

FIRST LESSON: LEARNING FROM A PRO

Eager family and friends may be willing to show you the ropes, but taking a lesson with a qualified instructor will guarantee a successful start. These professionals will tailor your lesson with you in mind – “your goals & expectations.” Resorts may offer different types of new skier programs, but they’ll all review similar information to help you become comfortable using your equipment and skiing around the mountain. This article will review a general outline of what to expect when you take your first lesson.

SIGNING UP FOR A LESSON

When you sign up for a new skier lesson ask about packages that include your equipment, lift ticket and lesson. Most resorts recognize that new skiers need a couple of lessons to learn the skills necessary to explore the mountain and may offer a discount if you purchase more than one lesson. Make sure to ask where you’ll be meeting your instructor given many resorts have different ski school meeting locations.

PREPARING FOR THE LESSON

Usually, skiers rent equipment the morning of their first lesson. If you have time, try to rent the afternoon before your first day. Most rental shops won’t charge you for this extra day and often it’s less busy renting in the afternoon. If you have never skied before plan on about 30 minutes to get set up and try on ski boots. You may need to try on more than one pair to find a comfortably snug fit.

Being prepared for the mountain environment is essential for your comfort and safety. Dressing in layers and wearing a water resistant outer layer will help you stay warm and dry all day. You’ll also want to bring goggles, gloves, a hat or helmet, and ski specific socks. Leave time before your lesson to locate the storage lockers or basket check to store your street shoes and personal items.

TYPES OF LESSONS AVAILABLE

Ski resorts have different types of programs for new skiers. Some ski schools use station teaching where you move from one area to another and practice different skills with a new instructor at each station. Other areas assign group lessons to one instructor for the entire lesson period. Group lessons are generally scheduled in 2-3 hour blocks so you have a number of opportunities throughout the day to take a lesson. Private lessons can be scheduled for yourself or a group of people from one to six hours, but may require reservations during holiday periods. Some ski schools have a website that includes instructor’s profiles so you can request a specific instructor for a private lesson. Whether you decide to take a group or private lesson is personal preference. Some people enjoy comradeship and meeting new people, while others may prefer individual uninterrupted attention.

STARTING ON SNOW

Your lesson will begin in an area specifically for new skiers. This is often near the base lodge but may be located further up the mountain. A ski school supervisor will be at this site assigning instructors to different groups. Once you have met your instructor the lesson will begin by getting to know the rest of the group, reviewing what you will learn in the lesson, and establishing goals. Next your instructor will help you buckle your boots and show you a couple of exercises to learn how to balance on skis. They may also teach you a couple of techniques in your boots that you will later use on skis. Next you’ll be shown how to enter and exit the bindings that hold your boot onto the ski. Generally people practice with one ski at a time before using both.

Once you are practicing with both skis you’ll learn how to balance while sliding and then how to glide to a stop. Most people will learn how to guide their skis into a triangle shape, often called a wedge or snowplow. This technique is used to glide forward, stop, and as an introduction to turning. Your instructor will also explain a couple of techniques for climbing uphill with your skis on so you can practice sliding down the hill. Depending on which resort you ski at you may be shown how to use rope tows, magic carpets, t-bars, or chairlifts that transport you in the beginner area.

At some resorts they use special terrain features that allow you to learn the parallel technique on your first day. This is a more advanced skiing skill that many new skiers will learn after their first couple of lessons. However, some resorts will teach you this technique your first day. Most new skiers can expect that they will learn how to balance, slide, and stop during their first lesson.

If your group or private lesson is at least three hours you will have more time to practice the skills to turn and use this in addition to the wedge to control your speed. Skiing downhill is done by linking turns together which takes practice. Most new skiers find that it’s helpful to learn and practice a variety of techniques for turning with their instructor. At most resorts the Level II lessons are specifically for skiers who need practice learning to turn. Some people take the Level I lesson their first day and the Level II lesson their second day. Most people are able to ski independently on green (very easy) trails when they know how to turn.

By the lessons end, your instructor will suggest trails best suited for your ability. They will also explain which lesson to take next and what that lesson will cover. If you experienced any problems with your equipment or your feet are uncomfortable tell your instructor, it’s important to have a comfortable and supportive (snug) fit. They may be able to recommend a rental shop with an experienced boot fitter or help you re-buckle your boots.

The information discussed in this article will help you prepare for adult ski school programs. Next week, children’s programs will be presented.