

# Lifeguarding Skills Verification

## Ensuring Proficiency Beyond Certification

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There is a strong difference between **certified** and **qualified** lifeguards. **Certified** means the lifeguard has a piece of paper that indicates the staff member has participated and passed a lifeguarding course. **Qualified** means the lifeguard is proficient and actually possesses the skills to perform those skills.

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### Why We Verify Lifeguard Skills

- Skills verification is just as important as interviews and reference checks.
- Technology makes it easy to forge certifications, so skills verification helps to assure that the lifeguard possesses the skills needed to perform their job on your waterfront.
- Shows you how well your staff can complete those skills. This allows you the opportunity to design training to improve deficiencies in your lifeguards AND assign lifeguards to areas on your waterfront that they are qualified to work.
- Are additional practice that is necessary to maintain a high level of skill proficiency.
- Remember the “family test” – would you want this lifeguard guarding your little brother, sister or cousin?

### Who’s Qualified to Verify

- Skills should be assessed *ideally* by someone who possesses a Lifeguard Instructor certification from a nationally recognized organization.
- Alternatively, assessments can be made by someone who has held a combination of Water Safety Instructor AND Lifeguard certifications for 10 years or more.
- If either of these options are not available, work with your local aquatics organization or another camp to find someone who possesses these skills.

### Who Should be Verified and How Often

- A skills verification should be completed at the beginning of each program season, BEFORE the staff member starts their job duties.
- EVERYONE should have their skills verified, even those that are doing the assessment if they are working on your waterfront or in your pool.
- Even seasoned staff who have been with your program for multiple years need to have their skills assessed on an annual basis.
- Do not assume that because a staff member possesses a lifeguard card they have the skills to perform their job duties. While technology can forge a certification card, it does not prove the staff member possesses the critical skills necessary to save a life in the water.

### Skills To Be Verified

- Test pre-requisite skills first. Can they do the 300 yard pre-requisite swim without stopping? How well do they tread in deep water they cannot see in? Do your staff know how to swim proficiently? Can they get to the furthest distance in your swim area and back without struggling?

- All skills lifeguards would be using to perform their job duties, should be verified. This includes all rescues (shallow water and deep water), reach assists, spinal management, first aid and CPR skills, your Emergency Action Plan etc.
- When verifying skills, incorporate multiple skills into one scenario – they pull a victim from the water and then the victim suddenly stops breathing – what do they do? Who calls whom? Who is the primary rescuer, the secondary rescuer etc? This is also important for any in-service training. Make it as real as possible.
- Skills verification needs to be performed in the environment in which the staff member will be working. If the lake at your waterfront is the primary location for swimming activities – this is the location you need to be doing your skills check.
- For northern or cooler climates where water temperature might be an issue, use your judgment as to when you allow staff (and campers) into the water, for skills verification.

### Skills Verification Checklist

- 300 yard swim –continuously
- Retrieve a 10 pound brick from 8-10 feet of water
- 25 yard sprint using front crawl or breaststroke head high
- Entry into the water
- Extension assist from a dock or deck
- Swimming extension rescue
- Active victim rear rescue
- Multiple victim rescue
- Passive drowning
- Submerged victim
- Removing a victim from the water
- Spinal management techniques –all
- Use of backboard in shallow and deep water
- Mock rescues utilizing multiple rescues skills

→ For more information, check out *Camp Waterfront Management*, available online from the American Camp Association bookstore: [acacamps.org/bookstore](http://acacamps.org/bookstore).

NOTES about skills verification at my particular camp, school, parks & rec department, or youth program: