

HOW TO PICK A GOOD INSTRUCTOR

Whenever the question comes up about picking a technical diving course, agency or instructor. The answer that normally comes up is to focus on finding the right instructor rather than focusing on the agency.

This is good advice but how should someone who wants to start on technical diving go about picking the right instructor? Without prior experience how can they tell a good instructor from a bad or just average instructor? The only way to do this is to talk to the prospective instructor as well as people that have trained with this instructor. Most good tech instructors will be happy (even welcome) a prospective student asking them questions as it shows the right approach and a keenness to get the best instruction.

Here are some questions that you might want to ask your prospective tech instructor (and what to look for in their answers).

How long have you been diving / instructing?

It is obvious that in order to teach, the instructor has to have the depth of knowledge to pass on. The more experience the instructor has the more they can draw on real world experience to illustrate the points in the course. If an instructor is trying to teach something that they have simply read in an instructors manual or been told on their instructor course then they will not be able to teach it as effectively as someone who has done it for real. They will also not know the common pitfalls and problems that are likely to occur.

Time and experience are not always the same. Someone may have been diving for 20 years but if they only average 20 dives a year and last year only did 5 dives then this is not the same as someone who has been diving for 20 years and averages 200 dives a year. So when looking for an instructor, look for someone that has a depth of experience as a diver and as an instructor.

How often do you teach these courses?

The more often an instructor teaches a course the more familiar they become with the material. Teaching is a skill in itself and the more often the instructor practices the better they become. A full time instructor will be teaching regularly and their teaching skills, as well as their diving skills, will be well practiced. There are some very good instructors who only teach part time or as a hobby. Some of these still teach and dive regularly but others teach very infrequently. Look for a potential instructor that teaches regularly and that has taught a technical course at the level you are interested recently.

What kind of diving do you do when you are not teaching?

Look for someone who does the type of diving that you want to do. If you are looking to do deep wreck diving then look for an instructor that is passionate about that kind of diving. If you want to do cave diving then look for someone who is passionate about cave diving, etc.

I made this mistake when I started tech diving. My passion was, and still is, wreck diving. I picked an instructor for my Trimix course who was an excellent instructor but whose passion was cave diving. All the way through the course his examples related to cave diving and his interest was obviously on this rather than on the wrecks we were diving on. Although I learnt a lot on the course I could have learnt a lot more and would have enjoyed the course a lot more if I had chosen an instructor who could have given me examples related to the type of diving I wanted to do.

What are the criteria for passing the course?

Do you want someone who will take your money and give you a cert after three days or do you want someone who will teach you new things, stretch you and make you earn the cert card?

When asking questions of your instructor you should also think about whether you get on with them and whether they are the sort of person that can put things in a way that makes sense to you. Technical courses are an intensive few days and you will spend a significant amount of face time with your instructor. If you do not get on with them then this will affect your ability to learn as much as possible on the course. Different people learn in different ways and different instructors teach in different ways. Make sure that the instructor you choose can explain things in a way that makes sense to you.

In addition to getting information from the instructor there is no better source of information about how an instructor teaches than previous students. Recommendations are one of the best ways of judging the quality of an instructor. Look for an instructor that is held in high regard by people they have trained. Poor instructors will not get any recommendations and average instructors will get a few recommendations but a good instructor should get extremely positive recommendations from previous students.