



## Level 4 Big Mountain Coach - Program Overview

### Introduction and Purpose:

This overview provides details about the Professional Ski Instructors of Canada (PSIC) Level 4 Big Mountain Coach Certification Course.

The Level 4 Big Mountain program aims to enhance your versatility, adaptability and creativity in Big Mountain skiing, teaching and guiding skills, building upon the learnings in the PSIC Big Mountain Level 3 certification.

Big Mountain Terrain in context of the level 4 refers to expert off-piste terrain, typically found above treeline elevations. This includes steeps, entrances, bowls, couloirs, chutes, drops, cornices, bumps, features and cliffs, and various snow surfaces like powder, ice, crud, mixed, slush, spring, and wind affected layers.

This dynamic program focuses on:

- Developing expert skiing skills and terrain awareness.
- Improving guiding abilities in expert and consequential terrain.
- Development of expert level teaching.

A Big Mountain Coach is essentially a “front country” guide, trained for off-piste, big mountain terrain within ski area boundaries. While not a backcountry guide certification, the program's guiding mindset pertains to risk management and guiding skills which also applies to Big Mountain environments accessible from many ski resorts in Canada - particularly out West.

A refined understanding of the physics of skiing, mountain awareness and equipment used in steep terrain is imperative when skiing, guiding and teaching at this level. The Level 4 Big Mountain program is designed to cultivate subject matter experts by challenging and empowering participants, while refining their skills and understanding in expert off-piste terrain. The big mountain and freeride arena is a growing area of the sport of alpine skiing. It conforms seamlessly to the PSIC's Adventure Philosophy which is a core principle within the organization.

## **Learning Outcomes:**

Learning outcomes for the Level 4 Big Mountain program align with the PSIC's Adventure Philosophy, emphasizing fun, safe, learning for skiers in advanced on-piste and off-piste terrain. The program focuses on developing versatility, adaptability and creativity in a variety of situations encountered in the Big Mountain environment.

## **Skiing**

Alpine Skiing Versatility, Adaptability and Creativity

Speed, Performance and Balance are appropriate to Expert skiing applicable to the terrain  
Momentum and flow are maintained between turns all of the time

Short Turns - Free

- Ability to manage speed and turn shape in expert off-piste terrain.
- Force created by skis may or may not deflect the mass (situation dependent)

Short Turns - Hop turns

- Ability to CONTROL speed, elevation and direction on steep expert off-piste terrain.
- Ability to hop the skis past the fall line or completely across the slope
- Turn shape requires very limited time spent above the fall line.
- Turn shape requires minimal deflection of mass.
- Speed is controlled and consistent.

Varied Turns - Your best skiing

- Ability to control and choose speed, path and performance in expert off-piste terrain.
- Turn shape requires deflection of mass at times

Bumps - Expert terrain

- Ability to dictate and adapt line, speed and snow contact (at will) in expert bumps
- Run shows creativity through precise application of skill
- Ability to demonstrate different line interpretations (inside,center, outside line)

## **Navigation of features and entrances (Purpose based skills) - Advanced and Expert Terrain**

Vertical side slip & Vertical hops (frog hop)

- Ability to manage speed and direction down the fall line in Expert terrain

Diagonal side slip

- Ability to manage and maintain speed and direction across the fall line in Expert terrain
- Ability to manage angle of direction (forward and reverse) and speed with control, flow, and precision

Straight line and Speed Management

- Ability to remain balanced and controlled through feature
- Ability to regain speed and direction control (shut downs)

Drops (feature, cornice, cliff)

- Ability to adapt approach
- Ability to take off with intent and balance

- Ability to land balanced and manage speed and direction control
- Ability to land balanced and maintain speed, and direction control
- Ability to decide landing location and initiate a transition into a turn

Traverse (Expert terrain)

- Ability to manage and maintain speed, direction, and elevation
- Ability to drop down to a lower or pop up to a higher track

Kick Turn and Mobility

- Ability to demonstrate expert level mobility in Expert terrain
- Ability to kick turn both ways in advanced terrain with precision and confidence

