's American Teaching System, and one that requires even greater teaching knowledge and skiing/riding skill.

Other rungs in the professional development ladder include division education staff positions like division clinic leader and examiner. Some of you may even aspire to undergo years of preparation and a grueling selection process to earn a spot on the PSIA-AASI Team, an elite group of instructors – representing all disciplines – who help develop the association's education materials and train fellow instructors throughout the country (see photo). And, of course, instructors have opportunities to pursue leadership positions at the division and national levels.

Regardless of whether you pursue or are successful in your certification, the most important achievement will be your personal development. The journey of learning and growth is extremely rewarding.

Reference Materials and Additional Resources

As you continue to grow as an instructor and seek knowledge in your discipline, there are many resources available to you, several of which are available in print and digital format and offer access to supplemental video. The following publications and education tools are available through PSIA-AASI's website (TheSnowPros.org), the *PSIA-AASI Accessories Catalog*, or through the link provided.

PSIA-AASI's divisions also produce excellent education materials, so contact your division for information on current resources (see the email addresses at the end of this guide).

National Standards

AASI Certification Standards
PSIA Alpine Certification Standards
PSIA-AASI Children's Specialist Standards
PSIA-AASI Freestyle Specialist Standards
PSIA Adaptive Alpine Certification Standards
Adaptive Alpine Exam Supplement
AASI Adaptive Snowboard Certification Standards
Adaptive Snowboard Exam Supplement
PSIA Nordic Cross Country Certification Standards
PSIA Telemark Certification Standards

Resources for New Instructors

E-Learning Course for New Instructors
PSIA-AASI Membership Guide
PSIA-AASI Trail Map: Your Guide to Getting Started as a Ski or Snowboard Instructor
The Teaching Dimension: A Compilation of Articles by Joan E. Heaton

Core Resources for All Instructors

Core Concepts for Snowsports Instructors
The Matrix (web-based)
Visual Cues to Effective/Ineffective Teaching

Alpine Resources

Alpine Technical Manual
Adult Alpine Teaching Handbook
Freestyle Technical Manual
Tactics for All-Mountain Skiing
Children's Alpine Teaching Handbook
Children's Ski and Snowboard Movement Guide
Visual Cues to Effective/Ineffective Skiing, 2nd ed.
Alpine Skiing: Tip of the Day Card
Children's Ski Lesson: Tip of the Day Card
Freeskiing: Tip of the Day Card
Alpine Stepping Stones Pocket Guide
A Ski Instructor's Guide to the Physics and Biomechanics of Skiing
(Free PDF download at TheSnowPros.org)

Snowboard Resources

Snowboard Technical Manual
Snowboard Teaching Handbook
Freestyle Technical Manual
Children's Ski and Snowboard Movement Guide
Snowboarding: Tip of the Day Card
Freestyle: Tip of the Day Card

Cross Country Resources

Cross Country Technical Manual
Cross Country Skiing: Tip of the Day Card

Telemark Resources

Telemark Technical Manual
Telemark Skiing: Tip of the Day Card

Adaptive Resources

Adaptive Alpine Technical Manual
Fundamental Mechanics of Alpine Skiing Across Adaptive Disciplines
(Available as print version or free PDF download at TheSnowPros.org)
Adaptive Snowsports Instruction Manual
(Free PDF download at TheSnowPros.org)
Adaptive Lesson: Tip of the Day Card
Adaptive Nordic Instructor's Manual
(PDF download through U.S. Paralympics)

Children's Specialist Resources*

Children's Instruction Manual, 2nd ed.
Children's Alpine Teaching Handbook
Snowboard Teaching Handbook
Children's Ski and Snowboard Movement Guide
Captain Zembo's Ski & Snowboard Teaching Guide for Kids, 2nd ed.
Children's Ski Lesson: Tip of the Day Card

Freestyle Specialist Resources*

Freestyle Technical Manual
Freeskiing: Tip of the Day Card
Freestyle: Tip of the Day Card

**Depending on division affiliation, those seeking a Children's Specialist 1, Children's Specialist 2, Freestyle Specialist 1, Freestyle Specialist 2, or Freestyle Specialist 3 teaching credential may first need to attain a discipline-specific Level I or II certification. Contact your division for more information.*

Division Contact Information

- Central Division: info@psia-c.org
- Eastern Division: psia-e@psia-e.org
- Intermountain Division: admin@psia-i.org
- Northern Intermountain Division: office@psia-ni.org
- Northern Rocky Mountain Division: nrm.psia.aasi@gmail.com
- Northwest Division: info@psia-nw.org
- Rocky Mountain Division: admin@psia-rm.org
- Western Division: info@psia-w.org