**Expert Teaching & Guiding - Versatility, Adaptability and Creativity**

**The Adventure (Fun Safe Learning)**

Guiding Skills

- Demonstrates an advanced understanding of Alpine terrain, including entrances, bowls, couloirs, chutes, cliffs and steeps.
- Demonstrates expert-level guiding techniques and strategies
  - efficiently moves group through terrain
  - seamlessly and creatively blends teaching into travel
- Effectively articulates the ongoing observations, assessments, and decisions being made in this terrain
- Applies an advanced decision-making framework
  - Identify and Evaluate + Consequence and Probability + Technical and Tactical = Decision

Teaching Skills - (Adventure Builder and the Method)

- Builds connections with trainees and trainers by engaging in the process and learning activities of the program fostering an expert-level exchange of knowledge.
- Applies advanced tactical approaches for navigation in expert terrain.
- Creates verbal, visual, and experiential methods providing effective advanced level of explanations, demonstrations and practice.
- Adapts lesson in response to terrain changes and utilizes terrain play to enhance skill development and the learning experience.

Technical Skills - (Application of Technical Blueprint)

- Applies technical principles grounded in understanding of force and balance, and the technical blueprint to guide students toward a clearly defined purpose.
- Guides expert skiers through an organized development process that includes identifying purpose, assessing progress and developing practical skills that enhance the intended purpose.

### **Course Structure:**

The Level 4 Program consists of mandatory and optional components.

Mandatory components:

- Online e-learning (approximately 2 hours)
- Online Managing Risk on Snow certification (3 hours)
- Skiing, Teaching and Guiding Development course (4 days - on snow)
- Evaluation (4 days - on snow)

Optional components:

- Guiding top-up camp (2 days)
- Bumps top-up camp (2 days)
- Skiing development (3 days)
- Teaching development (3 days)

### **Level 4 Big Mountain Skiing, Guiding and Teaching Development Course**

- The Level 4 Development course is a 4 day on-snow training approximately 5-6 hours per day.
- This is a training and development program and does not include a final evaluation.
- The course focuses on development of your skiing skills, guiding and teaching skills, as well as your understanding of how to assess and develop skiing skills in expert off-piste terrain.
- Throughout the program, you will, together with your Trainer, create a development plan to assist you with the next steps in your development toward achieving Level 4 certification.
- Participation, collaboration and teamwork are important throughout the course.
- You will receive a detailed description of meeting time and place when you register.

### **Level 4 Big Mountain Assessment and Evaluation Component**

- The Level 4 Evaluation Component is 4 days on-snow, approximately 5-6 hours per day.
- Participants should arrive prepared to ski expert off-piste terrain and conditions within the range of skiing, guiding and teaching outcomes described above, in expert off-piste terrain.
- This is an ongoing assessment process framed in a learning environment. Come to this component with a willingness to learn and a curiosity to explore. Multiple, guiding, teaching and skiing opportunities will focus on and allow for the development and assessment of the learning outcomes described above.
- Participation, collaboration and teamwork are important throughout this course.
- Opportunities for one-on-one check-ins will be available during the program to ensure learning outcomes are understood and increased focus is applied where necessary. The goal is to help you where you need help.
- Full Level 4 Big Mountain coach certification is recognized once you have successfully passed both the Skiing, Guiding and Teaching learning outcomes.

**Course Prerequisites:**

- PSIC Level 3 Big Mountain
- You MUST be a minimum of 16 years of age on the day the on-snow portion begins.
- You must be a paid member of the PSIC to register.
- You should be ready to experiment, try new things, collaborate with others, and have a great time! Arrive curious!

**General:**

- Breaks will happen throughout the day (vary depending on weather), however we recommend that you carry a snack in your pocket as the daily schedule and lunch break timing can vary based on various factors.
- You will receive a detailed description of the meeting time and place of your program when you register.
- Recommended equipment: 90mm to 120mm under foot, bindings & din well adjusted. Well tuned. Radius 18-30m recommended. Tune: well maintained. Your Trainer will inspect your equipment.

**Questions?** Please connect with our PSIC staff at [info@psic.pro](mailto:info@psic.pro). We look forward to seeing you!